

THE INVESTITURE PANEL AT MARI AND RITUALS OF DIVINE KINGSHIP IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST¹

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When kingship first emerged in the ancient Near East, it was, as far as we can tell, immediately associated with the sacred.² According to Sumerian chronicles,³ it was the gods meeting in heavenly council who determined to give the kingship to men. The gods acted as celestial guarantors of the king's power, enabling him to assume the position of "big man" in society—as the Sumerian word for "king" (*LUGAL*, literally "big man") signifies. Certainly other factors led to royal power—hereditary right and military conquest among them—but these were also seen as extensions of divine will.

1. A version of this article with more complete references and argumentation is available for download at <http://www.templethemes.net>.

2. Susan Pollock, *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Eden That Never Was* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 191.

3. See Sumerian King List (W-B 444), lines 1 and 41, in *The Ancient Near East: Historical Sources in Translation*, ed. Mark W. Chavalas (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 82; and *The Sumerian Flood Story* (CBS 10673), line 88, cited in Yi Samuel Chen, "Major Literary Traditions Involved in the Making of Mesopotamian Flood Traditions," in *Opening Heaven's Floodgates: The Genesis Flood Narrative, Its Contexts and Reception*, ed. Jason M. Silverman (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, in press). Chen constructs a rationale for why kingship was said to have been given twice in the former account, and only once in the latter.

This article will explore the ancient Near Eastern rituals that endowed kings with this power, specifically the rites suggested by the Investiture Panel at the palace of Mari, with specific focus on the motifs of creation, sacred garden, and divine kingship. Because contemporary evidence at Mari relating to an interpretation of the panel and the functions of various rooms of the palace is limited, it will be necessary to rely in part on a careful comparative analysis of religious texts, images, and architecture throughout the ancient Near East, including the Old Testament. Comparative analysis not only has the benefit of increasing our understanding of ancient Mesopotamian religion but also can enrich our understanding of the Bible. Throughout this discussion, themes relating to Latter-day Saint temple worship will also become apparent, although no hereditary relationship with Mari need necessarily be assumed.

Introduction

Mesopotamia, literally meaning “between rivers,” is a fertile area that encompasses the Tigris-Euphrates river system, located mostly in present-day Iraq. Because Mesopotamia is the ancient home of the Akkadians, Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians, it is often called the cradle of civilization. The ancient city of Mari is located on the right bank of the Euphrates in Syria, about fifty kilometers north of the present border with Iraq.⁴ The city first became known to scholars through references in Sumerian documents that date its Early Dynastic period to the middle of the third millennium BC.⁵

Mari was settled by the Amorites, who were probably emigrants from the “desert margins to the west of the Euphrates valley.”⁶ As one of the major crossroads of the Near East, Mari prospered in

trade and agriculture for centuries. Finally, in 1760–1758 BC, during the reign of its last independent sovereign, King Zimri-Lim, the city was sacked and burned by the famous Babylonian king Hammurabi.

In 1933, the ruins of the city were discovered by French archaeologists. Over a period encompassing four decades, André Parrot supervised twenty-one campaigns to the site and the excavation of what has become an endless supply of “dazzling riches,”⁷ which include both texts and artifacts.

Among the foremost treasures of Mari is what has come to be known as the Investiture Panel, the only ancient Mesopotamian figural wall painting that has been recovered in situ (see fig. 1). The painting has been convincingly dated to about 1800 BC, some decades before the destruction of the city.⁸ Jean-Claude Margueron has characterized it as “undoubtedly the richest pictorial work of any that have heretofore been brought to light by Near East archaeology.”⁹

All scholars are in agreement on the major features of the panel. The goddess Ishtar dominates its upper central portion as she offers royal insignia to the king. The king’s left hand is extended to receive these insignia while his right hand is raised in a gesture of oath making. Behind the king stands another goddess, the king’s guide and intercessor. Below, goddesses of lower rank hold vases from which flow streams of water. Framing the central register is a garden tableau featuring two kinds of trees, composite animal guardians, and intercessory goddesses resembling those in the central scene.

Though darkened by age, viewers of the nearly four-thousand-year-old painting cannot fail to be impressed by the vestiges of its originally vibrant colors. Even more fascinating, however, are

4. Jack M. Sasson, “The King and I: A Mari King in Changing Perceptions,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118/4 (1998): 453.

5. Stephanie Dalley, *Mari and Karana: Two Old Babylonian Cities* (London: Longman Group, 1984), 10; Wolfgang Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 3.

6. Stephen Bourke, ed., *The Middle East: The Cradle of Civilization Revealed* (Lane Cove, Australia: Global, 2008), 80.

7. André Parrot, *Mari, capitale fabuleuse* (Paris: Payot, 1974), 16. All translations from classical and modern languages are by the first author, unless otherwise noted.

8. Jean-Claude Margueron, “La peinture de l’investiture et l’histoire de la cour 106,” in *De la Babylonie à la Syrie, en passant par Mari*, ed. Önhun Tunca (Liège: Université de Liège, 1990), 115–25.

9. Jean-Claude Margueron, *Mari: Métropole de l’Euphrate au III^e et au début du II^e millénaire avant Jésus-Christ* (Paris: Picard, 2004), 509.

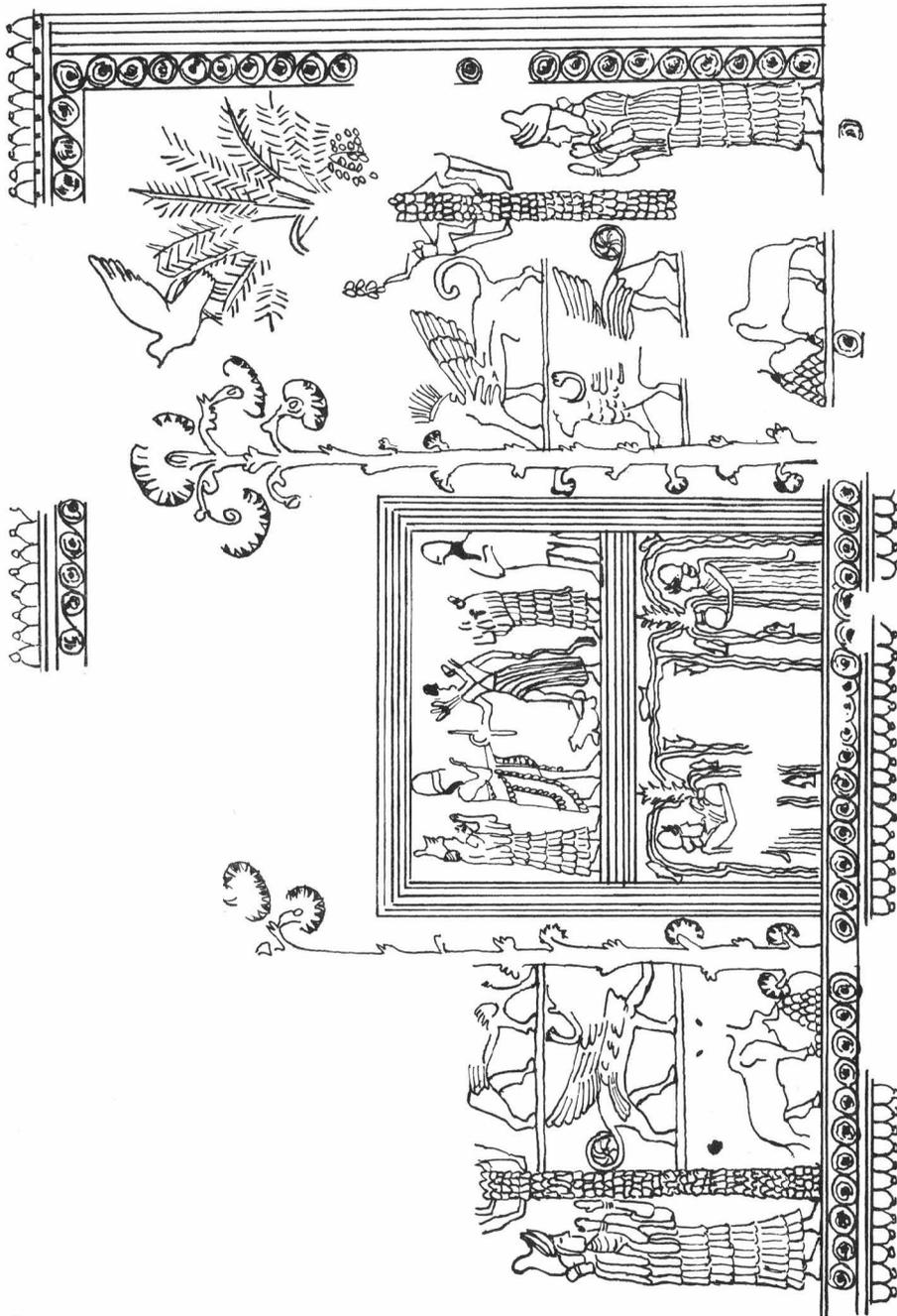


Figure 1. Line drawing of the Mari Investiture Panel. Drawing from al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, plate IV.

the particulars of the painting itself, including what Parrot called “undeniable biblical affinities” that “should neither be disregarded nor minimized.”¹⁰ J. R. Porter likewise highlighted several features of the scene that “strikingly recall details of the Genesis description of the Garden of Eden.”¹¹ Of course, it should be remembered that the painting was executed many centuries before the book of Genesis took its current form. Nevertheless, much can be learned by a careful examination of texts and artifacts from the Bible and the ancient Near East that shared the cultural and religious milieu of Mari in large measure.¹²

Given that the last and only comprehensive study of the iconography of the painting appeared in 1950,¹³ an up-to-date comparative analysis of the features of the Mari Investiture Panel is long overdue.¹⁴ In this article, we provide an interpretation of the form and the *Sitz im Leben* of the Mari Investiture Panel. With this interpretation as background, we explore the points of contact between the cluster of themes found in the painting and ancient religious images and texts from throughout the Near East, including the Old Testament. Though it must be stressed that we are not suggesting an organic link between rituals at Mari and those of the Latter-day Saints, it is hoped that Latter-day Saint readers will be interested

10. Parrot, *Mari, capitale fabuleuse*, 121.

11. J. R. Porter, *The Illustrated Guide to the Bible* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1998), 28. See also Lawrence E. Stager, “Jerusalem as Eden,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26/3 (May/June 2000): 37–38.

12. See, e.g., Mark W. Chavalas and K. Lawson Younger Jr., eds., *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002).

13. Marie-Thérèse Barrelet, “Une peinture de la cour 106 du palais de Mari,” in *Studia Mariana*, ed. André Parrot (Leiden: Brill, 1950), 9–35.

14. Wyatt reminds us that, although “full recognition of its historical context” is ultimately a requirement for the “legitimate use of the comparative approach” (Nicolas Wyatt, “The Significance of *Špn* in West Semitic Thought: A Contribution to the History of a Mythological Motif,” in *The Mythic Mind: Essays on Cosmology and Religion in Ugaritic and Old Testament Literature*, ed. Nicolas Wyatt [London: Equinox, 2005], 117–18), there is much more of a “recognizable continuity” in the religious cultures of earlier ages than we find in our own, and “the further back we go, the more conservative do we find cultural forms” (Nicolas Wyatt, “Water, Water Everywhere . . . : Musings on the Aqueous Myths of the Near East,” in Wyatt, *Mythic Mind*, 220).

in resonances with temple rites in their own tradition, which are believed to fit the faithful for “royal courts on high.”¹⁵

The Physical and Ritual Setting of the Investiture Panel

At the time of King Zimri-Lim, the great palace at Mari included some three hundred rooms, corridors, and courtyards. The Investiture Panel was found in room 106, which most scholars believe to be the so-called Court of the Palm, the main public space in the inner ritual complex of the palace. Visitors’ eyes would have been naturally drawn to the large scene (1.75m high and 2.5m wide) that was no doubt deliberately placed at eye level.

Marie-Thérèse Barrelet was the first to conjecture that the mural depicted an actual ritual event involving the king and statues of deities.¹⁶ Though subsequent scholarship has universally agreed with this conclusion, it has differed about the specific location where such a ceremony would have taken place. We find the model of Yasin al-Khalesi the most convincing one to date (see fig. 2). He argues that the ceremony would have taken place within room 66. Presuming that the ritual would have been witnessed by only a few people, he concludes that “the purpose of the mural was to illustrate the actual act of the ceremony” to those standing in courtyard 106, immediately outside the entrance to the fore throne room (room 64).¹⁷

In contrast to our precise knowledge about the physical location of the mural, only the broad outline of its ritual setting can be inferred. As witnessed by later practice throughout the ancient Near East, Mari’s rites of royal investiture likely took place at the beginning of the king’s reign. Thereafter, they were ritually enacted on an annual basis, probably at the festival of the Offerings of Ishtar,

15. “O My Father,” *Hymns*, no. 292. For a general discussion of related LDS rites, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Eborn, 2012), esp. 53–58.

16. Barrelet, “Peinture,” 29–30.

17. Yasin M. al-Khalesi, *The Court of the Palms: A Functional Interpretation of the Mari Palace* (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1978), 61.

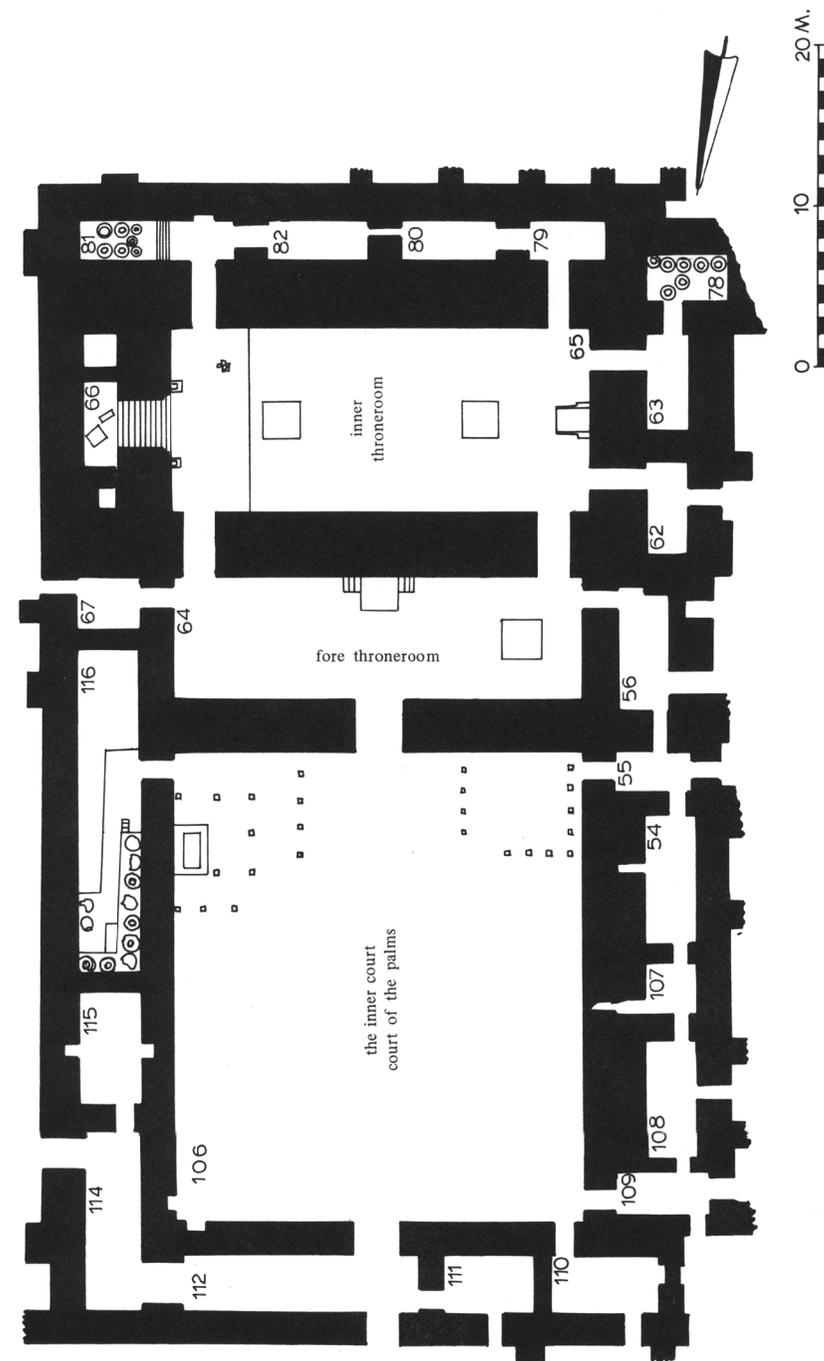


Figure 2. Ritual complex, including the Court of the Palm proper at the left with the Investiture Panel on the lower portion of the right wall (106), the fore throne room with its dais centered on the right wall (64), the inner throne room with another dais centered on the bottom wall (65), and the sanctuary situated at the opposite end of the inner throne room (66). Image from al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, plate II.

arguably “the most important event of the year at Mari.”¹⁸ The few clues in existence about this festival point to the possibility that the Offerings of Ishtar was “the equivalent at Mari of the New Year festival at Ashur a thousand years later.”¹⁹ The central scene in the Investiture Panel is consistent with what would have been the culminating moments of just such a ceremony.

Though differing in important details, scholars of Mari are in general agreement that the areas in the ritual complex have been laid out so as to accommodate a ceremonial progression of the king and his entourage toward the innermost cella.²⁰ The sequence of movement from the more public to the most private portions of the palace complex would correspond to a stepwise movement from the outer edges of the Investiture Panel toward its center. In our own reconstruction of events, we conjecture that at the times in which kingship was to be renewed, following the king’s ordeal and a recital of the events of the creation, the royal party would make its advance from the gardenlike open space in the courtyard with its central palm (room 106). This is consistent with a sacrificial scene painted on the walls of courtyard 106 that has been “interpreted as representing the king . . . leading a ‘procession of several temple servants towards’ an enthroned god.”²¹ Texts from Mari tell us that the queen was the one who furnished sacrifices for the “Lady of the Palace,”²² presumably meaning Ishtar.

18. Dalley, *Mari and Karana*, 134. All scholars find the connection between the mural and this particular festival to be a reasonable likelihood. However, as al-Khalesi rightfully points out, rituals such as the one depicted in the panel may also have taken place for additional reasons, e.g., “to inaugurate a newly constructed palace [or] to celebrate the victory of the king in the palace of the defeated ruler.” Al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 63.

19. Dalley, *Mari and Karana*, 136; cf. J. A. Black, “The New Year Ceremonies in Ancient Babylon: ‘Taking Bel by the Hand’ and a Cultic Picnic,” *Religion* 11/1 (1981): 40.

20. Scholars agreeing on this general interpretation include Barrelet, Parrot, Margueron, Muller, and al-Khalesi. See, e.g., al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 61-65; and Béatrice Muller, “Aspects de la peinture murale proche-orientale au II^e millénaire avant Jésus-Christ,” *Revue archéologique de Picardie* 10/10 (1995): 138n24.

21. Al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 63, citing a study by Anton Moortgat.

22. Jean-Marie Durand, cited in Nanno Marinatos, “The Minoan Harem: The Role of Eminent Women and the Knossos Frescoes,” *Dialogues d’histoire ancienne* 15/2 (1990): 43.

The procession must have included a statue of Ishtar, as well as statues of less-important deities and high palace officials.²³ Following the initiatory rites of sacrifice, and after having successfully passed by guardians at the entrance to each of the private chambers (64, 65), the party would come to the inner throne room (65) for the final events of the ceremony. In the sanctuary at the far end of this throne room (66; see fig. 3), the culminating rites of investiture would take place in the presence of statuary representations of gods and divinized humans. At one or more points in the ceremony, the king would have touched or grasped the hand of the statue of Ishtar.²⁴

If al-Khalesi’s interpretation of archaeological findings in the inner throne room is correct, some or all parties in the procession, prior to the presentation of the king to Ishtar, would have stood before a woven partition that divided the inner throne room (65) and screened the sanctuary (66) from outside view. As discussed in greater detail later in this article, this partition would have been flanked by two gateposts in the form of sacred trees and perhaps also by a final set of guardians. Once having passed to the inner side of the partition, the paired statues of the goddesses with the flowing vases would come into view at the foot of a stairway. Finally, according to al-Khalesi, the king would have ascended the stairway to enter the sanctuary (66) for the rites of investiture described previously.

Consistent with the reconstruction of the Mari investiture ritual just outlined, the following sections—Creation, Garden, and Divine Kingship—will explore in greater detail possible meanings for the prominent elements of the painting.

23. Al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 65. The carrying of the statues in the Mari procession would have functioned similarly to the transporting of the ark in corresponding Jerusalem temple rites; see, e.g., John H. Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London: Clark, 2003), 125-26; Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 1:177-80.

24. Al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 60-61.

Creation

Although we know few direct details of the Old Babylonian investiture ritual performed at Mari, it is certain that the fourth²⁵ of the eleven days of the later Babylonian New Year *akītu* festival always included a rehearsal of the creation epic, *Enuma Elish* (“When on high . . .”),²⁶ a story whose theological roots reach back long before the painting of the Investiture Panel and whose principal motifs were carried forward in later texts throughout the Levant.²⁷ In its broad outlines, this ritual text is an account of how Marduk achieved preeminence among the gods of the heavenly council through his victorious battles against the goddess Tī’amat and her allies and of the subsequent creation of the earth and of humankind as a prelude to the building of Marduk’s temple in Babylon.²⁸ The epic ends with the conferral upon Marduk of fifty sacred titles, including the higher god Ea’s own name, accompanied with the declaration, “He is indeed even as I.”²⁹ Seen in this light, a better title for *Enuma Elish* might be the *Exaltation of Marduk*.³⁰

25. Black, “New Year Ceremonies,” 43.

26. Stephanie Dalley, ed. and trans., “The Epic of Creation,” in *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*, ed. Stephanie Dalley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 228–77.

27. Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 167.

28. It is quite possible that the version of the creation story told at Mari featured Ishtar rather than Marduk as its principal character; see Stephanie Dalley, *Esther’s Revenge at Susa: From Sennacherib to Ahasuerus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 148.

29. E. A. Speiser, “The Creation Epic (*Enuma Elish*),” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 72 (7:140). The roles of Ea and Marduk can be understood by analogy to Christian conceptions of Deity “if we understand the Father as Ea and the son, the Creator, as Marduk. It is Ea who advises his son and gives him the plan, the idea, leading to his victory over Tī’amat. Later, at the end of the myth, Marduk eventually assumes the name of his Father, Ea, and thus all of his powers.” Philippe Talon, “*Enūma Eliš* and the Transmission of Babylonian Cosmology to the West,” in *Mythology and Mythologies: Methodological Approaches to Intercultural Influences*, ed. Robert M. Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), 276.

30. Richard J. Clifford, ed., *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1994), 93.

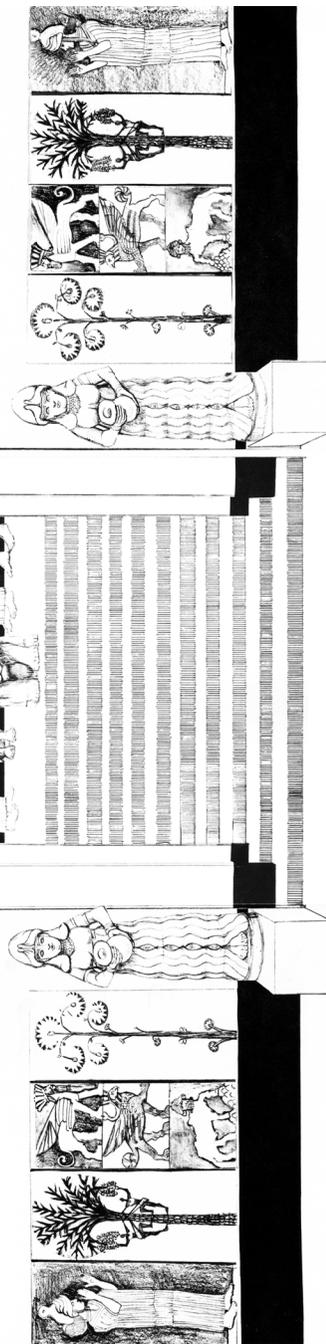


Figure 3. Reconstruction of the innermost sanctuary (66). Drawing by Constance Spriesterbach in al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, plate VI.

The idea that the process of creation provides a model for subsequent temple building and ritual³¹ is made explicit in Hugh Nibley's reading of the first, second, and sixth lines of *Enuma Elish*: "At once above when the heavens had not yet received their name and the earth below was not yet named . . . the most inner sanctuary of the temple . . . had not yet been built."³² Consistent with this reading, the account goes on to tell how the god Ea founded his sanctuary (1:77),³³ naming it *Apsu* after he had "established his dwelling" (1:71), "vanquished and trodden down his foes" (1:73), and "rested" in his "sacred chamber" (1:75). Later, Marduk was granted the privilege of having his own temple built in likeness of the temple of the god Ea.³⁴

Obviously, the temple of Marduk was not to be built directly by divine hands, but rather by the king on behalf of the gods as one of his central duties.³⁵ In return for his fealty, the fruits of the victory won by the gods were transmitted to the new king,³⁶ both through divine sanction for his kingship—expressed explicitly in the rituals of investiture—and also through the commission given him to build a royal palace of his own, its function paralleling in the secular world that of the temple in the religious domain.

Of course, none of the Mesopotamian creation themes of victory over one's adversaries, temple and palace construction, and rest following enthronement will be unfamiliar to students of the Bible. Indeed, John Walton correctly observes that "the ideology of the temple is not noticeably different in Israel than it is in the

ancient Near East. The difference is in the God, not in the way the temple functions in relation to the God."³⁷

A biblical analog to the function of *Enuma Elish* in Mesopotamian ritual is found in the proposal that Genesis 1 was used as part of Israelite temple liturgy.³⁸ Moreover, some scholars find parallels to Babylonian accounts of the primeval battle between the central god and his adversaries echoed in the biblical description of the subduing of the powers of watery chaos prior to creation.³⁹ Scattered in fragmentary form throughout the historical, prophetic, poetic, apocalyptic, and wisdom literature of the Bible are other possible allusions to primordial combat scenes.⁴⁰ Many Old Testament passages go further to equate the mortal king's political enemies with God's cosmic ones.⁴¹ Certain aspects of the Israelite Day of Atonement rite in Leviticus 16 also "seem to mimic"⁴² events of the Mesopotamian *akitu* festival. In line with creation themes linking divine rulership with the origins of human kingship are Jewish, Christian, and Islamic texts that tell of Adam's royal investiture in the Garden of

37. John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 129.

38. E.g., Jeff Morrow, "Creation as Temple-Building and Work as Liturgy in Genesis 1-3," *Journal of the Orthodox Center for the Advancement of Biblical Studies* 2/1 (2009): 1-13.

39. See Genesis 1:2, 6-10 and, e.g., Nahum M. Sarna, ed., *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 3, 6. The Pearl of Great Price reflects these primeval traditions in its stories of Satan's rebellion in the premortal existence and of his dramatic confrontation with Moses (Moses 1:12-22; 4:1-4; Abraham 3:27-28; cf. Moses 1:25); see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *In God's Image and Likeness: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Book of Moses* (Salt Lake City: Eborn, 2010), 60-61 (Moses 1:25e).

40. E.g., Exodus 15:1-18; Job 9:5-14; 26:5-14; 38:8-11; Psalms 18:5-18; 24:1-2; 29; 33:7-8; 44:19; 46; 65:6-8; 72:8; 74:12-17; 77:17-20; 87:4; 89:10-14, 25; 93; 104:1-9, 25-26; 106:9; 110; 144:5-7; Proverbs 8:22-33; Isaiah 8:5-8; 14:4-23; 17:12-14; 27:1; 51:9-11; Jeremiah 5:22; 31:35; 51:34; Ezekiel 28:2-23; 29:3-5; 32:2-8; Jonah 2; Nahum 1:3-6; and Habakkuk 3:8-15. See also, e.g., Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 37-92; Nicolas Wyatt, *Myths of Power: A Study of Royal Myth and Ideology in Ugaritic and Biblical Tradition* (Münster, Germany: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996), 117-26, 158-218.

41. Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 98.

42. Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 167.

31. Hugh W. Nibley, "Return to the Temple," in *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 71-73.

32. Hugh W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Pearl of Great Price* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 122. The term *giparu*, rendered by Nibley as "inner sanctuary" (Nibley, *Teachings of the Pearl of Great Price*, 122; cf. Speiser, "Creation Epic," 1:1, 2 6b, 60-61), has been translated variously in this context by others as "bog," "marsh," or "reed hut." The latter term more accurately conveys the idea of an enclosure housing the sanctuary or residence of the *en(t)u* priest(ess) of the temple.

33. See Speiser, "Creation Epic," 61n4.

34. See Nibley, *Teachings of the Pearl of Great Price*, 126-27.

35. Pollock, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 188.

36. Nicolas Wyatt, "Arms and the King," in *There's Such Divinity Doth Hedge a King* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005), 181.

Eden⁴³ and of the kingship of Noah.⁴⁴ The idea of humans being created “in” or “as” the “image of God” (Genesis 1:27) parallels the practice of ancient kings who were seen as having been created as living images of the gods and who themselves “placed statues (images) of themselves in far corners of their kingdom to proclaim, ‘This is mine.’ Humans were God’s images to represent to all creatures God’s rule over the earth.”⁴⁵

Perhaps the most important area of comparative study for Mesopotamian and biblical creation accounts is the increasingly accepted idea that just as the story of creation in *Enuma Elish* culminates in the founding of Marduk’s sanctuary, so the architecture of the tabernacle of ancient Israel is a physical representation of the Israelite creation narrative.⁴⁶ According to this view, the results of each day of creation are symbolically reflected in tabernacle furnishings.⁴⁷ Exodus 40:33 describes how Moses completed the tabernacle. The Hebrew text exactly parallels the account of how God finished creation (Moses 3:1). *Genesis Rabbah* comments: “It is as if, on that day [on which the tabernacle was raised in the wilderness], I actually created the world.”⁴⁸ With this idea in mind, Nibley has called the temple “a scale model of the universe.”⁴⁹

43. For references to Adam’s kingship in the Bible and the Qur’an, see Bradshaw, *In God’s Image*, 314 (4-58), 433-34 (5-10).

44. See, e.g., Wyatt, “Water, Water Everywhere . . .,” 206-7. See also Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “The Ark and the Tent: Temple Symbolism in the Story of Noah” (paper to be presented at a temple symposium, Provo, Utah, 22 September 2012).

45. Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 139. The translation “as the image of God” takes the *bet* as a *bet essentiae* in Hebrew syntax; see M. David Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul’s Soteriology* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 108.

46. See Bradshaw, *In God’s Image*, 146-49.

47. E.g., Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 1:51-52. In this conception of creation, the focus is not on the origins of the raw materials used to make the universe, but rather on their fashioning into a structure providing a useful purpose. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 26, 35; cf. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 181; Abraham 4:1.

48. Jacob Neusner, ed., *Genesis Rabbah* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985), 1:35 (III.IX.1.D), brackets in original

49. Hugh W. Nibley, “The Meaning of the Temple,” in *Temple and Cosmos*, 15.

In the biblical account, as in *Enuma Elish* (1:75), God rests when his work is finished.⁵⁰ And when he does so, taking his place in the midst of creation and ascending to his throne, the cosmic temple comes into its full existence as a functional sanctuary.⁵¹ This current scholarly understanding of the process explained in Genesis 1 as being the organization⁵² of a world fit to serve as God’s dwelling place is in contrast to the now scientifically⁵³ and theologically⁵⁴ discredited traditional view that this chapter merely describes, in poetic terms, the discrete steps of an ex nihilo material creation followed by a simple cessation of activity. Instead, from this updated perspective, we can regard the seventh day of creation as the enthronement of God in his heavenly temple and the culmination of all prior creation events.⁵⁵ God’s instructions to “dress and keep” the garden are nothing more nor less than an outline of the specific “temple” duties being given to Adam as the archetypal Levite in God’s newly created sanctuary.⁵⁶ In contrast to *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis*, where “the high gods create lesser beings to do work for them so that *they* can

50. See Victor Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 95, 330-31.

51. Walton, *Lost World*, 84, 88.

52. In his descriptions of the process of creation, the Prophet Joseph Smith favored the verb *organize* to translate the Hebrew term *bārā*; see, e.g., <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Parallel/1844/7Apr44.html> (accessed 18 April 2012). See also Abraham 4:1. Consistent with this biblical perspective, Teppo describes the “central theme” of *Enuma Elish* as being “organizing, putting things in their correct places.” Saana Teppo, “Sacred Marriage and the Devotees of Ištar,” in *Sacred Marriages: The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity*, ed. Martti Nissinen and Risto Uro (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 90.

53. See Bradshaw, *In God’s Image*, 538.

54. See Bradshaw, *In God’s Image*, 94-95 (Moses 2:1-2).

55. Walton, *Lost World*, 72-73, 75.

56. The Hebrew terms in Genesis for “to dress” (*‘ābad*) and “to keep” (*šamar*) respectively connote “to work, serve, till” (F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005], 712b-713c) and “keep, watch (guard), preserve” (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1036b). Recall the temple-like layout of the Garden of Eden (Bradshaw, *In God’s Image*, 146-49) and the parallel description of duties in Numbers 3:8, where it says that the Levites “shall keep (*šamar*) all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service (*‘ābad*) of the tabernacle.”

rest,”⁵⁷ Genesis emphasizes that the first couple was meant to *share* the divine pattern of sacred “rest” that followed the triumphant end of creation, paralleling in a general way humankind’s later weekly Sabbath keeping.

Garden

Attesting both the significance and ubiquity of gardens in ancient Mesopotamia, Stephanie Dalley writes: “The Babylonians and Assyrians planted gardens in cities, palace courtyards, and temples, in which trees with fragrance and edible fruits were prominent for re-creating their concept of Paradise.”⁵⁸ A tree, either real or artificial, typically took the central position in palace courtyards,⁵⁹ recalling the biblical account of the tree “in the midst” (literally “in the center”) of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9; cf. Moses 3:9).⁶⁰ Likewise, Margueron pictured a solitary artificial palm tree—“made largely of bronze and silver plating on an armature of wood” and, perhaps, accompanied by a series of live palm trees in pots that formed an alley leading to the scenes of sacrifice and the Investiture Panel⁶¹—in the center of courtyard 106 (see fig. 4). He convincingly argues that the correspondence between the central location of the palm with respect to the courtyard and the central placement of the goddess Ishtar in the Investiture Panel is no coincidence.⁶²

57. Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, 73, emphasis in original. For a discussion of different aspects of the motif of “rest” as it relates to creation, see Bradshaw, “Ark and Tent.”

58. Stephanie Dalley, “Ancient Mesopotamian Gardens and the Identification of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon Resolved,” *Garden History* 21/1 (1993): 1.

59. Dalley, “Ancient Mesopotamian Gardens,” 2.

60. See Bradshaw, *In God’s Image*, 167–68 (Moses 3:9h), for more on this motif.

61. Jean-Claude Margueron, “Mari: A Portrait in Art of a Mesopotamian City-State,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (New York City: Scribner’s Sons, 1995; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 2:892–93.

62. Jean-Claude Margueron, “La peinture de l’Investiture: Rythme, mesures et composition,” in *Von Uruk nach Tuttul, eine Festschrift für Eva Strommenger, Studien und Aufsätze von Kollegen und Freunden*, ed. Barthel Hrouda, Stephan Kroll, and Peter Z. Spanos (Munich: Profil Verlag, 1992), 106–7.

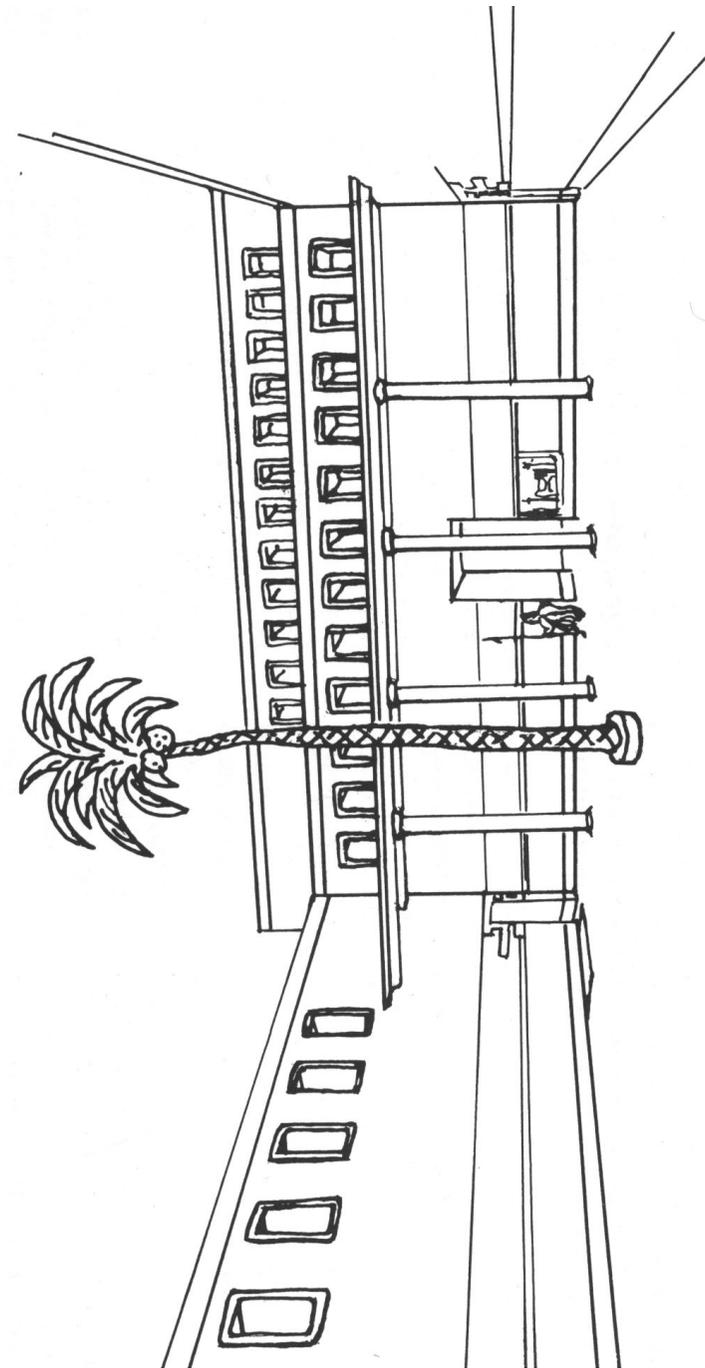


Figure 4. Reconstruction of the Court of the Palm with an artificial tree in the “exact center” of the open-air space (106). The Investiture Panel is shown just to the right of the entry to the fore throne room (64). Drawing from Margueron, “Mari: A Portrait in Art,” 892.

First Type of Sacred Tree

In the symmetrical side panels at the far left and right of the mural, two men climb a date palm, either to fertilize it or to pick its fruit.⁶³ It is reasonable to suppose that in the context of the investiture ritual at Mari, “its fruits might be offered to the goddess [Ishtar] who, moreover, according to Sumerian texts, had not the least distaste for date wine.”⁶⁴ The motif of eating sacred fruit is also preserved in the Sumerian myth of *Enki and Ninhursag*, where Enki was cursed because he ate the carefully nurtured plants of Ninhursag, the mother-goddess.⁶⁵

However, according to both early Mesopotamian and later West Semitic texts, date palms not only were a source of sweet fruit but also sometimes were climbed to obtain access to a source of wisdom or warning that has been termed “the conversation of palm trees.”⁶⁶ The action of eating sweet fruit or honey from such a tree was associated in the Bible with the “opening of the eyes” and the attainment of “supernatural vision.”⁶⁷ More generally in the ancient Near East, sacred trees were seen as a source of energy, grace, and power.⁶⁸

We also observe that in ancient Near Eastern traditions from Ugarit and Israel, sacred trees are sometimes identified with a

human king,⁶⁹ or with the mother of a king, whether human or divine (cf. 1 Nephi 11:8-22).⁷⁰ Consistent with these ideas, Mariana Giovino concludes that ancient Mesopotamian cult objects resembling sacred trees “were possibly considered as substitutes for gods” and “may have received sacrifices and prayers and undergone purification rituals.”⁷¹ Such an idea seems apparent in the Mari Investiture Panel. In likeness of the two goddesses witnessing the investiture in the inner sanctuary, a pair of similar goddesses near the date palms raise their hands in supplication,⁷² suggesting a parallel between the tree and the king himself “as the gods’ regent on earth, the conduit through whose actions their gift of abundance could reach [the kingdom] and her empire.”⁷³ Like the palm tree, the king is an “archetypal receiver and distributor of divine blessing.”⁷⁴

A number of scholars have found parallels in the layout of the trees in the Garden of Eden and certain features of Israelite sanctuaries.⁷⁵ Significantly, the holiest places within the temples of Solomon and of Ezekiel’s vision were decorated with palms.⁷⁶ Indeed, the holy of holies in Solomon’s temple contained not only one but many palm trees and pillars, which Terje Stordalen says can represent “a kind of stylised forest.”⁷⁷ The angels on its walls may

63. André Parrot, *Mission archéologique de Mari, vol. 2: Le palais* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1958), Peintures murales, 60-61n3; Barbara N. Porter, “Sacred Trees, Date Palms and the Royal Persona of Ashurnasirpal II,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 52/2 (1993): 129-39.

64. Muller, “Aspects de la peinture murale,” 136; cf. Barrelet, “Peinture,” 24.

65. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 40 (lines 198-219).

66. Burton L. Visotzky, “The Conversation of Palm Trees,” in *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha*, ed. John C. Reeves (Atlanta: Scholars, 1994), 205-14. According to Dalley, the “tree was so important in ancient Mesopotamia that it was personified as a god, Nin-Gishzida, ‘trustworthy tree,’ and had the power of human speech” (Dalley, “Ancient Mesopotamian Gardens,” 2). Indeed, one of the most popular pieces of Old Babylonian literature was the debate between the tamarisk and the date palm, which the king had planted in his courtyard after a heavenly council had granted the first kingship to men at the beginning. W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 151-64.

67. See, e.g., Edric A. S. Butterworth, *The Tree at the Navel of the Earth* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970), 74; see also 75, 78.

68. See the conclusions of Albenda, as cited in Mariana Giovino, *The Assyrian Sacred Tree: A History of Interpretations* (Fribourg, Switzerland: Academic Press Fribourg, 2007), 172-73.

69. Cf. Daniel 4:20, 22: “The tree . . . is thou, O king.” See also Judges 9:7-21; Terje Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden* (Louvain: Peeters, 2000), 89-92; Geo Widengren, *The King and the Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Religion* (Uppsala, Sweden: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1951), 42-50.

70. Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8-23,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 191-243.

71. Giovino, *Assyrian Sacred Tree*, 201.

72. Al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 45, 54; Bradshaw, *In God’s Image*, 355-56. Al-Khalesi concludes that this supplication “was on behalf of the worshipper.” Al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 15.

73. Porter, “Sacred Trees, Date Palms,” 139.

74. Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 101. Cf. Margueron, “Mari: A Portrait in Art of a Mesopotamian City-State,” 892; Muller, “Aspects de la peinture murale,” 136; Porter, “Sacred Trees, Date Palms,” 133. See also Daniel 4:10-12.

75. E.g., Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 112-16, 308-9.

76. 1 Kings 6:29, 32, 35; 7:36; 2 Chronicles 3:5; Ezekiel 40:16, 22, 26, 31, 34, 37; 41:18-20, 25-26.

77. Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 122.

have represented God's heavenly council,⁷⁸ mirrored on earth by those who have attained "angelic" status through the rites of investiture. Such an interpretation recalls the statues of gods mingling with divinized kings in the innermost sanctuary of the Mari palace.⁷⁹ Borrowing Christian imagery of the righteous on earth being "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), we might see eating of the fruit of a sacred tree as a prelude to actually becoming a divine provider of such fruit oneself. The relevance of this imagery for the idea of kingship is discussed in greater detail later in this article.

Guardians and Sacred Names

In the Investiture Panel, a second type of sacred tree is guarded by mythical winged animals who, according to al-Khalesi, would be responsible for "the introduction of worshippers to the presence of the god."⁸⁰ Architecturally, he sees these animals being represented as wall reliefs, covered with metal or other precious materials, as one sees in the temple façade of Sin at Khorsabad.⁸¹

However, it is not unreasonable to suppose that these animals might additionally have been represented as actual metal-plated statues placed at each of the entrances to the private areas of the Court of the Palms complex, as one sometimes sees at the entrances to temples in Mari⁸² and elsewhere throughout the ancient world. Indeed, Barrelet—citing texts associated with Gudea, a ruler of the southern city of Lagash (ca. 2144–2124 BC)—conjectures that the three composite animals in the Investiture Panel symbolize the three major areas of

the ritual complex where the investiture took place.⁸³ In Babylonia, as in Jerusalem, "different temple gates had names indicating the blessing received when entering: 'the gate of grace,' 'the gate of salvation,' 'the gate of life' and so on,"⁸⁴ as well as signifying "the fitness, through due preparation, which entrants should have in order to pass through [each of] the gates."⁸⁵ In Jerusalem, the final "gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter" (Psalm 118:20), very likely referred to "the innermost temple gate"⁸⁶ where those seeking the face of the God of Jacob (cf. Psalm 24:6) would find the fulfillment of their temple pilgrimage. Note that the middle guardian in the painting is pictured with one foot propped up against the tree, suggesting a possible correspondence to guardians that might have been placed at the gateposts of the innermost sanctuary partition. Such guardians would find their likeness in the position and function of biblical cherubim whose depiction appeared on the veil of the Jerusalem temple (2 Chronicles 3:14).

We know nothing directly about the possibility or function of gatekeepers in Old Babylonian rites of investiture. However, it should be remembered that *Enuma Elish* both "begins and ends with concepts of naming" and that, in this context, "the name, properly understood [by the informed], discloses the significance of the created thing."⁸⁷ If it is reasonable to suppose that the function of sacred names in initiation ritual elsewhere in the ancient Near East might be extended by analogy to Old Babylonian investiture liturgy, we might see in the account of the fifty names given to Marduk at the end of *Enuma Elish* a description of his procession through the ritual complex in which he took upon himself the personal attributes

78. Matthew B. Brown, *The Gate of Heaven: Insights on the Doctrines and Symbols of the Temple* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1999), 113.

79. E.g., "Gudea was received among the gods"; van Buren, cited in Hurowitz, *I Have Built*, 45n1.

80. Al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 67.

81. Al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 23. This façade shares many features in common with the Mari palace and the Investiture Panel. Parrot cites the prominent trees, the pair of gods with flowing vases beneath them, and the procession of symbolic animals on either side of the portal. Parrot, *Mission archéologique de Mari*, Peintures murales, 62; see Barrelet, "Peinture," 24–25, 33.

82. See, e.g., the lion from Mari's Temple of Dagan (Parrot, *Mari, capitale fabuleuse*, plate 22).

83. "Gudea . . . makes several allusions . . . to imaginary beings (or to animals who have a counterpart in reality) that correspond to a given part of the temple" (Barrelet, "Peinture," 24). See the Cylinders of Gudea, Cylinder A 24–28, in *The Harps That Once . . . : Sumerian Poetry in Translation*, trans. Thorkild Jacobsen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 419–24. In addition, Barrelet describes evidence that gatepost guardians sometimes may have been represented in human form; Barrelet, "Peinture," 27.

84. Mowinckel, *Psalms*, 1:181n191.

85. Eaton, *Psalms*, 405 (Psalm 118:19–22). See also Psalm 24:3–4.

86. Mowinckel, *Psalms*, 1:180.

87. Benjamin R. Foster, "Epic of Creation," in *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, ed. Benjamin R. Foster, 3rd ed. (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), 437.

represented by those names one by one.⁸⁸ Ultimately, one might suppose, he would have passed the guardians of the sanctuary gate to reach the throne of Ea where, as also related in the account, he finally received the god's own name and identity.⁸⁹

By way of comparison, the biblical book of Genesis relates how Adam was commanded by God to give names to the animals in the Garden of Eden (Moses 3:19).⁹⁰ Although the standard explanation for this elliptically described incident is that it gives Adam an opportunity to display his godlike dominion over the animals,⁹¹ recent scholarship suggests that the story of Adam and Eve, like the biblical creation account, may have functioned as a temple text⁹² and, in that light, that there may be more to the story than first meets the eye.⁹³

Whereas Jewish tradition records that the animals subsequently bowed to Adam, pseudepigraphic and Islamic accounts instead have *angels* paying homage to him.⁹⁴ Moreover, Islamic sources hint at a context of initiation. While omitting the biblical account where the animals were named, the Qur'an relates in its place the story of how Adam—before the fall and after having been instructed by God—was directed to recite a series of secret names to the angels in order to convince them that he was worthy of the elevated status of priest and king that had been conferred upon him.⁹⁵

88. Talon explains, "The importance of the names is not to be understressed. One of the preserved Chaldaean Oracles says: 'Never change the Barbarian names' and in his commentary Psellus (in the 11th century) adds 'This means: there are among the peoples names given by God, which have a particular power in the rites. Do not transpose them in Greek.' A god may also have more than one name, even if this seems to introduce a difficult element of confusion, at least for us" (Talon, "Enūma Eliš," 275).

89. "He is indeed even as I." Speiser, "Creation Epic," 7:140, 72. Cf. Foster, "Epic of Creation," 437-38.

90. For other accounts of the ritual uses of naming in the Old Testament, see David Calabro, "The Giving of New Names in the Hebrew Bible" (master's thesis, Vanderbilt University, 2003).

91. See, e.g., Bradshaw, *In God's Image*, 177 (Moses 3:19b).

92. See, e.g., Bradshaw, *In God's Image*, 342-44.

93. See Bradshaw, *In God's Image*, 177-79.

94. See discussion and examples in Bradshaw, *In God's Image*, 225.

95. E.g., Qur'an 2:30-33.

Second Type of Sacred Tree

Scholars contrast the realism in the Investiture Panel depiction of the date palm to the representation of the second type of "Sacred Tree," which seems to be "imaginary" in kind.⁹⁶ Barrelet nonetheless was convinced that it represented an actual object in the architecture of the ritual complex.⁹⁷

As to the specific function of this tree, al-Khalesi concludes that it was "meant to symbolize a door-post." From archaeological evidence, he conjectures that such posts could have provided supporting infrastructure for a partition made of "ornamented woven material."⁹⁸ This recalls the *kikkisu*, a woven reed partition ritually used in temples through which the Mesopotamian flood hero received divine instruction.⁹⁹ If symmetrically placed, the gateposts would have defined a portal of about two meters in width at the end of the inner throne room (65) nearest the sanctuary (66).¹⁰⁰ The neo-Hittite temple at 'Ain Dara provides a parallel to such an arrangement in its screened-off podium shrine located at the far end of its main hall.¹⁰¹

By way of analogy, Egyptian, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic literature alludes to a secondary paradisiacal tree as a symbol of the veil of the temple sanctuary¹⁰² and of the theme of death and rebirth.¹⁰³ Perhaps the most interesting biblical tradition about the placement

96. Al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 11, 43; cf. Barrelet, "Peinture," 12, 27; and Parrot, *Mission archéologique de Mari*, Peintures murales, 59. Giovino refutes arguments by scholars who frequently conflate this second type of sacred tree with the date palm (see, e.g., Giovino, *Assyrian Sacred Tree*, 113-28 and figs. 58-60).

97. Barrelet, "Peinture," 12.

98. Al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 18; cf. Barrelet, "Peinture," 26-27; Giovino, *Assyrian Sacred Tree*, 195-96.

99. Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 362.

100. Al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 57.

101. John Monson, "The New 'Ain Dara Temple: Closest Solomonic Parallel," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26/3 (May/June 2000): 20-30, 32-35, 67.

102. See Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Book of Moses* (Salt Lake City: Eborn, 2010), 77-87; see also Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, "The Tree of Knowledge as the Veil of the Sanctuary" (paper to be presented at the 2013 Sperry Symposium, Provo, Utah, October 2013).

103. See Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Book of Moses*, 109-26.

of the two special trees in the Garden of Eden is the Jewish idea that the foliage of the tree of knowledge hid the tree of life from direct view and that “God did not specifically prohibit eating from the tree of life because the tree of knowledge formed a hedge around it; only after one had partaken of the latter and cleared a path for himself could one come close to the tree of life.”¹⁰⁴ It is in this same sense that the fourth-century Christian, Ephrem the Syrian, could call the tree of knowledge “the veil for the sanctuary.”¹⁰⁵

One example of an architectural parallel to the Mari sanctuary partition hanging between two artificial trees is a depiction of Solomon’s temple at the el-Khirbe Samara synagogue¹⁰⁶ that shows the veil being suspended from two columns whose tree-like appearance is highlighted in some accounts. In many parallel investiture depictions from early¹⁰⁷ and later¹⁰⁸ Babylonia, either trees or treelike columns stand immediately in front of the throne of the god, thus demonstrating the strong association between the symbolism of the veil and the flanking arboreal doorposts in ancient Mesopotamia.

Barrelet discusses depictions of doorpost guardians in human form “found on many cylinder seals from different eras.”¹⁰⁹ She notes that “certain of these guardians are frequently shown between

104. Meir Zlotowitz and Nosson Scherman, eds., *Bereishis/Genesis*, 2nd ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah, 1986), 101; cf. 96. For more on this theme as it relates to the biblical story of Adam and Eve, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Ronan J. Head, “Mormonism’s Satan and the Tree of Life,” *Element: A Journal of Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 4/2 (2010): 1–54.

105. Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 350–63), “The Hymns on Paradise,” in *Hymns on Paradise*, ed. Sebastian Brock (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 3:5, 92. Note that the phrase *in the midst* was used both to describe the location of the two special trees of the Garden of Eden and also for the heavenly veil in the creation account (Moses 2:6).

106. Image from William J. Hamblin, <http://hamblinofjerusalem.blogspot.com/2010/01/temple-mosaics-from-el-khirbe-synagogue.html> (accessed 30 January 2010).

107. See, e.g., the investiture scene from the Ur-Nammu Stela, ca. 2100 BC. Jeanny V. Canby, *The “Ur-Nammu” Stela* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2001), plate 33.

108. See, e.g., the Sippar Shamash Tablet, from the reign of the Babylonian king Nabu-apla-iddina, ca. 900 BC; Giovino, *Assyrian Sacred Tree*, fig. 77; cf. 178.

109. Barrelet, “Peinture,” 26.

the gate they are commissioned to guard and the trees that rise up immediately behind them [see fig. 5]. This provides additional proof that the ‘gate’ of the divine dwelling is flanked by posts, or by artificial trees that stand there.”¹¹⁰

Presentation Scenes

With respect to the king’s passage through the final portal to enter into the presence of the god, Parrot finds the “endless scenes of *presentation*” on ancient Mesopotamian cylinder seals of particular significance.¹¹¹ Consistent with their function as instruments of authentication, such seals were used to confirm the legitimate status of the bearer¹¹² and may have been “understood in [their] own time to represent the very moment of the conferring of that status.”¹¹³ Parrot distinguishes between a first and a second type of presentation. In the first type, the king is presented to the god by a mediating deity who holds his hand (see fig. 6, top). In the second type, “the worshiper, who has already been introduced,”¹¹⁴ now interacts directly with the god (see fig. 6, bottom). Whereas the first scene is consistent with the idea of the introduction of the king at the entrance to the final temple portal described in the previous section, the second scene might correspond to the depiction of the actual investiture in the upper register of the central scene of the panel discussed below.

Divine Kingship

Having left the garden areas and now, at last, being within the inner sanctuary, the king of Mari’s journey to the celestial realm

110. Barrelet, “Peinture,” 26–27.

111. André Parrot, *Abraham et son temps* (Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1962), 28; Barrelet, “Peinture,” 27–28.

112. Irene J. Winter, “The King and the Cup: Iconography of the Royal Presentation Scene on Ur III Seals,” in *Insight through Images: Studies in Honor of Edith Porada*, ed. Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, Paolo Matthiae, and Maurits Van Loon (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1986), 265.

113. Winter, “King and the Cup,” 264.

114. Parrot, *Abraham*, 28.

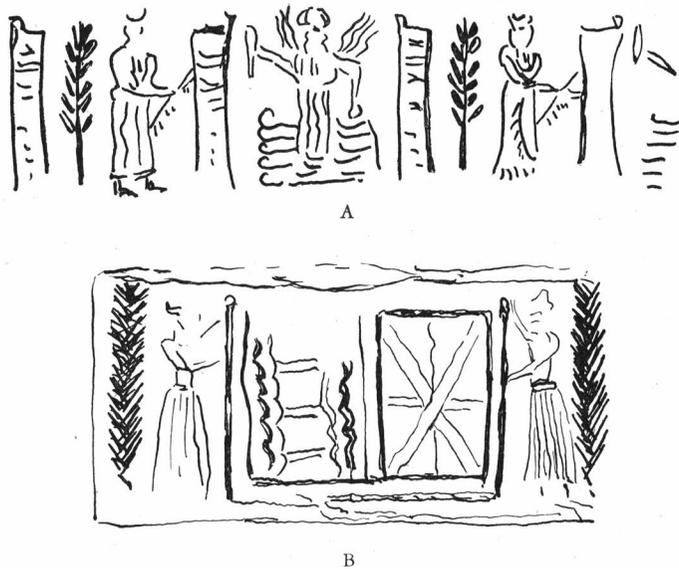


Figure 5. Guardians of the gate with trees rising up immediately behind them. The central figure in the upper panel is the standing god. Drawings from Barrelet, “Une peinture,” 27, fig. 11.



Figure 6. Mesopotamian cylinder seals showing a first presentation scene and a second presentation scene. Photos by Parrot in *Abraham et son temps*, plate II, a and b.

was complete and he was (re-)endowed with kingship. Such a ritual journey was not unique to Mari. Nicolas Wyatt summarizes a wide range of evidence indicating “a broad continuity of culture throughout the Levant”¹¹⁵ wherein the candidate for kingship underwent a ritual journey intended to confer a divine status as a son of God,¹¹⁶ thereby allowing him “*ex officio*, direct access to the gods.”¹¹⁷

Scholars have long debated the meaning of scattered fragments of rituals of sacral kingship in the Old Testament, especially in the psalms, but over time have increasingly found evidence of parallels with Mesopotamian investiture traditions.¹¹⁸ In this regard, one of the most significant of these is Psalm 110, an unquestionably royal and—for Christians—messianic passage:

1. A word of the Lord for my lord: Sit at my right hand,
till I make your enemies a stool for your feet.
2. The Lord shall extend the sceptre of your power from
Zion,
so that you rule in the midst of your enemies.
3. Royal grace is with you on this day of your birth,
in holy majesty from the womb of the dawn;

115. Nicolas Wyatt, “Degrees of Divinity: Some Mythical and Ritual Aspects of West Semitic Kingship,” in Wyatt, “*There’s Such Divinity Doth Hedge a King*,” 192.

116. See Wyatt, “Degrees of Divinity,” 191-220.

117. Wyatt, “Degrees of Divinity,” 220; cf. Eaton, commenting on Psalm 110:4: “He will be priest-king, the supreme figure for whom all the other personnel of the temple were only assistants” (Eaton, *Psalms*, 385). Nibley, commenting on Egyptian kingship: “Kings must be priests, and candidates to immortality must be both priests and kings.” Hugh W. Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005), 353.

118. While many of the specific criticisms of research in this tradition are well deserved, no better explanation has yet been attempted for the evidence as a whole. For example, having reviewed nearly a century of criticisms relating to Mowinckel’s theory of an Israelite enthronement festival, Roberts finds that a modified version of this idea still offers “the most adequate interpretive context for understanding both the classical enthronement Psalms and a large number of other Psalms.” J. J. M. Roberts, “Mowinckel’s Enthronement Festival: A Review,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 113. For a description of similar themes in the Qumran literature, see David J. Larsen, “Themes of the Royal Cult in the Psalms and in the Dead Sea Scrolls” (PhD diss., St. Andrews University, in preparation).

- upon you is the dew of your new life.
4. The Lord has sworn and will not go back:
You are a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.
 5. The Lord at your right hand
will smite down kings in the day of his wrath.
 6. In full majesty he will judge among the nations,
smiting heads across the wide earth.
 7. He who drinks from the brook by the way
shall therefore lift high his head.¹¹⁹

A well-known scholar of the Psalms, John Eaton, summarizes the import and setting of these verses as part of

the ceremonies enacting the installation of the Davidic king in Jerusalem. The prophetic singer announces two oracles of the Lord for the new king (vv. 1, 4) and fills them out with less direct prophecy (vv. 2-3, 5-7). Items of enthronement ceremonial seem reflected: ascension to the throne, bestowal of the sceptre, anointing and baptism signifying new birth as the Lord's son (v. 3 [cf. Psalm 2:7; 1 Chronicles 17:13]), appointment to royal priesthood, symbolic defeat of foes, the drink of life-giving water. As mentioned [in Psalms] 2, 18, 89, [and] 101, the rites may have involved a sacred drama and been repeated in commemorations, perhaps annually in conjunction with the celebration of God's kingship, for which the Davidic ruler was chief "servant."¹²⁰

As with the investiture rites of ancient Israel, our knowledge of Mesopotamian ceremonies is limited because of secrecy, the tradition of oral transmission, and the fragmentary nature of the texts.¹²¹ However, the broad outlines are clear enough. Below we give a reconstruction of the culminating rites.

119. Translation in Eaton, *Psalms*, 384.

120. Eaton, *Psalms*, 384-85.

121. Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 167.

Flowing Water

In the lower half of the central register of the Investiture Panel, we see female figures holding jars from which flow four streams, recalling the four rivers that flowed out from underneath the tree of life in the biblical Garden of Eden and also from the Israelite temple mount.¹²² A seedling (see Alma 32:41-42) grows out of the middle of the streams, which brings to mind the Book of Mormon account of Nephi's dream where he saw the "tree of life" sharing the same location as the "fountain of living waters" (1 Nephi 11:25). In a thirteenth-century-BC ivory inlay from Assur, four streams flow into water jars from a god at the top of a mountain, who stands between two sacred trees guarded by a pair of winged bulls.¹²³ By way of analogy to kingship rituals elsewhere in the ancient Near East, the streams in the Mari palace could be seen as representing a final ritual washing or libation¹²⁴—or perhaps instead a "drink of life-giving water"¹²⁵—as a prelude to the final rites of royal investiture.

Al-Khalesi proposed that these female figures, or goddesses, correspond architecturally to two identical statues with flowing vases that once flanked the bottom of the stairway to the sanctuary (66). One such statue was found within the Court of the Palm complex in the Mari palace. Careful examination of the statue "shows that actual water streamed out of the vase."¹²⁶ As evidence for a symmetric

122. See Stager, "Jerusalem as Eden," 37-38. On the streams of Eden, see Moses 3:10 and 1 Nephi 11:25. See also, e.g., Revelation 22:1-2. On the streams flowing from underneath the Jerusalem temple mount, see Psalm 36:8-9; Ezekiel 47:1; Joel 3:18; and Zechariah 14:8.

123. John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 122; see photograph and caption in Stager, "Jerusalem as Eden," 41.

124. See Black, "New Year Ceremonies," 45.

125. Eaton, *Psalms*, 384, commenting on Psalm 110:7; cf. John 4:6-15, 7:38; Revelation 21:6. The Sumerian ruler Gudea is depicted as receiving a drink from the gods, "representing supernatural life." John H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (London: SCM, 1976), 96. Similarly, in Israel, "a cup of life and salvation [was] given to the king from the Gihon source" (Eaton, *Psalms*, 386) so that he might be "purified and strengthened" as part of the "procession from the brook to the king's palace" (Mowinckel, *Psalms*, 1:64). Note that in Genesis 2:13, Gihon is named as one of the rivers of Eden.

126. Al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 43.

placement of two such statues at the foot of the sanctuary stairway, al-Khalesi cites the finding of waterproof building material and drainage installations in each of the corresponding locations.¹²⁷ A placement of two such statues of gods with flowing vases likewise is found on the façade of the temple of Sin at Khorsabad.¹²⁸

The meaning of the sprout and the flowing water is made apparent in a seal of Gudea. In this seal, a mediating deity introduces the humble, bareheaded, and nearly naked Gudea to a seated god. The mediating god presents a vase featuring a seedling and flowing water to the god. Water flows from the seated god himself into flowing vases, no doubt anticipating the sprouting of future seedlings that have yet to appear (see fig. 7a). The scene suggested is one of rebirth and transformation: drawing on the phraseology of the Gospel of John we might say that having been “born of water” (John 3:5),¹²⁹ the king, in likeness both of the sprout within the flowing vase and of the god to which he is being introduced, is also to become a “well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). An additional sculpture attests just such an interpretation, where Gudea himself is shown with his head covered and holding a vase of flowing water (see fig. 7b).



Figures 7a and 7b. Impression seal of Gudea, Tello, Iraq, ca. 2150 BC. Drawing from Canby, “*Ur-Nammu*” *Stela*, plate 14a. The Sumerian prince Gudea holding a vase of flowing water, ca. 2150 BC. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.

127. Al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 43–45.

128. Image in al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 42.

129. See Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 164.

General Description of the Investiture Ceremony at Mari

Regarding the specifics of the Mari ceremony from an earlier time, the following excerpt from an oracle of the god Adad to King Zimri-Lim is understood by Wyatt as an allusion to established rites of royal investiture:

Thus speaks Adad: . . . I have given all the land to Yahdun-Lim and, thanks to my arms, he has had no equal in combat. . . .

I have brought you back to the throne of your father, and have given you the arms with which I fought against Tī'amat [literally *tāmtum*]. I have anointed you with the oil of my victory, and no one has withstood you.¹³⁰

Based on this and other fragmentary textual evidence,¹³¹ Wyatt conjectures three events that would have taken place during the ritual of investiture at Mari:

Firstly, the king is escorted by the god to the throne of his father, where he presumably takes his seat. This suggests that he approaches the throne accompanied by the image of the god, perhaps holding his hand;

Secondly, he is given the “divine weapons,” which are identified as those used by the god in the mythical *Chaoskampf* [i.e., the primeval battle between the central god and his adversaries].¹³² Something of their power and efficacy is evidently to be transmitted to the king;

Thirdly, he is anointed, in the first extra-biblical allusion to the anointing of a king. This most distinctive of

130. Jean-Marie Durand, “Le mythologème du combat entre le dieu de l’orage et la mer en Mésopotamie,” *Mari: Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires* 7 (1993): 45; the second paragraph is from Wyatt’s translation of the French in Wyatt, “Arms and the King,” 159.

131. See Black, “New Year Ceremonies,” 44–45, for a detailed reconstruction of related ceremonies during the later Babylonian *akitu* festival.

132. Scholars debate as to whether they are to be seen as weapons or as implements of building construction. See more on these two views below.

Israelite and Judahite rites is now given a pedigree going back a millennium. This is thus the formal inauguration of [the king's] reign.¹³³

The Hand Ceremony

Wyatt connects the well-known Mesopotamian *akītu* hand ceremony with the moment when royal insignia were conferred:

The actual handing over of the weapons (taken by the king from the hands of the divine image?) indicates a process of direct transmission by touch, comparable to rites of laying of hands, as in investitures, and enthronement rites in which kings sit on the divine throne.¹³⁴

Comparing the function of the hand ceremony to Jewish, Mandaean, and Manichaean handclasp rites, Ethel Drower sees the “yearly placing of the king’s hand into the hand of the god [as] a kind of pact: the king swore fealty to his divinity; the god engaged himself to protect king and people. The handclasp appears on ancient Persian coins as an emblem of peace and alliance.”¹³⁵

In an Old Testament context, Matthew Brown notes a depiction of a handclasp in a presentation scene involving “the Israelite king standing at the veiled door of the Jerusalem Temple and being admitted by the Lord into an assembly” (see Psalm 27; cf. D&C 76:67).¹³⁶ He also notes important allusions in the psalms. At least one traditional Jewish exegete, Ibn Ezra, recognized similar “mechanisms of human ascent” in Psalm 73:23–24: “for I am always with

You; you grasped my right hand [and] led me into your [council], and afterwards granted me glory.”¹³⁷

The Oath

Within the panel’s culminating scene of royal investiture, we take the king’s raised right hand as representing the gesture of an oath.¹³⁸ His outstretched left arm receives the ring and staff of his office, symbols of divine power that are discussed in more detail below.¹³⁹

In his study of the *nīšum* oath at Mari, Paul Hoskisson conjectured that the course of the Ishtar festival—plausibly the event at which kingship was renewed—may have provided an occasion for the king to swear the oath of the gods.¹⁴⁰ He described the words and gestures associated with the oath ceremony as follows:

This spoken element of the oath could have reference to god and/or kings as the object, literally, “by the life of” god and/or king. . . . In addition to the verbal element, there was also a “ritual gesture,” presumably of the hand or hands, associated with the oath. . . . While the exact denotation of these phrases remains elusive, they no doubt refer to touching or seizing the throat (AHW 535a), and connote the seriousness of the commitment undertaken by reciting the oath.¹⁴¹

Conditional self-cursing was a standard part of covenant making elsewhere in the ancient Near East, and is indeed implied by the grammar of oaths in Akkadian where the oath is introduced by the protasis, “If I do not . . . [then].” Also of relevance is Yael

137. John C. Reeves, *Heralds of That Good Realm: Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis and Jewish Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 123; cf. 137n80.

138. See Stephen D. Ricks, “Oaths and Oath-Taking in the Old Testament,” in *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 49–50.

139. Al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 58.

140. Paul Y. Hoskisson, “The *Nīšum* ‘Oath’ in Mari,” in *Mari in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Mari and Mari Studies*, ed. Gordon D. Young (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 208.

141. Hoskisson, “*Nīšum* ‘Oath’ in Mari,” 204.

133. Wyatt, “Arms and the King,” 159–60.

134. Wyatt, “Arms and the King,” 160n28.

135. Ethel S. Drower, *Water into Wine* (London: Murray, 1956), 102n1. Cf. Bradshaw, *In God’s Image*, 681–86, 871–73.

136. Matthew B. Brown, “The Israelite Temple and the Early Christians” (paper presented at the FAIR Conference, Sandy, Utah, August 2008); see <http://www.fairlds.org/fair-conferences/2008-fair-conference/2008-the-israelite-temple-and-the-early-christians> (accessed 3 May 2012).

Ziegler's examination of the biblical use of variations of the oath formula: "So may God do to me and more."¹⁴² He notes that the allusive nature of this phrase

may suggest that this oath formula was accompanied by an act, speech, or gesture that suggested the manner of punishment in case of violation of this oath. In speculating on the nature of this act, scholars offer various possibilities: it is a verbal enumeration of punishments that would occur in case of its violation; a symbolic gesture or act intended to clarify the implied punishment in case of violation, such as an index finger moving across the throat¹⁴³ or another gesture of threatened punishment; or a ritual act involving the slaughter of animals. In this situation, the slaughtered animal would represent the punishment which God is invoked to execute against the violator of the oath.¹⁴⁴

An oath made by God himself, accompanying investiture with the royal priesthood in Israel, is attested by Psalm 110:4. Here the Lord confirms his intent by "an oath which he will never revoke. It appoints the king to be God's priest forever."¹⁴⁵ This same concept is invoked in the book of Hebrews (Hebrews 6:13–20; 7:15–28) and in the explanation of the oath and covenant of the priesthood given in Doctrine and Covenants 84:32–48.¹⁴⁶

The Conferral of Royal Insignia

We have now worked our way from the outermost edges of the Investiture Panel to its exact center, where is depicted the conferral of royal insignia on the king by the Mesopotamian goddess

142. Yael Ziegler, "So Shall God Do . . .: Variations of an Oath Formula and Its Literary Meaning," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126/1 (2007): 59–81, finds twelve such instances in the Bible: 1 Samuel 3:17; 14:44; 20:13; 25:22; 2 Samuel 3:9, 35; 19:13; 1 Kings 2:23; 19:2; 20:10; 2 Kings 6:31; Ruth 1:17.

143. Cf. Moses 5:29; see also Bradshaw, *In God's Image*, 377–78 (Moses 5:29b).

144. Ziegler, "So Shall God Do . . .," 62–63.

145. Eaton, *Psalms*, 385, commenting on Psalm 110:4.

146. See Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood*, 60–62.

Ishtar. Among other identifying conventions for Ishtar, note the lion under her foot, consistent with the *Chaoskampf* creation theme of triumph over one's adversaries.¹⁴⁷ The picture of Ishtar's foot on the lion recalls the biblical statement in Genesis 3:15: "it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (cf. Moses 4:21).

With respect to the royal insignia, there is no question that Ishtar is holding out the well-known Mesopotamian rod and ring that—according to the most recent major study of the subject, by Kathryn Slanski—was "employed for almost 2,000 years, in both Babylonian and Assyrian royal monuments and in non-royal works." And yet, as she also points out, researchers have heretofore been unable to propose "a convincing explanation for what the objects, the 'rod' and the 'ring,' are, and what meaning or meanings their representation was intended to convey."¹⁴⁸ The most troublesome interpretive problem is the ring. Significantly, though the ring in the Investiture Panel and in many later illustrations seems to be solid, it is in fact formed in the older Ur-Nammu stela by a coiled rope. According to Thorkild Jacobsen, both the rod (which he calls a "yardstick") and the looped rope (which he calls a "measuring coil") held in the right hand of the deity in both the Ur-Nammu stela and the Mari Investiture Panel are implements associated with the building of temples. On the other hand, the battle-axe hanging down idly from the left hand of the deity is a deadly instrument of war. Insightfully, Jacobsen observes that in the stela, as in the Investiture Panel, it is the rod and ring rather than

the weapon that [the deity] hands to Urnammu, thus entrusting him with works of peace rather than war, for the

147. See al-Khalesi, *Court of the Palms*, 58–60, for arguments in favor of the identification of this goddess with Ishtar. Eaton observes: "Exalted thrones always had a footstool, and there are Egyptian examples of such stools formed or decorated to symbolize subjected foes" (Eaton, *Psalms*, 385, commenting on Psalm 110:1). For related motifs in Jewish and Christian sources, see Bradshaw, *In God's Image*, 266–67.

148. Kathryn E. Slanski, "The Mesopotamian 'Rod' and 'Ring': Icon of Righteous Kingship and Balance of Power between Palace and Temple, 2100–850 BCE," in *Regime Change in the Ancient Near East and Egypt: From Sargon of Agade to Saddam Hussein*, ed. Harriet Crawford (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2007), 38.

task of building temples could be done only in peacetime. Thus the yardstick and measuring coil symbolize peace, and Inanna [in the related story of the *Descent of Inanna*] holds them¹⁴⁹ because, as goddess of war she clearly controls also the absence of war, peace.¹⁵⁰

Further confirming this interpretation is the fact that on the Mari painting—the only such depiction known that still shows color—the “rod” is painted white and the ‘ring’ is red.”¹⁵¹ From both linguistic and archaeological evidence (e.g., “traces of red discovered in excavation of the ziggurat of Anu in Uruk”), Slanski concludes that the ring in the hand of Ishtar could well be an ancient chalk line.¹⁵² As emblems that symbolically conjoin the acts of measuring and laying the temple foundation with the processes of cosmic creation, the Mesopotamian rod and ring can be profitably compared to temple surveying instruments in the biblical book of Ezekiel¹⁵³ as well as to the analogous figures of the square and circle (or compass).¹⁵⁴

With respect to the role of these emblems as symbols of the just rulership of the king, Slanski’s overall conclusions are worth quoting directly:

149. See *Descent of Inanna* 14–19, 102–7, 134–35, in Jacobsen, *Harps That Once*, 207, 212, 213. For an Old Babylonian depiction of Inanna in the underworld holding a “yardstick and measuring coil” in each hand, see Jeremy Black, Graham Cunningham, Eleanor Robson, and Gábor Zólyomi, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 70.

150. Thorkild Jacobsen, cited in Slanski, “‘Rod’ and ‘Ring,’” 45. The difference in attitude manifested by the rod and ring versus the battle-axe can be compared to the contrasting Egyptian kingship symbols of the shepherd’s crook vs. the flail.

151. Slanski, “‘Rod’ and ‘Ring,’” 44.

152. See Slanski, “‘Rod’ and ‘Ring,’” 47–48.

153. See Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 512, 515.

154. Hugh W. Nibley, “The Circle and the Square,” in *Temple and Cosmos*, 139–73. See Matthew B. Brown, “Cube, Gate, and Measuring Tools: A Biblical Pattern” (paper presented at the Expound Symposium, Provo, Utah, 14 May 2011); see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLy2tIbqeAc> (accessed 5 May 2012). Copy of manuscript in the possession of Jeffrey M. Bradshaw.

The suggestion proposed here, then, is that the “rod and ring,” depicted clearly as coiled rope on the Ur-Namma Stele, are surveying tools for laying straight lines. Of course, they would also be used for measuring; such tools, after all, serve both interrelated purposes even today. But my emphasis here is on the use of these instruments to lay straight foundations, a visual metaphor that arose in the realm of physical building and construction to be employed as an expression signalling righteous royal leadership. In the imagery of Ur-Namma’s stele, the symbol is to be connected with the building activity portrayed in the registers below, and in Hammurabi’s stele with that king’s memorialization of himself as *šar mēšarim*, the “just king.” That the “rod and ring” is held out to the king by the divinity in this and similar scenes, and not held by the king himself, may express the understanding that while the god may show or reveal to the ruler the means for making foundations or guiding people “straight,” justice and the tools for establishing justice remain firmly in the hands of the gods.

What of the preponderance of the depictions which do not clearly show the “ring” as rope or cord? Here I follow Frankfort and Cooper, who proposed that visual representation of the symbols “metamorphose” later into—or are interpreted later as—the more familiar “rod and ring,” such as that seen on the Hammurabi Law Stele and the Sippar Shamash Tablet from southern Mesopotamia, the Assyrian representations from northern Mesopotamia, and the royal stele from Elam.¹⁵⁵

How do we then explain Wyatt’s previously mentioned reference to the message from the god Adad to the king of Mari that tells how, in the midst of what seems to be a ceremony of kingship, he had given him “the arms with which I fought against Ti’amat”?¹⁵⁶

155. Slanski, “‘Rod’ and ‘Ring,’” 51.

156. Durand, “Mythologème du combat,” 45, from Wyatt’s translation of the French in Wyatt, “Arms and the King,” 159.

Since there is no explicit link between the Mari Investiture Panel and the oracle, we are free to conjecture that, just as the painting seems to depict an established rite involving the “rod and ring” that authorized the king to build a palace and establish his just rule, so there may have been an analogous ceremony to which the message of Adad alludes, where the god would stretch out his battle-axe to the king in preparation for war.

A biblical parallel to the dichotomy between the commission to build and the commission to wage war can be found in the story of King David, who was forbidden by God from constructing a temple because of his career as a fighter. Instead, David’s son Solomon, a “man of rest,” was eventually given the commission to build the earthly house of God. Speaking to David, the Lord said:

Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name. . . . Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. (1 Chronicles 22:8-9)

Citing Moses as the prototype of king, priest, and prophet in the Old Testament, Geo Widengren notes his possession of three objects as emblems of these respective offices: the verdant rod or staff (Exodus 4:17),¹⁵⁷ the manna (Exodus 16:33-34),¹⁵⁸ and the tablets of law (Exodus 31:18). The first and third of these can be compared to the cedar staff and the Tablets of Destiny that the Mesopotamian king Enmeduranki received at his enthronement.¹⁵⁹

157. Used anciently as a weapon and corresponding to the later symbol of a sword.

158. Perhaps relating to the shewbread that only the priests were to eat (cf. Matthew 12:4; Mark 2:26; Luke 6:4).

159. Widengren, *King and the Tree of Life*, 39-40, 60-61. For more recent comparative views, see Cornelis Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 45-63; Nicolas Wyatt, “The Hollow Crown: Ambivalent Elements in West Semitic Royal Ideology,” in Wyatt, “*There’s Such Divinity Doth Hedge a King*,” 43-46.

These tangible “tokens of the covenant,”¹⁶⁰ emblems of Moses’s threefold office that were provided in each case by God himself, seem to have been the very objects that were later transferred to the temple ark (Hebrews 9:4).¹⁶¹

Concluding Remarks

The Mari Investiture Panel depicts the endowment of the king of Mari with the divine right to rule. That it represents an actual ceremony that took place in the inner sanctum of the palace, perhaps annually, is almost certain. The exact details of the ceremony are difficult to reconstruct, but it is hoped that comparison with propinquitous rites from elsewhere in the ancient Near East provides a plausible interpretation of the panel and also a link with the religious practices of the Israelites with which Latter-day Saints are familiar and with which they feel a ritual kinship.

Although there is little indication in the Old Testament that these Israelite rituals were given to anyone besides the king, there is significant nonscriptural evidence from later times that rites with a similar function were made available to others. For example, we have already noted the role of priests as religious deputies to the king. Later, when the “active monarchy fell into abeyance, it was crucial that [the king’s] mediatorial role be perpetuated by his deputies, and so the priesthood itself took on a quasi-royal status.”¹⁶² Moreover, findings at Qumran and Dura Europos suggest that in at least some strands of Jewish tradition these rituals of royal priesthood were

160. Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 236. For more about the symbolism of these and other ancient temple objects as they related to the higher priesthood, see Bradshaw, *In God’s Image*, 658-60, 679-81; and Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood*, 39-41.

161. Contrast Exodus 25:16, which seems to be arguing polemically against anything other than the tablets being in the ark.

162. Wyatt, “Degrees of Divinity,” 220. Cf. Widengren’s comparative analysis of Akkadian and West Semitic literature showing “that the sacral garment of the High priest, including his pectoral with the urim and tummim, was adopted from the king.” Geo Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book* (Uppsala, Sweden: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1950), 25.

further democratized, enabling members of the community, and not just their ruler and his priests, to participate in what Crispin Fletcher-Louis calls an “angelomorphic priesthood” and a routinized form of transformational worship that ritually brought them into the presence of God.¹⁶³ Indeed, a precursor of this tradition is evident in the account of God’s promise to Israel that, if they kept his covenant, not just a select few but all of them would have the privilege of becoming part of “a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). Going back to the beginning of the Bible, scholars have concluded that the statement that Adam and Eve were created in the “image of God” (see Genesis 1:26-27) is meant to convey the idea that “each person bears the stamp of royalty.”¹⁶⁴ As an example from the New Testament, note that similar blessings, echoing temple themes and intended for the whole community of the faithful, are enumerated in statements found in the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation (Revelation 2:7, 10-11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 20-21). In the most direct of these statements, Revelation 3:21 declares: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” Similarly, in 1 Peter 2:9, the faithful are identified as members of a “royal priesthood.”

The Mesopotamian rituals of sacral kingship may seem in some respects far removed from current Latter-day Saint teachings and ritual practices. However, what resemblances exist, particularly in light of their Israelite and Christian analogues, may be of sig-

163. See Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 56, 212-13, 476. Larsen provides a detailed discussion of evidence for such worship from Qumran texts in Larsen, “Themes of the Royal Cult,” especially chapter 5. For a comparative LDS perspective relating to these themes, see Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood*, 97-107. Regarding the possibility of such forms of worship at Dura Europos, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, “The Ezekiel Mural at Dura Europos,” *BYU Studies* 49/1 (2010): 4-49.

164. Sarna, *Genesis*, 12. On the relationship between this concept and the scriptural concept of “sealing,” see Bradshaw, *Temple Themes in the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood*, 48. Hendel sees the biblical democratization of royal ideology as an explicit deprecation of Mesopotamian theology. See Ronald S. Hendel, “Genesis 1-11 and Its Mesopotamian Problem,” in *Cultural Borrowings and Ethnic Appropriations in Antiquity*, ed. Erich S. Gruen (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2005), 27.

nificance to a people who claim that divine revelation about the ordinances goes back to the beginning of humankind. Antedating, as they do, scriptural records of temple rituals by more than a millennium, Truman Madsen notes that while such resemblances may be “an embarrassment to exclusivistic readings of religion,” they represent to Latter-day Saints “a kind of confirmation and vindication.”¹⁶⁵ Whether or not scholarship sustains the suggestion of common origins for certain elements of ancient and modern temple practices, one thing seems evident: the rites of the restoration speak to ageless human yearnings for the divine.

True it is that some may find little of direct interest in the innumerable shifting *mythologies* of the ancient Near East. However, what is important to note about many of the myths, as Noel Robertson observes, is that they are nearly always “closely tied to *ritual*. A myth was told to explain a rite, and at the end of the telling the rite was held up as proof that the myth had happened so.” Though myths naturally “moved away from their original setting, . . . the ritual always continued as before (that is the nature of ritual) and was familiar to everyone (similar festivals were celebrated in every city). It gave rise to new stories, or to variations of the old.”¹⁶⁶ The primacy of ritual should have been “clear from the outset,” Nibley affirms, “since myths and legends are innumerable

165. Truman G. Madsen, “Introductory Essay,” in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judeo-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1978), xvii.

166. Noel Robertson, “Orphic Mysteries and Dionysiac Ritual,” in *Greek Mysteries*, ed. Michael B. Cosmopoulos (New York City: Routledge, 2003), 220, emphasis added. This observation, of course, needs to be qualified. Oden notes that what is important in order to avoid the excesses of some of the early proponents of myth-ritual theory (e.g., William Robertson Smith) is to reject the generalization that *all* myths originated as rituals and to focus on the evidence for specific cases, as we have tried to do here. In addition, Oden writes that what is important in any argument that a particular myth arose as part of ritual is “an adequate explanation of the specific ritual alleged to accompany the myth.” If such an explanation, accompanied with “an adequate theory of ritual,” is forthcoming, and “if it is then combined with those cases where myths and rituals do appear to be inextricably linked, then the myth-ritual position might prove to be most useful”; see Robert A. Oden Jr., *The Bible without Theology: The Theological Tradition and Alternatives to It* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 65, 69.

while the rites and ordinances found throughout the world are surprisingly few and uniform, making it apparent that it is the stories that are invented—the rites are always there.”¹⁶⁷

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167. Hugh W. Nibley, “Myths and the Scriptures,” in *Old Testament and Related Studies* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1986), 42. See Wyatt, “Arms and the King,” 155–89, for an example of how this generalization applies with respect to the *Chaoskampf* myth.