


Book of Moses Essays #55: Moses Sees the Garden of Eden (Moses 3) The Garden of Eden as a Model for the Temple in Israel and Old Babylon (Moses 3:8–15)

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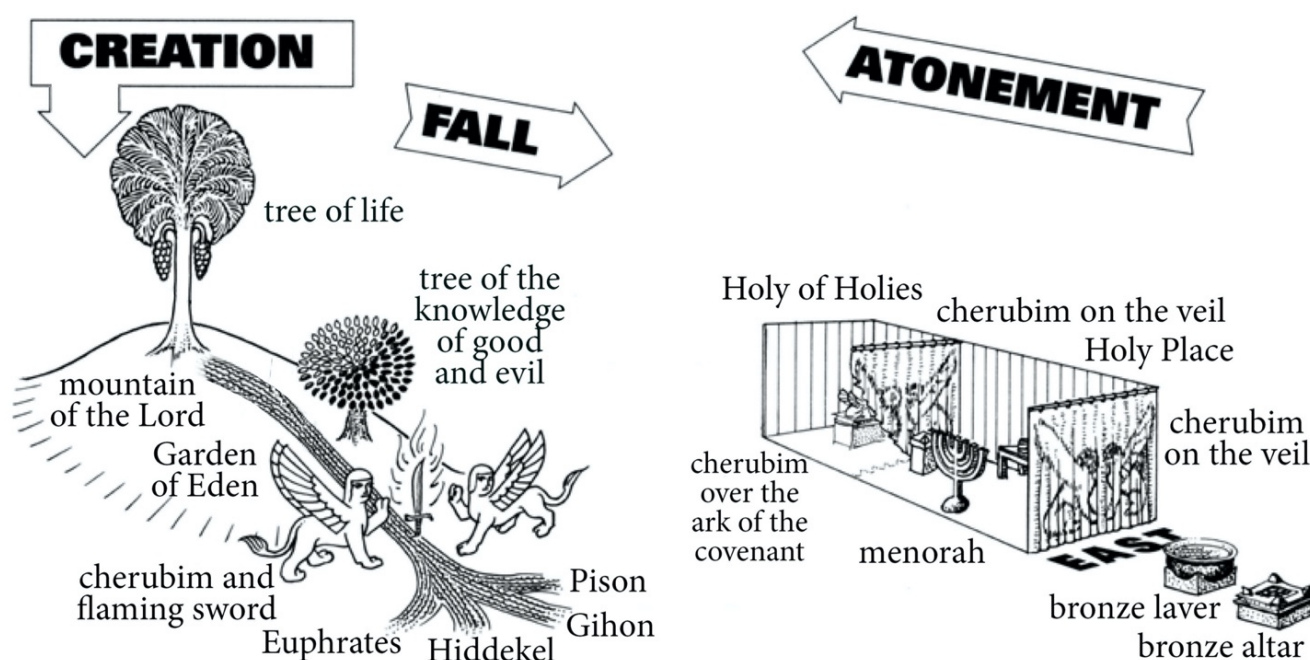


Figure 1. Adapted from Michael P. Lyon, 1952–: *Sacred Topography of Eden and the Temple*, 1994. The outbound journey of the Creation and the Fall at left is mirrored in the inbound journey of the Israelite Tabernacle at right.

In [Essay #32](#), we discussed the view of Latter-day Saint scholar Donald W. Parry that the outbound journey of the Creation and the Fall is mirrored in the inbound journey of the Tabernacle, the prototype for later Israelite temples.^[1] The Garden of Eden can be seen as a natural “temple,” where Adam and Eve lived in God’s presence for a time. Significantly, each major feature of Eden (e.g., the river, the cherubim, the Tree of Knowledge, the Tree of Life) corresponds to a similar symbol in the Israelite temple (e.g., the bronze laver, the cherubim, the veil,^[2] the menorah^[3]).

Elsewhere in the ancient Near East, Creation, garden, and temple themes were also combined, as illustrated in this famous Mari Investiture panel from Old Babylon, created in the Abrahamic era. A study of this panel can enrich our study of the temple-like description of the Garden of Eden in Moses 3, preparing us for the temple themes we will encounter in the story of the Fall (Moses 4).

Figure 2. Line-drawing of the Mari Investiture Panel.

Garden and Temple Themes in Old Babylon

This mural was found the Court of the Palms at Mari, where excavations began in 1933. It dates from about 1800 BCE, possibly during the reign of King Yahdun-Lim.^[4] Most scholars believe that it represents the ritual by which the king's right to rule was renewed each year.

Al-Khalesi argues that the central scene of the mural depicts “a religious ceremony taking place inside [an inner sanctuary] as viewed through an open door.”^[5] He concludes that the scene in the Investiture mural is a “*figurative representation of the actual architectural form of the [inner sanctuary] and the statues which were originally set up inside it.*”^[6] Since the ritual

would have been witnessed by only a few people, al-Khalesi thinks that “the purpose of the mural was to illustrate the actual act of the ceremony—a given moment” to those standing outside.^[7]

In the exact geometric center of the panel, we see a statue representing the goddess Ishtar conferring royal insignia on the king, highlighting the prime importance of this event in the annual kingship ritual.^[8] Below the investiture scene, in the lower half of the mural, we see “figures holding jars from which flow four streams,” with a seedling^[9] growing out of the middle, recalling the streams that flowed out from underneath the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden.^[10] In the context of the Investiture Panel, the streams could be seen as suggesting the theme of ritual washings or libations as a prelude to the renewal of kingship.^[11]

Note that the two sides of the Investiture panel are mirror images. 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 sacred center.

J. R. Porter writes of how the scene depicted in the mural “strikingly recall[s] details of the Genesis description of the Garden of Eden. In particular, the mural depicts two types of tree,” one type clearly being a date palm analogue to the Tree of Life. In the symmetrical side panels at the far left and right of the mural, two men climb each of the two date palms.^[12] In many traditions, sacred trees are identified with a human king,^[13] or with the mother of a king, whether human or divine.^[14] Like the two figures witnessing the investiture, two other individuals near date palms raise their hands in supplication,^[15] suggesting a parallel between the tree and the king himself. Like the Tree of Life, the king is an “archetypal receiver and distributor of divine blessing.”^[16] The palm tree on the right can clearly be seen as harboring a bird.^[17]

As an intriguing parallel to the notion of the Tree of Knowledge as the veil of the sanctuary, note that two exemplars of the second type of tree are placed in immediate proximity to the most holy place — suggesting the possibility that they represented treelike wooden posts that would have supported a veil.^[18] These two trees are “guarded by mythical winged animals[—the Assyrian version of the] cherubim”^[19] who would be responsible for “the introduction of worshippers to the presence of a god.”^[20]

Sequence of Ritual Events

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 sanctuary.^[21] We will review some of the themes of the king’s journey, including

- Creation
- A garden with a central tree bearing sweet fruit

- Sacrifice
- A veil held up by a second kind of “tree”
- Renewal of kingship.

Creation. Although we know little directly about the details of the Old Babylonian investiture ritual performed at Mari, it is certain that the fourth^[22] of the twelve days of the later Babylonian New Year *akītu* festival always included a rehearsal of the creation story, *Enuma Elish* (“When on high...”),^[23] a story whose theological roots reach back long before the painting of the Investiture Panel.^[24] 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 heavenly battles, and the subsequent creation of the earth and of mankind as a prelude to the building of Marduk’s temple in Babylon.^[25] 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.”^[26] Seen in this light, a better title for *Enuma Elish* might be “The Exaltation of Marduk.”^[27]

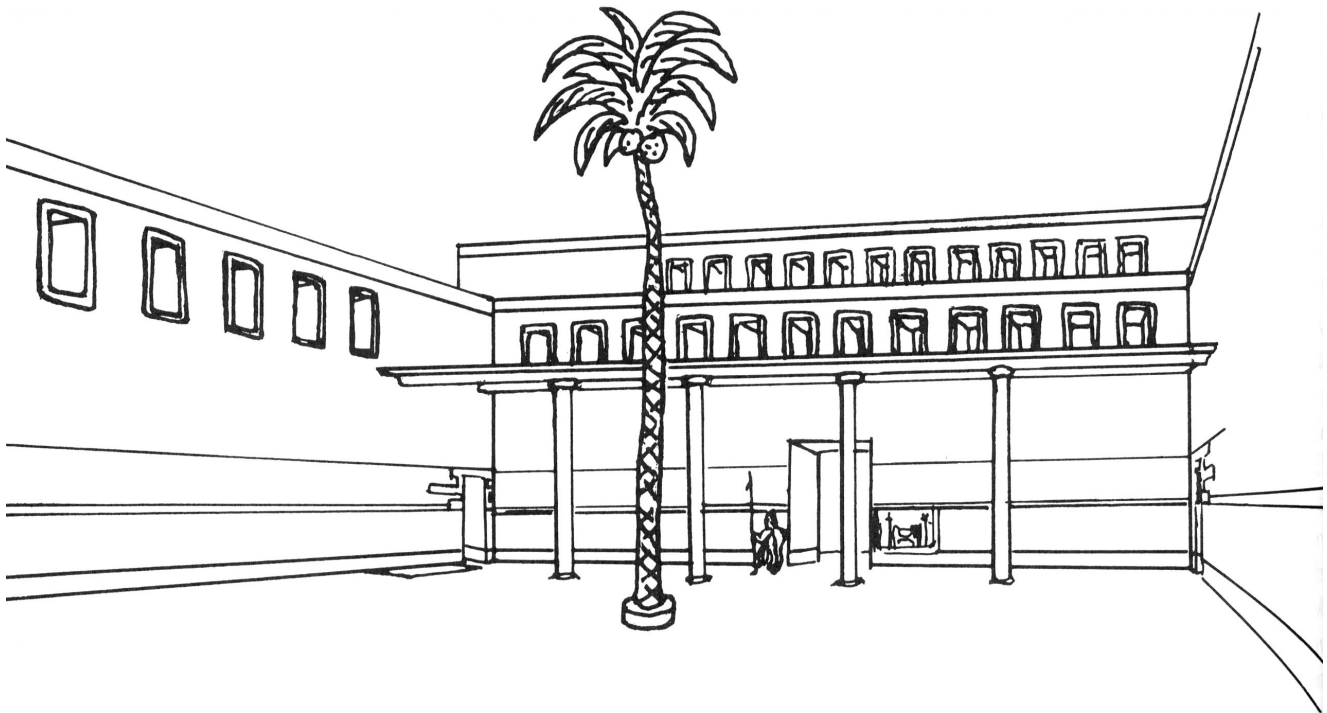


Figure 3. Margueron’s reconstruction of the Court of the Palm with an artificial tree^[28] in the “exact center”^[29] of the open air space.

Garden with a central tree bearing sweet fruit. A tree, either real or artificial, typically took the central position in palace courtyards of the Babylonians and Assyrians,^[30] recalling the biblical account of the Tree of Life “in the midst” (literally “in the center”) of the Garden of Eden.^[31]

In this attempted visual reconstruction of the Court of the Palm at Mari, the sacred date palm with its sweet fruit is placed in the exact center. A single date palm tree “often yielded more than one hundred pounds of fruit per year over a productive lifetime of one hundred years or more. Akkadian synonyms for ‘date palm’ included ‘tree of abundance’ (*iṣu mašrû*) and ‘tree of riches’ (*iṣu rāšû*)—appropriate names for the vehicle of agricultural success and richness.”^[32]

The Investiture Panel is shown just to the right of the entry to the fore throneroom. Though the central palm no doubt dominated the courtyard symbolically and visually, the courtyard might also have been filled with potted trees and plants to create a luxurious garden.

The motif of eating sacred fruit is 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.^[33] However, according to both early Mesopotamian and later Palestinian texts, date palms were not only a source of sweet fruit but also they sometimes were climbed to obtain access to a source of wisdom or warning that was termed “the conversation of palm trees.”^[34] 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.”^[35] More generally in the ancient Near East, sacred trees were seen as a source of energy, grace, and power.^[36]

Sacrifice. 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. This is consistent with a sacrificial scene painted on the walls of the courtyard that has been “interpreted as representing the king ... leading a ‘procession of several temple servants towards’ an enthroned god.”^[37] Texts from Mari tell us that the queen was the one who furnished sacrifices for the “Lady of the Palace,”^[38] presumably meaning the goddess Ishtar.

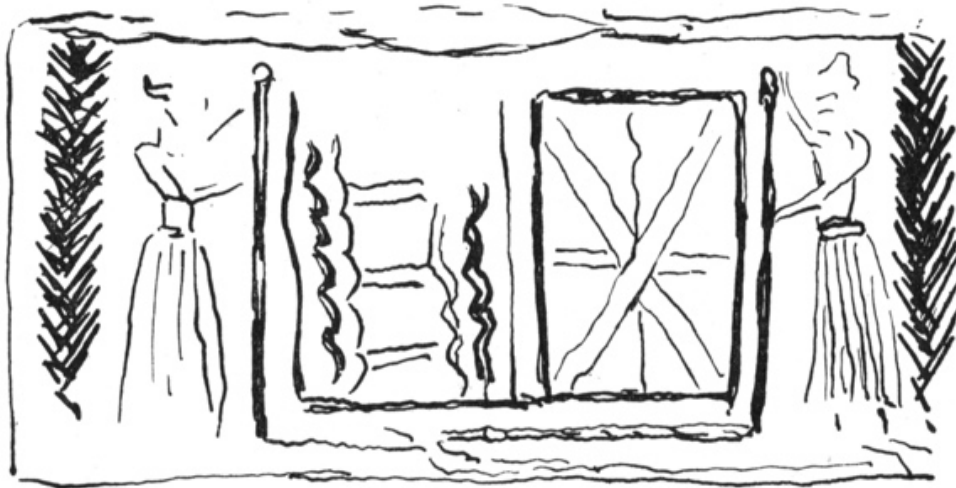
A veil held up by a second kind of “tree.” Scholars contrast the realism in the Investiture Panel depiction of the date palm to the representation of the second type of “Sacred Tree,” which seems to be “imaginary” or artificial in kind.^[39]

As to the function of the second type of sacred tree, al-Khalesi concludes that it was “meant to symbolize a door-post.”^[40] From archaeological evidence, he conjectures that such posts could have provided supporting infrastructure for a partition made of “ornamented woven material.”^[41] This recalls the *kikkisu*, a woven reed partition ritually used in temples through which the Mesopotamian flood hero received divine instruction.^[42] Al-Khalesi cites the presence of a rectangular chink in the pavement of the inner throne room as evidence for the presence of tree-like gatepost.^[43] He conjectures that such posts could have provided supporting infrastructure for a partition made of “ornamented woven material.” If symmetrically placed, the gateposts would have defined a portal of about two meters in width.^[44] 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.^[45] In essence, the veil

shielded the “Holy of Holies” of the Mari palace from public view, suggesting the same symbolic function as the Tree of Knowledge, which in Genesis hid the Tree of Life from view.^[46]



A



B

Figure 4. Guardians of the gate with trees rising up immediately behind them. The central figure in the image labeled as A is the standing god.

Priests acting in the role of cherubim, shown above next to the treelike posts of the veil, would be responsible for “the introduction of worshippers to the presence of a god.”^[47]

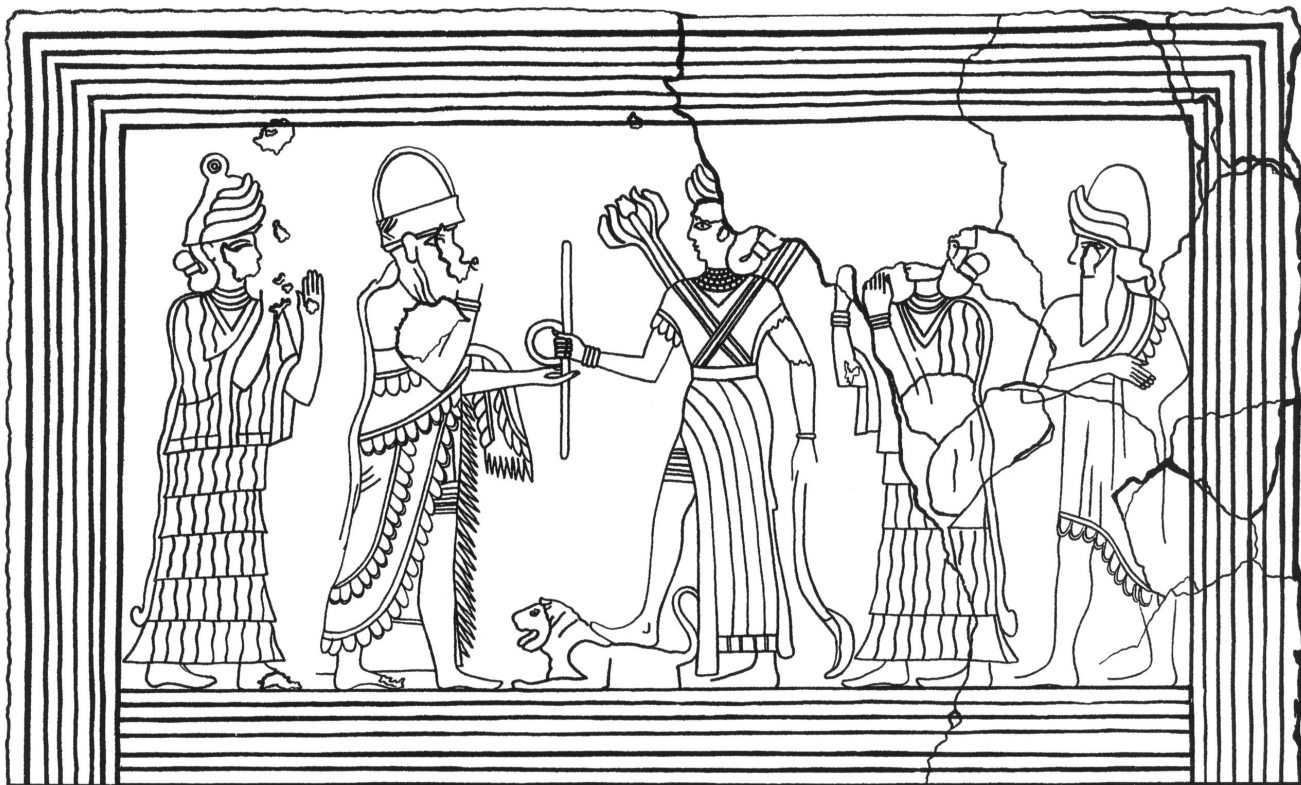


Figure 5. The upper register of the central portion of the Investiture Panel, showing the king being invested by the victorious Ishtar in the presence of intercessory goddesses and a divinized royal figure (at right).

Renewal of kingship. This scene seems to “depict a king being invested by the Mesopotamian fertility goddess Ishtar:[48] Eve has been associated with such divine figures.”[49]

As one part of his initiation ceremony, the king would have touched or grasped the hand of the statue of the god of the palace. Within the innermost sacred chamber, the king raises his right hand, perhaps in an oath-related gesture.[50] At the same time, his left hand receives the rod and coil that signified his worthiness for the prerogatives of his office. These two items of regalia are measurement tools used in construction, corresponding in their general function to the later symbols of the square and compass. They served as symbols of divinely authorized power.[51]

Conclusion

John Walton observed 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.” [52] Of course, resemblances between authentic, revealed religion in Old Testament times and the religious beliefs and practices of other peoples do not simply imply that the Israelites got their religion from their neighbors. Rather, to believing Latter-day Saints, they provide “a kind of confirmation and vindication”[53] that the Gospel

was preached in the beginning and that ancient evidence of distorted fragments of truth found outside of biblical tradition may be the result of subsequent degeneration and apostasy.

Adapted from Bradshaw, Jeffrey M., and Ronan J. Head. "The investiture panel at Mari and rituals of divine kingship in the ancient Near East." *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 4 (2012): 1-42. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sba/vol4/iss1/1/>.

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Notes on Figures

Figure 1. Published in D. W. Parry, *Garden*, pp. 134–135. We have modified Lyon's original drawing by moving the Tree of Life to the top of the mountain. It was originally placed slightly downhill. For the rationale for this modification, see J. M. Bradshaw, *Tree of Knowledge*.

Figure 2. Drawing from J. R. Porter, *Guide*, p. 28. With permission.

Figure 3. Image from J.-C. Margueron, *Mari*, p. 892. Muller, agreeing with Margeueron, accounted for the seeming discrepancy between the single palm tree of the palace and the symmetric doubling of the palm tree in the Investiture Panel by citing rotation and flattening as principles of artistic perspective in the ancient Near East (B. Muller, *Aspects*, pp. 135, 138). Differing from al-Khalesi, however, they applied this same principle to the statue of the goddess with the flowing vase and concluded that there was only one such statue, rather than two, and that it stood on a pedestal within room 64, facing the opening from courtyard 106 ().

Figure 4. M.-T. Barrelet, *Peinture*, p. 27 figure 11. With permission.

Figure 5. Image in J.-C. Margueron, *Mari Métropole*, p. 478. With permission.

Endnotes

[1] D. W. Parry, *Garden*, p. 135. Cf. J. M. Lundquist, *Reality*; J. A. Parry *et al.*, *Temple in Heaven*; T. Stordalen, *Echoes*, pp. 112-116, 308-309; T. D. Alexander, *From Eden*, pp. 20-23; G. K. Beale, *Temple*, pp. 66–80; G. J. Wenham, *Sanctuary Symbolism*; J. A. Parry *et al.*, *Temple in Heaven*; R. N. Holzapfel *et al.*, *Father's House*, pp. 17–19; J. Morrow, *Creation*; D. R. Seely *et al.*, *Crown of Creation*.

[2] For more on the correspondence between the symbolism of the Tree of Knowledge and the temple veil, see J. M. Bradshaw, *Tree of Knowledge*. See also [Essay #58](#).

[3] In most depictions of Jewish temple architecture, the menorah is shown as being *outside* the veil—in contrast to the Tree of Life, which is at the holiest place in the Garden of Eden. However, Margaret Barker cites evidence that, in the first temple, a Tree of Life was symbolized *within* the Holy of Holies (e.g., M. Barker, *Hidden*, pp. 6–7; M. Barker, *Christmas*, pp. 85–86, 140; J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image 1*, pp. 366–367). Barker concludes that the Menorah (or perhaps a second, different, representation in arboreal form?) was both

removed from the temple and diminished in stature in later Jewish literature as the result of a “very ancient feud” concerning its significance (M. Barker, *Older*, p. 221, see pp. 221–232). Mandaean scripture describes a Tree of Life within the *heavenly* sanctuary as follows: “They ... lifted the great veil of safety upward before him, introduced him, and showed him that Vine,” meaning the Tree of Life (M. Lidzbarski, *Ginza*, GL 1:1, p. 429:3–20; cf. E. S. Drower, *Prayerbook*, 49, pp. 45–46).

[4] Long presumed to have been created in about 1760 bce during the reign of its last independent sovereign, King Zimri-Lim, it has now been convincingly dated by Margueron to a period decades earlier, most likely during the reign of Zimri-Lim’s father, the great Yahdun-Lim (J.-C. Margueron, *La Peinture et l’Histoire*, p. 23). For a ritual interpretation and comparative analysis of the Mari Investiture Panel, see J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, *Investiture Panel*

[5] Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, p. 38. The ceremony may have taken place during an Babylonian New Year’s festival called the “Offerings of Ishtar” (S. Dalley, *Mari and Karana*, p. 134). Known in greater detail from later periods, the New Year’s festival represented the annual renewal of kingship.

[6] Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, p. 38, emphasis in original.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

[8] Image from J.-C. Margueron, *Mari Métropole*, p. 510.

[9] See Alma 32:41–42. Related imagery on a seal of Gudea suggests the idea that the sprout represents the new king (J. M. Bradshaw *et al.*, *Investiture Panel*, p. 30).

[10] Cf. Moses 3:10, 1 Nephi 11:25.

[11] A restoration of the mural revealed fish in the water. Note also that the entire mural “is surrounded by a border of running spirals, probably symbolizing water, and there is another band of dome-like motif with a knob at the top and the bottom of the mural. It is interesting to note that the latter motif is somewhat similar to the tassels which adorn the robe of Idi-ilum’s statue from Mari” (Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, p. 38).

[12] Associated in some cultures with the idea of heavenly ascent and the attainment of divine vision. See, e.g., E. A. S. Butterworth, *Tree*, p. 213.

[13] Cf. Daniel 4:20, 22: “The tree... is thou, O king.” See also Judges 9:7–21, E. D. Clark, *Cedars*; T. Stordalen, *Echoes*, pp. 89–92, 100–101, 291; G. Widengren, *King and Tree of Life*, pp. 42–50.

[14] N. Wyatt, *Space*, p. 170; cf. 1 Nephi 11:8–22, M. Barker, *Joseph Smith*, p. 76; M. Cazenave, *Encyclopédie*, p. 44; D. C. Peterson, *Asherah* 1998; D. C. Peterson, *Asherah* 2000 H. Schwartz, *Tree*, p. 50. See also Qur’an 19:23–26, A. a.-S. M. H. at-Tabataba’i, *Al-Mizan*, 6:146.

[15] Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, pp. 45, 54, 56; J. M. Bradshaw, *God’s Image* 1, pp. 355–356. Al-Khalesi concludes that this supplication “was on behalf of the worshipper” (Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, p. 15).

[16] T. Stordalen, *Echoes*, p. 101.

[17] The bird, painted in blue, “has been identified as the ‘hunter of Africa’” and “was seen over the ruins of Mari in 1951” (Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, p. 11). Others have identified it as a

dove, a symbol associated with Ishtar. See also J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image* 1, pp. 42-43, 166, 209, 246, 473, 654.

[18] This second type of tree with its prominent blossoms is identified by al-Khalesi simply as the "Sacred Tree" (Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, pp. 11, 43). Al-Khalesi notes the realism of the date palm but sees the "sacred tree" as "imaginary" in nature (*ibid.*, p. 11). Al-Khalesi reproduces a figure of the façade wall of the Sin temple at Khorsabad where palm trees positioned immediately above identical goddesses with flowing vases flank the entrance to the ante-cella.

[19] Cf. Moses 4:31.

[20] Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, p. 67. Barrelet—citing texts associated with Gudea, a ruler of the city of southern city of Lagash, ca. 2144-2124 bce—conjectures that the three composite animals symbolize the three major areas of the ritual complex where the investiture took place (M.-T. Barrelet, *Peinture*, p. 24).

[21] Scholars agreeing on this general interpretation include Barrelet, Parrot, Margueron, Muller, and al-Khalesi. See, e.g., B. Muller, *Aspects*, p. 138 note 24; Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, pp. 61-65. While some of our specific conclusions and comparisons are unique to the present study, our overall interpretation follows most closely that of al-Khalesi.

[22] Although the *akītu* festival was very often held on the New Year, particularly for national deities such as Marduk or Assur, it could be "observed at various times of the year, depending on the deity and city... As in ancient Israel, the Mesopotamians maintained two calendars—civil and religious—and as a result, it turns out that first-millennium Babylon actually held two *akītus*, a primary one during Nisanu 1-12 (the first civil month) and another during Tashritu 1-12 (the seventh civil month, the first religious month). The two months obviously corresponded to the vernal equinox and the autumnal equinox, underscoring the solar and, by implication, agricultural dimensions of the rituals" (K. L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, p. 166).

[23] E. A. Speiser, *Creation Epic*.

[24] Consistent with Lambert's earlier findings, Yingling adduces internal evidence relating to the role of Marduk that *Enuma Elish* in its current form can be dated to no earlier than 1126–1105 bce (E. O. Yingling, *Give Me*). However, speaking of the late and varied primary texts that provide ritual prescriptions for *akītu* rites, Sparks writes: "[O]ur image of the *akītu* is a composite result of dovetailing disparate sources, but the image is essentially a valid one. Scholars are also quite certain that these late copies of the *akītu* reflect much older ritual traditions" (K. L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, p. 167). For example, Howard Jacobson cites Sumerian elements in the introductory theogony that hearken back to the great god list *An* and additional echoes of the Ninurta myth *Lugal-e*. He also refers to what may be allusions to early Akkadian and Old Babylonian themes. A later Assyrian version of the tale finds the name of Marduk replaced by that of the god Ashur, and in Ugarit we find the motif of the battle between the storm god and the sea in the story of Ba'al and Yam (see H. Jacobson, *Pseudo-Philo*, pp. 167-168). See N. Wyatt, *Arms* for an extensive discussion and a collection of relevant texts from across the Levant that serve to set the major themes of *Enuma Elish* in a context stretching back to at least the third millennium bce.

Thorkild Jacobsen reminds us of how the interpretation of the stories may change even when the stories themselves remain relatively intact (T. Jacobsen, *Treasures*, pp. 19-20):

It is not only that older elements disappear and are replaced with new; often the old elements are retained and exist side by side with the new; and often too, these older elements, though seemingly unchanged, have in fact come to mean something quite different, have been reinterpreted to fit into a new system of meanings. To illustrate with an example from our own Western cultural tradition, the story of Adam and Eve is retained unchanged since Old Testament times, but the [first chapters] of Genesis [have] been progressively reinterpreted by St. Paul, by St. Augustine, and by Milton (not to speak of modern theologians) so that [they have] come to carry a wealth of theological and anthropological meaning related to the essential nature of man, very different from what the story could possibly have meant in its earlier... cultural setting.

In approaching ancient Mesopotamian materials, it should be kept in mind that the older elements of culture survive, and that they may be reinterpreted over and over; for we find among these materials religious documents, myths, epics, laments, which have been handed down almost unchanged in copy after copy for as much as a thousand or fifteen hundred years, and it is often difficult to say with certainty whether a document originated in the period from which it seems to come, or whether it was in fact from earlier times.

[25] Later, Marduk was granted the privilege of having his own temple built, in likeness of the temple of Ea (H. W. Nibley, *Teachings of the PGP*, 10, pp. 126-127). Of course, such temples were not directly built by divine hands, but rather by the king, on behalf of the gods, as one of his central duties. In return for his service and fidelity, the fruits of the victory won by the gods were transmitted to the new king, 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, its function paralleling in the secular world that of the temple in the religious domain (I. J. Winter, *King*, p. 253).

Marduk's life is, of course, a recapitulation of events from the story of the god Ea. It is quite possible that the version of the creation story told at Mari featured Ishtar rather than Marduk as its principal character—see S. Dalley, *Esther's Revenge*, p. 148.

[26] E. A. Speiser, *Creation Epic*, 7:140, p. 72. Philippe Talon observes (P. Talon, *Enūma Eliš*, p. 266):

Everything Ea... accomplished [was] later accomplished by Marduk, on a grander scale. Apsû and Mummu announce Tiamat and Kingu and they are vanquished in the same way, by magic. Ea has created his dwelling with the body of Apsû as Marduk will create the intelligible world with the body of Tiamat, the exact correspondence of the Apsû being the Ešarra. The deeds of Ea are thus a prefiguration of the great deeds of Marduk, who will receive as his last name the name of his father in Tablet VII.

Continuing his exploration of the means by which it seems possible that “something of the original Mesopotamian concept of the divine left its mark in the Western mind” (ibid., p. 277), Talon writes (ibid., p. 276):

The Chaldaean doctrine does not directly reflect Mesopotamian cosmology in itself, but is rather like an echo. Fragment 7 of the Oracles says: “Because the Father created everything in perfection and gave it to the second Intellect, whom you call the first, all of you, human race.” On which Psellus comments: “After having worked the whole creation, the first Father of the Triad gave it to the Intellect, the one that the human race, ignorant of the preeminence of the Father, calls the first God.” Psellus, being of Christian faith, is here linking the Oracle with his own doctrine and he adds: “Because in the book of Moses, the Father gives the Son the idea of the production of creatures, and the Son becomes the artisan of creation.” This agrees with the role of Marduk in the Babylonian myth if we see him as the Demiurge, the Twice-Beyond who created the universe, distinct from Aššur/ Marduk, the One from which the other gods emanate in the diagram elaborated by S. Parpola. It also agrees well with *Enuma Elish*, 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 Tiamat. Later, at the end of the myth, Marduk eventually assumes the name of his Father, Ea, and thus all of his powers.

[27] R. J. Clifford, *Creation*, p. 93. Rennaker laments that “in spite of the fact that it was one of the few texts that we know was read in public each year (especially during the years of the Jewish Babylonian Exile), [*Enuma Elish*] hasn’t received an incredible amount of scholarly attention since... the early 1900s... When it has been examined, almost all of the scholarly focus is on Marduk, with its temple imagery being treated only secondarily” (J. Rennaker, February 24 2012).

Eaton finds it notable that “the story does not contain any death and resurrection of Marduk, nor a union with his consort” (J. H. Eaton, *Kingship*, p. 91). However, this does not mean that these ideas were not widespread in Old Babylonian culture. Regarding the notion of life after death in Mesopotamia, Lapinkivi writes:

[T]he widespread scholarly notion that belief in a resurrection did not exist in Mesopotamia but that all dead human souls stayed eternally in the Netherworld is contradicted by the Mesopotamian texts themselves: for instance, the kings Sulgi and Isbi-Era ascended to heaven after death; Dumuzi died only temporarily and, according to one tradition, ascended to the highest heaven to be its gatekeeper. Ascent to heaven is the central theme in the Etana and Adapa myths. Utnapistim, the sage of the *Gilgamesh Epic*, was made divine and granted eternal life after the Flood. In the poem *Ludlul bel nemeqi* (“I will praise the lord of wisdom [i.e., Marduk]”) from the Kassite period (ca. 1595-1155 bc), the righteous sufferer pairs descent to the Netherworld with ascent to heaven, implying that both ideas were familiar to him (II 46-47): “In prosperity they speak of going up to heaven, under adversity they complain of going down to the Netherworld.” Later in the text (IV 33-36), the sufferer claims that only Marduk (the divine king) and Zarpanitu (= Ishtar of Babylon) can *restore the dead to life* or grant life. In short, the evidence indicates that the Mesopotamians believed humans had souls that were separate from the body because they were able to leave the body in dreams or ecstatic experiences. The soul survived after death and continued its existence in the Netherworld or in heaven.

In this context, it should be kept in mind that, while the human soul, according to the Hebrew Bible—as in Mesopotamia—generally ended up in the Netherworld, a different fate was reserved for select individuals such as Enoch and Elijah... According to Josephus’ (ca. 38-101 ce) *Discourse to the Greeks concerning Hades*:

The souls of all men are confined [in the Netherworld] until a proper season, which God has determined, when he will make a resurrection of all men from the dead, ... raising again those very bodies, ... giving justly to those who have done well an everlasting fruition, but allotting to the lovers of wicked works eternal punishment [cf. John 5:28-29; Alma 40:11-26].

On various forms of sacred marriage in Mesopotamia, see B. Pongratz-Leisten, *Sacred Marriage*; P. Lapinkivi, *Sumerian*.

[28] Providing evidence for artificial palm trees at Mari is a “stone column base... cut in imitation of palm scales,” suggesting that “columns resembling palm-tree trunks would have been quite at home here,” and the fact that the left side of the doorway into the Dagan temple seems to have been decorated with palm trunks (Harvey Weiss, cited in M. Giovino, *Assyrian Sacred Tree*, p. 187).

[29] J.-C. Margueron, *La Peinture: Rythme*, p. 106. Cf. B. Muller, *Aspects*, p. 138; J.-C. Margueron, *Mari Métropole*, p. 511 figure 499. Margueron qualifies this conclusion, stating that the tree was “almost in the center of the courtyard” (J.-C. Margueron, *Mari*, p. 892).

[30] S. Dalley, *Mesopotamian Gardens*, p. 2.

[31] Moses 3:9; cf. Revelation 22:1-2; Ezekiel 47:1, where the source of these waters is respectively identified as the “throne of God” and the temple. See J. M. Bradshaw, *God’s*

Image 1, pp. 167-168; J. M. Bradshaw, *Moses Temple Themes*, pp. 69-89 for more on this motif.

[32] T. Stordalen, *Echoes*, p. 82; cf. B. N. Porter, *Date Palms*, p. 134.

[33] J. B. Pritchard, *ANET*, 197-219, p. 40.

[34] B. L. Visotzky, *Conversation*. According to Dalley, the “tree was so important in ancient Mesopotamia that it was personified as a god, Nin-Gishzida, ‘trusty tree,’ and had the power of human speech” (S. Dalley, *Mesopotamian Gardens*, p. 2). Indeed, one of the most popular pieces of Old Babylonian literature was the debate between the tamarisk and the date palm, which king planted in his courtyard after a heavenly council had granted the first kingship to men at the beginning (W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom*, pp. 151-164). The shade of the tamarisk is the setting for a king’s banquet, and at Mari we are, of course, not surprised to find evidence that “the king and his entourage often ate their meals in the garden” (S. Dalley, *Mesopotamian Gardens*, p. 2; see depiction of such an event in M. Giovino, *Assyrian Sacred Tree*, figure 29).

Such traditions continued into later times. Notes Visotzky (B. L. Visotzky, *Conversation*, p. 212; cf. H. W. Nibley, *Message* (2005), p. 288):

For a period of close to five hundred years, stories from Semitic religious communities preserved (in Palestinian Aramaic, *koine* Greek, and rabbinic Hebrew) snatches of the conversation of palm trees. The palms speak in dreams to one another and in broad daylight to those who would transgress against them. What seems to bind the dialogues together is that in every case, the ultimate hearer is a towering religious figure.

An example of the theme of warning is illustrated in the *Genesis Apocryphon*, a Jewish text from Qumran where we find Abram dreaming of a cedar and a date palm, representing himself and his wife Sarai. It is only through the pleadings of the palm tree that the cedar is spared from the axes of the woodcutters (F. G. Martinez, *Genesis Apocryphon*, 19:14-17, p. 232). A similar theme is found in the later biography of Mani, where Elchasai the Baptist climbs a date palm and is apparently warned that he should not cut it down for wood (R. Cameron *et al.*, *CMC*, pp. 11, 13.). The theme persists centuries later in the Persian *Shahnama* epic (A. Ferdowsi, *Shahnama* (1905-1925), pp. 517-519), where a talking tree rebukes Alexander the Great “for his lust of conquest and prophesies his death in a distant land” (E. Edson *et al.*, *Cosmos*, p. 55, caption to Figure 29).

On the other hand, the function of the trees as a source of wisdom is shown in the *Pistis Sophia*, which reports that God spoke “mysteries” to Enoch “out of the Tree of Gnosis [Knowledge] and out of the Tree of Life in the paradise of Adam” (C. Schmidt, *Pistis*, 2:99, p. 495; G. R. S. Mead, *Pistis*, 2:246, p. 205).

[35] See, e.g., E. A. S. Butterworth, *Tree*, p. 74, see also pp. 75, 78. Butterworth discusses this idea in the context of Genesis 3:6-7, 21:19; Numbers 24:3-4; 1 Samuel 14:25-29; and 2 Kings 6:17-20.

- [36] See the conclusions of Albenda, as cited in M. Giovino, *Assyrian Sacred Tree*, pp. 172-173.
- [37] Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, p. 63, citing a study by Moortgat.
- [38] Durand, cited in N. Marinatos, *Minoan Harem*, p. 43. Marinatos sees it as no coincidence that the women's apartments at Mari were not far from the Throne Room suite, where the sacrificial banquet would have taken place (*ibid.*, p. 44).
- [39] Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, pp. 11, 43; cf. Barrelet's "*arbres fictifs*" (M.-T. Barrelet, *Peinture*, pp. 12, 27; cf. Parrot "*arbre stylisé*" (A. Parrot, *Palais*, *Peintures murales*, p. 59). Giovino refutes arguments by scholars who frequently conflate this second type of sacred tree with the date palm. Among other evidence, she includes several examples where, as in the Mari Panel, both kinds of trees appear together (see, e.g., M. Giovino, *Assyrian Sacred Tree*, pp. 113-128 and figures 58-60).
- [40] Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, p. 18; cf. M.-T. Barrelet, *Peinture*, pp. 26-27; M. Giovino, *Assyrian Sacred Tree*, pp. 195-196. See also T. D. Alexander, *From Eden*, p. 22 n. 20.
- [41] Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, p. 18; cf. M.-T. Barrelet, *Peinture*, pp. 26-27; M. Giovino, *Assyrian Sacred Tree*, pp. 195-196.
- [42] H. W. Nibley, *Lehi* 1988, p. 362.
- [43] As evidence for one of the gateposts, al-Khalesi cites a drawing in a study by Parrot that includes a tiny rectangular chink (approximately 12 cm. wide and 25 cm. long) in the pavement at a distance of 4.80 m. from the northern wall of the room (the wall between Rooms 64 and 65). A gatepost at a similar distance from the opposite wall would have defined an opening of about 2 m. that was centered in the room. Al-Khalesi also observes that pieces of wooden beams lying on the floor that Parrot identified as part of the roofing beams of the room could have also been part of the partition structure (Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, p. 57).
- [44] *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- [45] J. Monson, *New 'Ain Dara Temple*.
- [46] See [*Essay #58*](#)
- [47] Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, p. 67. Barrelet—citing texts associated with Gudea, a ruler of the city of southern city of Lagash, ca. 2144-2124 bce—conjectures that the three composite animals symbolize the three major areas of the ritual complex where the investiture took place (M.-T. Barrelet, *Peinture*, p. 24).
- [48] See Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, pp. 58-60 for arguments in favor of the identification of this goddess with Ishtar. Note, among other conventions, the lion under her foot. By way of contrast, the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* shows that "the cat who split the *ished-tree* and released the god also beheads the god's mortal enemy, the *Apophis* serpent, beneath the same *ished-tree*," its paw resting heavily on the head of the serpent in accompanying illustrations (H. W. Nibley, *Message* (2005), pp. 311-312). For related motifs in Jewish and Christian sources, see J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image* 1, pp. 266-267.
- [49] J. R. Porter, *Guide*, p. 28.
- [50] See S. D. Ricks, *Oaths*, pp. 49-50; P. Y. Hoskisson, *Nīšum Oath*.

[51] Y. M. al-Khalesi, *Palms*, p. 58. Wyatt discusses these items as divine arms that relate the king's military action to the mythic combat of the gods (N. Wyatt, *Arms*, p. 159): "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" (ibid., p. 160 n. 28). Based on fragmentary textual evidence, Wyatt conjectures three elements in the ritual (ibid., pp. 159-160):

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., primeval battle between the god and the forces of chaos]. 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 Israelite and Judahite rites is now given a pedigree going back a millennium. This is thus the formal inauguration of [the king's] reign...

Differing from Wyatt in the interpretation of the "rod and ring," Slanski concludes, from both linguistic and archaeological evidence, that the "ring" in the hand of Ishtar could well be an ancient chalk line (K. E. Slanski, *Rod and Ring*, pp. 47-48), symbolizing the just rulership of the king. As emblems that symbolically conjoin the acts of measurement and temple foundation-laying with the processes of cosmic creation, the Mesopotamian rod and ring can be profitably compared to temple surveying instruments in the biblical book of Ezekiel (see, e.g., D. I. Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, pp. 512, 515) as well as to the analogous figures of the square and circle (or compass) (H. W. Nibley, *Circle*).

Note that the battle axe that hangs down from Ishtar's left hand in the mural would have been a more fitting symbol of war. Since there is no explicit link between the Mari Investiture Panel and the text on which Wyatt bases his interpretation, Ronan J. Head and I have tentatively concluded 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 Wyatt's text alludes, where the god would stretch out his battle-axe to the king in preparation for war. A biblical parallel to the dichotomy between building and waging 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 warrior. For this reason, Solomon his son, a "man of rest," was eventually given the commission to build the earthly House of God (1 Chronicles 22:8-9).

[52] J. H. Walton, *Ancient*, p. 129.

[53] Summarizing the LDS attitude toward ancient and modern revelation of religious truths, Truman G. Madsen wrote (E. Benz, *Imago Dei* (1978), pp. xvi, xvii):

To say that the gospel of Jesus Christ in its fulness is restored is to say that something has been lost and regained — but it is not to say that everything has. The Mormon believes that after every outpouring of divine light there is a record of degeneration and loss, the signs of which he thinks he can see in every generation. But Mormons have resisted from the outset the sectarian impulse: the isolation of a text or principle and the insistence that they alone possess and practice it. Exultant at a new revelatory downpour, the Mormon sees the implication: unless the same truths, authorities, and powers can be found in prior times and places; unless there have been genuine prophets, apostles and holy men who were, for all their individual traits, in touch with divine outpourings; unless there have been saints of former as well as of latter days — unless these things are so, Mormonism is without foundation. In other words, Mormonism has no claim to be a viable religion in the present unless it has been a viable religion in the past. And this is not just a halfhearted concession that there has been sort of, or part of, or a shadow of the fulness of the Gospel. It is to say that some, at least, among the ancients had it all. It is to match the thesis that from the early (and supposedly crude) beginnings things have become better; just as often they have, instead, become worse. Spiritual anabolism and catabolism have been at work in the religious life from the beginning. ...

If the outcome of hard archaeological, historical, and comparative discoveries in the past century is an embarrassment to exclusivistic readings of religion, that, to the Mormon, is a kind of confirmation and vindication. His faith assures him not only that Jesus anticipated his great predecessors (who were really successors) but that hardly a teaching or a practice is utterly distinct or peculiar or original in his earthly ministry. Jesus was not a plagiarist, unless that is the proper name for one who repeats himself. He was the original author. The gospel of Jesus Christ came with Christ in the meridian of time only because the gospel of Jesus Christ came from Christ in prior dispensations. He did not teach merely a new twist on a syncretic- Mediterranean tradition. His earthly ministry enacted what had been planned and anticipated “from before the foundations of the world,” (e.g., John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20; Alma 22:13; D&C 130:20; Moses 5:57; Abraham 1:3) and from Adam down.