**Wisdom Between East and West:
Mesopotamia, Greece and Beyond**
edited by Francesco Sironi and Maurizio Viano

King, Sage, Scribe, and Priest: Seleucid Uruk and Jerusalem in Perspective

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Abstract The scribal role is fundamental in Antiquity and is often associated with royal power, to the point that one may speak of a mythology of the 'wise king'. One may think of Kings David and Solomon in the Hebrew Bible or the tradition begun with Šulgi in Mesopotamia. This mythology, which articulates both concepts of kingship and wisdom, seems to gain credence not so much at the peak of the Babylonian and Assyrian empires or at the time of David and Solomon reigns, but at a very late moment in the history of these cultures, when they lacked political independence, especially during the Hellenistic period.

Keywords Scribalism. Wisdom. Kingship. Hellenistic Jerusalem. Hellenistic Uruk.

1 Introduction

Scribes and scribalism have recently been the object of renewed studies.[1] The scribal role in the transmission of traditions and cultural heritages is fundamental in Antiquity. It is often associated

1 Moore 2021; Zhakevich 2020; Schniedewind 2019; Bloch 2018; Cooley 2018; Grabbe 2014; Davies, Römer 2013; Perdue 2008; van der Toorn 2007; Perdue, Gammie 1990.

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with royal power, to the point that one may speak of a mythology of the 'wise king', in the sense that the latter is not only a king of justice or a good shepherd but also a cultured, literate king, at times even 'one who writes'. One thinks in the Hebrew Bible of kings David and Solomon, but also, in Mesopotamia, of the tradition initiated by Šulgi (2094-2047 BCE) and later perfected under Aššurbanipal (668-630 BCE). This mythology, which articulates both concepts of kingship and wisdom, the latter embracing politic, divinatory, and scribal techniques, seems to gain credence not so much at the peak of the Babylonian and Assyrian empires or at the time of the reigns of David and Solomon, but at a very late development in the history of these cultures –[2] indeed, when these cultures lacked political independence, especially during the Hellenistic period.

The Hellenistic period may be characterized as a new oikumene, when political, cultural, and linguistic structures were Hellenized throughout the ancient Near East.[3] Alexander the Great's generals competed for the inheritance of his empire and finally, after several wars, three kingdoms emerged in 301: the most modest was Macedonia; it was conquered in 168 BCE by Rome, which would impose itself more and more in the eastern Mediterranean. The largest part of the empire, from Anatolia to Mesopotamia, went to Seleucos I, founder of the Seleucid dynasty. The whole of Cyrenaica, Egypt, and Syria Palestine became the kingdom of Ptolemy I Lagos, founder of the Lagid dynasty. After several wars, Palestine fell permanently into the Seleucid orbit around 200 BCE, conquered by Antiochos III. While the Lagid kingdom experienced stability for most of the third century and dominated the eastern Mediterranean basin, the Seleucids were plagued by many difficulties combined. Wars were fueled against the Lagids, including the "Syrian wars" (during the years 275-271, 260-253, 246-241, 219-217, 202-200, and 170-168). Their territory, being immense, slowly fragmented and dissolved. From this period different sources and archives have been excavated and studied. Well known is the history of Seleucid Uruk, in addition to that of Jerusalem.[4] Though these cities lay far away from each other, the way local elites responded to the political, cultural, and linguistic changes, when placed in perspective, show very interesting and connected evolutions. Our attention will be focused on this mythology of the wise king in the Hellenistic period, and two main sources will be of

2 This idea regarding the reception of the figure of king Nabonidus was thoroughly developed by Beaulieu 2007, 137-66.

3 Martinez-Sève 2017, 36-46; 2011, 89-106.

4 Ambos 2020; Honigman et al. 2021; Stevens 2016, 74; Clancier, Monerie 2014, 181-237; Clancier 2011; 2007, 21-74; Robson 2007, 440-61; Linssen 2004; Pearce, Doty 2000, 331-41.

interest: the Uruk List of Kings and Sages, and the Solomonic Wisdom collection in the Bible. It is not argued here that these sites or documents influenced each other; rather it is proposed that the Hellenistic oikumene brought along local elites' responses that can be fruitfully compared, particularly concerning ancestral culture, understood in terms of divine kingship and wisdom.

2 Kings, Sages, Scribes, and Priests in Mesopotamia

1.1 A General View over Time

As Mattila recalled, the wisdom of kings is of divine origin, and royal mythology developed in the light of the figures of Adapa or *apkallū*.[5] Among different examples cited,[6] the propaganda around the royal figure of Aššurbanipal is famous:

> Palace of Aššurbanipal, king of the world, king of Assyria, whom Nabû and Tašmetu endowed with great wisdom, and who with a sharp eye acquired the gems of literature. While none of the kings who preceded me had learned that craft, with the wisdom of Nabû I wrote on tablets all extant cuneiform writings, checked, and collated them, and established them in my palace for my reference and reading.[7]

The example of Aššurbanipal may look exceptional. However, royal power and wisdom were closely related, and power was even justified by wisdom. It can be said that there was an "agreement" between power, in the person of the king, and knowledge of the world, held by the scribal, priestly, and divinatory elites: the king, informed by his close elite, acted in accordance with the will of the gods – that is, the 'divine will was dictated to the king by his elite'. The wisdom of the king thus responded to the order of the cosmos, a divinely revealed

5 Mattila 2019, 67-8. See already Pongratz-Leisten 1999, 293-307. On divine sages, see Fechner 2022.

6 King Hammurapi refers in his law code to "wisdom (*igigallim*) that Ea decreed for me" (Codex Hammurapi 47.26-7). The wisdom granted by the gods is a recurrent theme also in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions (e.g. Tiglath-pileser III. RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 47 r.17'). In a letter praising Aššurbanipal's rhetoric, the king's speech is equaled to that of the *apkallu* (SAA 10 30, r.3-9; the sender's name is missing but the letter was most probably sent by the chief scribe). In his letter to Aššurbanipal, the chief haruspex Marduk-šumu-usur calls the king a sage and an offspring of Adapa and goes in his praise as far as to say that the king has surpassed the wisdom of the *apsû* (SAA 10 174). Mattila 2019, 67-8.

7 Hunger 1968, 319.

order, clearly stated by the divinatory arts and techniques.[8] The royal ideal could thus be summarized as perfect obedience to the revealed divine word. The wise king was good, as opposed to the "bad king", the one who did not listen to the will of the gods.[9] Many texts emphasize this royal ideal, whether literary or chronographic, and even criticize the royal memory when the cosmic agreement is thought to have been undermined. We may think, in the latter case, of Narâm-Sîn, Nabonidus (and the Deuteronomist ideology in the Hebrew Bible). Often judgment is based on cultic agreement.[10] The king's wisdom is therefore an integral part of the mediating conception of kingship and requires a very elaborate organization and cohesion of skills:

> The central and pervasive role of divination as underpinning the world view, religion, and politics, generated a diversified class of intellectuals responsible for explaining and controlling the nature of things and protecting the king from portentous omens. These are the agents behind the complex grid of cultural strategies and key metaphors which shape the image of the king; they organized and set the guidelines norms, and rules for correct royal behavior as the king as agent of the gods was responsible for maintaining the social order and thus contributing to securing the cosmic order.[11]

This royal elite has been the subject of extensive studies. As demonstrated by Lenzi, kings and wise scholars were closely associated with the "secret" of divine revelation. These were known as *apkallū* (antediluvian sages) and *ummânū* (elite or royal experts), of which the Uruk List of Kings and Sages dated to the Seleucid period is a famous witness.[12]

8 "The Mesopotamia worldview did not separate the natural world from the normative framework. Natural phenomena were indicative of divine decisions made in relation to human life and to be decoded by divinatory experts, as revealed by the scholars' references to the celestial phenomena as 'heavenly writing' (*šiṭir šamê*) or 'writing of the firmament' (*šiṭir burūmê*) and categorisation of the liver as 'tablet of the gods' (*ṭuppi ša ilī*). To be able to read the divine will written in the intestines of an animal or in the constellations was the prerogative of these scholars and – in the royal ideological discourse – of the king. Nature was conceived as a carrier of divine writing establishing the cosmic truth (*kittu*), the decoding of which put the diviners at center stage" (Pongratz-Leisten 2014, 527; cf. 2013; 1999).

9 Pongratz-Leisten 2014, 534.

10 Pongratz-Leisten 2014, 538. Concerning Nabonidus, see Beaulieu 2007, 159-63. The matter is there more complex, as it is about legitimizing religious authority rather than dogma.

11 Pongratz-Leisten 2014, 543-4.

12 Allusions to the seven sages are known in the myth of Erra (1.162), in the incantations of the series *Maqlû* ("7 sages from Eridu", *Maqlû* 2.124.36; 5.110.37; 7.49.38; 6-2),

2.1 A Particular Witness in the Seleucid Rule: The Uruk List of Kings and Sages

The so-called Uruk List of Kings and Sages is preserved in a single-column tablet unearthed, among other ritual texts from lamentation priests, in Uruk's Bit Reš temple. It is dated to the year 147, during the reign of Antiochos IV (175-164 BCE), a few years before the Seleucids would lose the eastern part of their empire when the Parthian empire, under Mithridates, would conquer Mesopotamia in 141 BCE.

The tablet witnesses to the ancestral mythology of the wise king. As analyzed by Helle, the Uruk List of Kings and Sages is composed of four sections separated by horizontal rulings, each section corresponding to a major epoch of history: the mythical time before the Flood when the sages were semi-divine creatures; the historical time, after the Flood, when the sages were fully human. This second section makes clear a transition from the original cult of the sky-god Anu to that of the goddess Ištar.[13] The scholars listed along with the kings are all known from other sources as 'authors' of famous cuneiform texts. Finally the colophon points to Anu-belšunu claiming descent from Sîn-lēqi-unnenni, the author of the *Epic of Gilgameš* and the first scholar listed in the second section. The structure of the List implies cuneiform scholars were the proper successors to the semi-divine sages that had founded Mesopotamian culture. But why chose precisely those scholars known as 'authors'? This is what Helle wants to understand, more precisely the mechanism by which cultural history is 'reduced' to a list of names. Undoubtedly for the author, names are here indicative of a canon – that is, they evoke more than appears: they evoke their works as "authors".[14] The Uruk List of Kings and Sages thus provides a synoptic overview of the entire culture: "With its brevity, metonymy, and symmetry, the text sketched out a miniature version of a far broader tradition".[15] This is understood consequently as a major change due to the Hellenistic context:

and in *Gilgameš* ("7 advisors" founders of Uruk, 1.i.19, 11.305), as well as in some fragments of the library of Aššurbanipal (*AMT* 105.1 / K.4023.21-5). See Lenzi 2008a; Borger 1974; van Dijk 1962, 44; Reiner 1961.

13 Helle 2018, 222; Ambos 2020.

14 "The list of kings and sages includes a selection of the most famous authors of Babylonian literature. This is, in fact, surprising: given the otherwise predominant anonymity of Babylonian literature, any interest in the authorship of literary texts – let alone the placement of authors alongside mighty kings and mythical sages – represented a fundamental break with the tradition of the time" (Helle 2018, 220). See also Helle 2019; Foster 1991; Lambert 1962; 1957.

15 Helle 2018, 230.

> To be clear, I am not arguing that the canonization of Babylonian culture was an effect of Greek influence as such, or a product of Hellenistic cross-pollination. I view it as a specifically Babylonian development, but one that took place as a reaction to cultural contact and subsequent changes in the scholars' social standing. It was a counter-current brought about by new hegemonies and threats of the Hellenistic period, which forced these scholars to stake out a claim for cultural superiority in order to preserve their status. In order to do so, they had to define, delimit, and exalt the scholarly tradition they wanted to protect, and on which their social standing relied. In short, they had to produce a canon.[16]

Though it may be difficult to understand the Uruk List of Kings and Sages in a political perspective, it remains a fact nonetheless that whereas the List opens with Oannes and closes with king Antiochus IV, within the colophon the order king/sage is reversed: it is no longer the king who comes first but the scholar/author – Anu-belšunu along with his genealogy – and only second to him comes the Hellenistic king.

This genealogy has been referred to and analyzed by Lenzi as the "mythology of the scribal succession".[17] It could also be called the 'mythology of the wise king', as it matches so perfectly this conception of divine mediation through kings and sages – the cosmic agreement we have analyzed. While there can be no doubt about the ancient anchoring of such a mythology, Lenzi wonders about the late character of the List: why is this ideology of kings and sages, *ummânū* and *apkallū*, best known in the Seleucid period?[18] The careful examination of the way in which the elite formulated their genealogy reveals a cultic and political aspect of their ambitions. Thus, Nungalpirigal, the first postdiluvian *apkallu*, makes a bronze lyre to be placed in front of the deity Anu, clearly pointing to the renewal of Anu's cult in Uruk. By placing this act of devotion in first place, after the Flood, the List intends to give the cult of Anu a renewed primacy. Moreover, according to the author, the List seems to provide an etiology of the relationship between Nungalpirigal, the temple of Eana, and the temple of Anu, thus preventing any criticism regarding the idea that the house of Anu could replace that of Eana.[19] What is really the point of this 'mythology' if not to accredit scholars with ancestral, divine, and royal authority and in particular Anu-belšunu, who copied and signed the document? Therefore, the lamentation priest of the Seleucid era is endowed with a venerable history

16 Helle 2018, 231.

17 Lenzi 2008a; 2008b, 107.

18 Lenzi 2008a, 139.

19 Lenzi 2008a, 161.

that justifies his authority. He participates, moreover, in this mythology of the wise king, as he becomes the recipient and mediator of revealed treasures. This shows indeed how political the Uruk List of Kings and Sages was: in associating wisdom and skills with royal power in a myth of origin, in the end it endowed Anu-belšunu with royal and divine authority. We might say that at this point the myth of the 'wise king' becomes the myth of the 'royal sage' – that is, the sage, here the scribe and lamentation priest, sharing divine mediation and even taking authority over the Seleucid king, though at the same time showing him due respect.

3 Hebrew Bible and (Divine) Mediation

3.1 The Problem with Kingship in the Hebrew Bible

Many texts from the Hebrew Bible are marked by a criticism of royal power, which is but the result of the loss of the monarchy in ancient Israel and Judah. We often know this phenomenon by the so-called Deuteronomistic ideology running from the book of Deuteronomy to the end of the books of Kings.[20] This theology accounts for an evolution in the idea of kingship, evolution that the Exile accelerated as monarchy was brought to a final term, at least in political terms, apart from the Hasmonean kingship (104-63 BCE). If criticism also exists in Mesopotamian texts, it is more extensive in the library represented by the Hebrew Bible, which texts were gradually edited after the Exile, even if we can identify among them older collections (narrative, legal, prophetic, or sapiential) that fully correspond to the ideal kingship in the ancient Near East. Many biblical texts are thus also anchored in the royal, mediating, and cosmic mythology, which we know in Mesopotamia. The scribes are present in the royal entourage with their more or less definite functions.[21] As for the Deuteronomistic ideology, many texts suggest that the divine royal mediation was questioned and thus had to be renewed or, more precisely, transferred, as the royal figure in particular was no longer pivotal: wisdom

20 Knoppers 2021; Dozeman et al. 2011.

21 The scribe *sofer* is an administrator or secretary; he is counted alongside the treasurer (lit. weigher in Isa. 33:18), the inspector (lit. the one who counts in Isa. 33:18), the archivist or chronicler (2 Kings 18:18,37; 19:2), the attendant or head of the king's household (2 Kings 18:18,37), the priest (2 Kings 19:2), and the prophet (2 Kings 19:2). He is an important royal official, closely involved in political affairs (2 Kings 22:3,8-12 cf. 2 Chron. 34:15; Est. 3:12; 8:9). He may also be a military officer (2 Kings 25:19, cf. Jer. 52:25; 2 Chron. 26:11). Though different names and functions are known, the political organization of the kingdoms of the North and the South and the hierarchy within the monarchical organization are not known.

had to be found elsewhere! One example is certainly the figure of Moses: though never called a king, he is nonetheless endowed with the skill of writing down the Law and mediating it to the people. There is no doubt that the writing of the Law is part of an ancient paradigm of royal authority.[22] It thus participates in this royal mythology that has been developed above except that there is no longer a king but someone who is defined as a prophet.[23] The writing motif has at least two functions: to establish the fame of Moses, which merges with the glory of God, since the act of writing belongs to both of them;[24] and to establish the status of revelation – words can no longer change, and writing certifies it – even though, ironically, at least two legislative codes correct each other, with differences often highlighted. After Moses, other prophets would gain the authority of divine mediation. *Neviim*, after the Law/Torah, indeed became the second part of the official Hebrew library or Hebrew canon. Though we could demonstrate how prophets share in the mythology of the wise king, let us bear in mind our temporal and Hellenistic framework and provide an example of royal and priestly prophecy in Jerusalem during the Seleucid period, before delving into the Davidic and Solomonic paradigm.

3.2 Royal and Priestly Prophecy: The Case of Ben Sira in Hellenistic Times

Let us briefly recall the political situation in Jerusalem during the Seleucid period. The Jewish community of Judea was subject to the Ptolemies from 305 BCE and throughout the third century, then passed into the hands of the Seleucids after 198 BCE. Judea became increasingly important at an international scale between the fourth and the first centuries BCE owing to its strategic position. During the second century, a religious and popular opposition developed, led by the Maccabees (169-152). The war of the Maccabees against the Seleucids called into question the Greek way of life, spread by the political power and adopted by many. The Hasmonean state (from the real name of the family) became a priestly monarchy in 104, thus closely associated

22 Anthonioz 2015a; 2015b.

23 On the literary level, Moses' mediation includes all the legal codes of the Torah/Pentateuch that are either inserted into the revelation of Sinai (Ex. 19-Num. 10) or presented as a recapitulation of it (Deut. 12:26). See Römer 2012, 88.

24 According to the Torah/Pentateuch, the word of God is divinely and orally revealed (Ex. 19). It is therefore first heard, "voice", before being put down in writing, whether by the hand of Moses (Ex. 24:4; 34:28) or by the hand of God himself (Ex. 24:12; 31:18; 34:1; Deut. 4:13; 5:22; 9:10) – with a confusion that underlines all the more Mosaic authority. In this prophetic revelation, Moses is the recipient or, better, the mediator. See Anthonioz 2019.

with the temple, but paradoxically continued to be Hellenized. It is in this situation that the Bible as library continued to develop.

The book of Sira is often said to be the first to have been placed under the authority of its 'author', thus testifying to Greek influence.[25] The prologue written by Ben Sira's grandson attributes the text to a sage of the Law, the Prophets, and other ancient books, named Jesus (Yeshua). The grandson indicates that in the 38th year of the reign of Ptolemy VIII Evergetes II (co-regent in 170-164, then regent in 145-117), he went to Egypt to study (132 BCE). It can be concluded that Ben Sira wrote his book earlier between 200 and 174 (at least before the pogrom at the initiative of Antiochos IV Epiphanes). Coming from the aristocracy and the elite,[26] Ben Sira may have traveled and learned from his travels.[27] His profile is rather Sadducean: he avoids any reference to oral tradition, to the resurrection of the dead, or to the apocalyptic theme. Wisdom and Torah are practically equivalent, and the temple of Jerusalem is central.[28] Wisdom comes out of the temple and is the source of teaching. Moses is not only the mediator of the Law; he is also the patron of the sages.[29] This description of Moses only gives more honor and importance to the office and function of the sage who interprets the Law. According to Murphy:

> Ben Sira invited his readers who needed instruction to come to his school or teaching (bet midrash Sir 51:23) and singled out the profession of the scribe (sopher) as excelling all others (38:24-39:11: the scribe's profession increases wisdom). By this time, ca 180 BCE, the activity of the sage was concentrated particularly on the study of the Law. (Sir 39:1)[30]

Sira 51:23-5 indicates that Ben Sira taught in a school. His support for the institution of the temple and the priestly hierarchy shows that his teaching is related to them. He could therefore have worked under the Zadokite auspices. Should we consider a Torah school belonging to the temple in Jerusalem, or a synagogue? Sira 45:17.26 actually makes clear the connection between priesthood and teaching.[31] Certainly, Ben Sira appears as one of the first known scribes to interpret Scripture. Interestingly, he defines the sage and understands his own role as Deuteronomistic: fearful, loving, serving Yhwh and keeping

25 Beentjes 2008; Corley 2008; Wright 2008; Goshen-Gottstein 2002.

26 Sira 23:14; 39:4.

27 Sira 34:11.

28 Zsengellér 2008.

29 Sira 44:23-45:6.

30 Murphy 1990, 3.

31 See Sira 39:1-5. Boccaccini 2008; Doran 2002.

his commandments.[32] Whatever his teaching position, Ben Sira is a prophetic and priestly scribe and, as such, he shares in the 'mythology of the wise king' as he teaches the Law and the Prophets. The Praise of the Ancestors (44:1-50:24) is worth mentioning. As a self-contained unit of its own, it forms the last supplement for the book's final edition. As the title indicates, it is a praise or encomium to the glory of heroes for their virtuous life. This long section indeed covers the Hebrew Bible with a canonical view, referring to and distinguishing between Torah and *Neviim*/Prophets. Unsurprisingly, priestly covenant is primordial, and the divine word prophetically revealed.[33] As a consequence, the royal transmission of wisdom has become priestly. Would the sage have become a prophet? Indeed, in Sira 39:6-8 and 24:30-4, the sage is divinely inspired at a time when prophets are discredited.[34] However, and for our purpose, Ben Sira is no king – rather, a priest and prophet: his authority is clearly understood as prophetic.[35] It is in this same period of time, however, that old royal figures seem to gain momentum, in the task of transmitting very ancient lore. This is the case in particular with David and Solomon.

4 David and Solomon: Kings Mythologized as Authors

In the wake of the prophetic literature known as *Neviim*, particularly interesting for our purpose are the book of Psalms under the authority of David and the sapiential texts under the authority of Solomon, premises of collections that would later become part of the Hebrew library or canon: the *Ketuvim*. Let us look more closely at this process of literary collection.

4.1 David and the Lyre

David is famous in the Hebrew Bible for playing the lyre and appeasing king Saul when the latter was seized by an evil spirit.[36] Contrarily to the lyre in the Uruk List of Kings and Sages, no obvious connection can be made between these narrative episodes and the cult: it is about smoothing the troubled spirit of king Saul. However, associated with these musical episodes, David as king becomes famous as a Psalmic authority. Already in the book of Samuel, one can read:

32 Deut 6:1-2; 10:12-13; 30:16. Gammie 1990. See also Himmelfarb 2000.

33 Goshen-Gottstein 2002. See also Beentjes 2008; Corley 2008; Wright 2008.

34 Stone 1987.

35 Sira 24:33.

36 1 Sam. 16:23.

> And these are David's last words: Oracle of David, the son of Jesse and oracle of man (who has been) high placed, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweetest of the psalm(ist)s of Israel.[37]

Recent study of this Psalmic corpus demonstrates how Davidic authority, though anchored in the past, developed and strengthened over time, especially with the Greek translation of the Septuagint.[38] Not only does the composition of the Hebrew Psalter show the importance of the Davidic collections,[39] but the Greek Psalter reinforces the Davidic attribution to single psalms.[40] In the same way, the prestige of the Davidic figure is reflected in different manuscripts from the Judean desert. The Halachic Letter (4Q397; 4Q398) testifies, without naming the Psalms, to the importance of the figure of David: "We have written to you that you may discern (the meaning) of the book of Moses [and the] books of the prophets and Davi[d…]".[41] In the same way, the prestige of the Davidic figure is reflected in the often cited Psalmic composition, 11QPs^{a} (11Q5). This composition incorporates among various literary texts a praise of David, sage and author of many psalms. David accordingly composed 4050 psalms and songs 'prophetically', yet he is never called a 'prophet'. David is here the perfect 'wise king', in the sense that he is both king and scholar, scribe and author. The Davidic authority is invoked again in 2 Macc. 2:13 and confirms the point that the king's authority was invoked to legitimize literary collections:

> In these writings and in the memoirs of Nehemiah, it was said, in addition to these same facts, that Nehemiah, founding a library, gathered there the books concerning kings and prophets, those of David and letters of kings about offerings.

It is remarkable that obviously after the Law/Torah and the Prophets/*Neviim*, it is a collection under royal authority that opens that which will later be called Writings/*Ketuvim*. And this royal figure is himself wise. Studying the Davidic material, one may only point out the shared royal mythology. The reasons for the creation of the Davidic corpus seem to be clearly related to the mythology of the wise king. Let us now look at the Solomonic corpus to gain more insight.

37 ישראל זמרות 2 Sam. 23:1.

38 Willgren Davage 2020.

39 Ps. 3-41; 51-72; 86; 101; 103; 138-44.

40 33; 43; 71; 91-9; 104 and 137.

41 Berthelot 2013; Puech 2012; Berthelot 2006.

4.2 Solomon: Great King of the East or Greek Philosopher?

Indeed, this conception of the wise king developed further with the son of David, Solomon, the builder of the Jerusalem temple. In the biblical tradition that makes him a wise king, Solomon is iconic. Though at times also criticized,[42] he equals or even surpasses the wisdom of the greatest:

> [29]God gave Solomon very great wisdom, discernment, and breadth of understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore, [30]so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the East, and all the wisdom of Egypt. [31]He was wiser than anyone else, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, children of Mahol; his fame spread throughout all the surrounding nations. [32]He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered a thousand and five. [33]He would speak of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish. [34]People came from all the nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon; they came from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.[43]

In this Hebrew biblical tradition, Solomon is also the authority under whom different works and collections are placed: the book of Proverbs, Qoheleth, and the Song of Songs,[44] to which may be added in the Greek biblical tradition the Book of Wisdom or *Sophia Salomonis*, Psalms, and Odes. Solomonic authority therefore goes beyond the scope of the third part of the Hebrew Bible or *Ketuvim* and opens to the Greek transmission and development of the Bible. Obviously, at the start of this development is a collection under royal authority.[45] This collection was born with the royal figure of David and unfolded through the figure of Solomon.

It is necessary to insist on this point of emergence of a Solomonic literature, at the crossroads of the book of Psalms, a Wisdom collection, and that of the Writings/*Ketuvim*. Why choose this royal authority in the process of authorizing books? What does it mean to place a collection under royal authority when monarchy is no more? To this question I have proposed elsewhere to consider the possible

42 de Pury 2009, 32-3.

43 NRS 1 Kings 4:29-34 / TM 1 Kings 5:9-13.

44 The Song opens with the title "The most beautiful song of Solomon or Song of Songs"; Qoheleth with "Words of (the) Qoheleth, son of David, king in Jerusalem"; and the book of Proverbs with "Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel" (Prov. 1:1).

45 There is clearly an editorial project of great coherence: the mediation after the Torah of Moses and after the Prophetic Library/*Neviim* continues through kings David and Solomon, royal figures having become mythical and thus a guarantee of divine authority.

Greek and philosophical influence.[46] If the ancient Near East anchorage of this royal mythology is not in doubt, the late development of the Solomon collection during the Hellenistic period and most probably during the Seleucid rule also deserves attention. The fact that out of five Wisdom books (Prov; Job; Qoh; Sir; Wis) two were transmitted in Greek speaks for itself. Would this Greek influence be at work in the very elaboration of a Solomonic 'canon' and more specifically a sapiential one? This notion can be defended, as the Solomon figure corresponds – at least according to one biblical tradition – to Plato's ideal of the wise king. In the *Republic*, the ideal king is a "lover of wisdom" – that is, precisely a philosopher.[47] This concept of the philosopher-king could be the source of the astonishing biblical development that places the royal figure of Solomon at the head of a collection. The royal mediating figure then becomes an authoritative figure for the present: if Solomon is no more, he has nevertheless 'left' a set of writings that do not legislate but invite reflection on the community, its modes of governance, the freedom of citizens. This may or may not be related to the episode of the Hasmonean monarchy, which settled in the second half of the second century BCE. If it is related, it is indeed critical and polemical – and one should add self-critical, as Hasmonean kingship was Hellenized.[48] The authority that asserts itself is not only a mythical mediating authority, rooted in a venerable past, but truly a civic authority and undoubtedly polemical in view of the political facts – in the sense that an art of living is taught in and for the city in accordance with ancestral, not to say mythological, traditions. There is therefore no doubt that this literature is developing within the framework of a society that has opened to Greek culture and its philosophical heritage.

But another possibility, not exclusive of the preceding one, may be interesting to understand the choice and development of the figure of king Solomon in the late Hellenistic time of the composition of the Bible. As the Uruk List of Kings and Sages has shown, it is possible that amid political changes, a royal collection endowed scribes and priests with the authority of divine and royal mediation in the milieu of the Jerusalem temple. However, contrary to the Uruk List of Kings and Sages, scribes responsible for this Solomonic sapiential collection are not known by name. They did not sign their manuscripts, but by this very collection did they not gain prestige and power?

The authority of the royal figures, David and Solomon, is thus a particularly interesting case of the ancient royal mythology that

46 Anthonioz 2020, 7-19.

47 Pl. *Resp.* 5.473c. Baccou 1966, 229.

48 Criticism of the Hasmonean kings is evident in a number of writings, including the Odes of Solomon.

places the figure of the king at the heart of a mediation of divine origin, so that the writings placed under such authority have the same divine origin. If this mythology is very old, it is quite original and strengthened in the Hellenistic period, it seems, as a process of authorization. But is it only a royal mythology? Is it not necessary, as in Seleucid Uruk, to detect in this royal strategy the affirmation of a scribal power that is endowed with a royal mediation and is thus anchored in past divine revelation? The analysis conducted here points to the interrelated scribal and priestly milieu that gained authority in the Seleucid period. Whether they left their names or not on their works, one means to gain such authority was by endowing their own endeavor and works with the ancient mythology of the wise king, mediator of all divine revelation.

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