A Royal Garden: The Ideology of Eden

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ABSTRACT: Before “Paradise” became concerned with explaining the present “fallen” condition of humanity, due to a primal sin, which later also became eschatologised into the locus of a human post-mortem felicitous destiny, it already symbolised royal power and the king’s role in the ritual management of the state. And before the Garden of Eden came to be understood as “in the east,” or in some other place remote from the present real world, it was understood to be located in Jerusalem, as the setting of the royal cult. Adam the gardener was originally a type of the king. This paper examines the evidence for these elements in the biblical Eden story (Genesis 2-3) and in Mesopotamian and Egyptian iconography and ideology, and attempts to set the final form of the tradition within its historical context, the destruction of the state in 597/586 BCE and its non-monarchical succeeding period under Persian rule.

Key Words Adam, Eden, Exile, Jerusalem, Kingship, Royal Ideology, Sacred Tree, Zion

Introduction

It is probably fair to say that the narrative in Genesis 2-3 is one of the foundation documents of western culture. It has certainly determined the whole self-understanding of humanity in Jewish and Christian thought, with an appreciable influence on Muslim anthropology. It has been universally interpreted throughout most of its history as treating the creation of man, followed by his “fall”—however that is understood—and giving rise to our present universal “fallen” human nature. Paradise has been “lost,” to be “restored” in the future, at the last trump.

But many elements within the story, both narrative and incidental features, suggest that the original author(s) may have understood it very differently, and as referring to their own time, and to conditions only recently imposed upon them, only a much later Jewish, Christian and particularly Augustinian hermeneutic giving rise to the final lapsarian interpretation. If we examine these clues, we shall be enabled to appreciate the specifically royal ideological ties which bind the story to an entire nexus of beliefs, and to
iconographic, architectural and ritual forms. These in turn have a bearing on why paradise subsequently became an eschatological theme, and also explain many of the features of its exposition in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Within Jewish and early Christian thought the Enochic and similar apocalyptic literature moved in an eschatological direction, with significant input from the prevailing Persian and Greek cultures, as argued by J. Bremmer. This material, with celestial and remote conceptions of Paradise, remained in tension with the centre-of-the-world imagery to which our present discussion will ultimately lead us.

*The text of Genesis 2.4b-3.24*

Let us begin with a brief study of the text, concentrating on those features which are particularly relevant to the issues under discussion. My translation runs as follows, arranged to indicate the quasi-poetic nature of the composition:

a) *The Creation of the Man and Woman*

2.4b On the day when the Lord of the gods (*yhw* †lōhîm) made earth and heaven,

5 before any plant of the steppe was on the earth,

or any herb of the steppe had sprouted

for the Lord of the gods had not yet caused it to rain upon the earth,

and there was no man to till the soil;

6 a mist (†d—or perhaps rather: a mountain?) was rising up from the underworld

and was watering the whole surface of the ground.

7 Then the Lord of the gods fashioned (wayyišer) the man (*hā′ādām*) from
dust† from the ground,

and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,

and the man became a living being.

8 And the Lord of the gods planted a garden in the beginning (*miqqedem*)

and he placed there the man whom he had fashioned.

9 Then the Lord of the gods caused to grow from the ground every tree

that is pleasant to the sight and good for eating,

and the tree of life in the middle of the garden,

and the tree of knowing all things."
A river came out of Eden to irrigate the garden, and from here it divided into four sources (rāšīm).

The name of the first is Pishon: this encircles the whole land of Havilah, where gold is found.

And the gold of this land is pure. Bdellium and carnelian are also found there.

And the name of the second is Gihon (gīḥōn): this encircles the whole land of Cush.

And the name of the third river is Tigris: this flows this side of Assyria.

And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

Then the Lord of the gods took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it (lē‘obdāḥ) and care for it (lēšomrāḥ).

Then the Lord of the gods commanded the man, “From every tree in the garden you may indeed eat. But from the tree of knowing all things you may not eat. For on the day that you eat it you will certainly die…”

And the Lord of the gods said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I shall make him a helper suitable for him.”

So the Lord of the gods fashioned from the ground all the living things of the country, and all the birds of heaven, and he brought (them) to the man to see what he should call them. And what the man called every living thing, that became its name.

Then the man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of heaven, and to every living thing of the country. But for the man (himself) he did not find a suitable helper.

Then the Lord of the gods caused a deep sleep to fall on the man. And he fell asleep. Then he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.

And the Lord of the gods turned the rib which he had taken from the man into a woman, and he brought her to the man.

Then the man said:

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4 Zevit, *What Really Happened*, pp. 140-50, has an interesting alternative to this, seeing šēla‘ as “penis” (!). But the expression ʼaḥat miṣṣal ʿālāw would appear to preclude this.
At last! 
Bone from my bone! 
Flesh from my flesh! 
This shall be called woman (‘îšâ), 
for from man (mē’îš) this was taken.”

So a man supports5 his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, 
and they are one flesh.

And the two of them were naked (‘ārummîm), the man and his wife, 
and they were not ashamed.

b) The “Fall” of the Man and Woman

Now the snake was wiser (‘ārûm) than all the living things of the 
country which the Lord of the gods had made, 
and he said to the woman, 
“Did God really say, 
‘You shall not eat from every tree (in) the garden?’”

And the woman said to the snake, 
“You will not die. 
For God knows that on the day that you eat from it 
your eyes will be opened 
and you will be gods (kēlōhîm), knowing all things.”

Then the woman saw that the tree was good for food, 
and that it was delightful to the eyes, 
and that the tree was to be desired to make (one) wise, 
and she took (one) of its fruit and ate it, 
and gave it as well to her husband who was with her, 
and he ate.

And both their eyes were opened, 
and they knew that they were naked, 
and they plucked fig-tree leaves 
and made themselves loin-cloths.

Then they heard the sound of the Lord of the gods strolling in the garden

Following the insight of Zevit, What Really Happened, pp. 156-57.
6. I interpret the idiom here as kaph veritatis, indicating identity rather than similarity. See B. K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 203. They defined the usage thus: “the logical outcome of comparison is correspondence or identity.” This is integral to the royal ideological slant of the narrative.
in the cool of the day,\(^7\)
and the man and the woman hid themselves from the presence of the
Lord of the gods
in the midst of the trees in the garden.
9 And the Lord of the gods called out to the Man, and said to him,
“Where are you?”
10 And he replied,
“I heard the sound (you were making) in the garden
and I was afraid because I am naked (‘êrôm).
So I hid.”
11 Then he said,
“Who told you that you were naked\(^8\)?
Have you eaten from the tree
from which I said that you must not?”
12 And the man replied,
“The woman whom you gave (me) to be with me,
she gave me from the tree, and I ate (from it).”
13 And the Lord of the gods said to the woman,
“What is this that you have done?”
And the woman said,
“The snake deceived me, so I ate (from it).”
14 Then the Lord of the gods said to the snake,
“What is this that you have done?
Cursed are you above every animal
and above every living thing of the country:
On your belly (‘al gêhônêkâ) you shall proceed.
And dust shall you eat all the days of your life.
15 And I shall establish enmity between you and the woman
and between your offspring and her offspring.
He shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”\(^9\)
16 To the woman he said:
“I shall make your childbearing pain very great.
In pain you shall bring forth children,

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7. Given the symbolic aspect of Eden discussed here, the source of this figure is perhaps to be understood as a cultic procession, with the image of the deity carried out of the cella, perhaps for evening sacrifices: N. Wyatt, Myths of Power. A Study of Royal Myth and Ideology in Ugaritic and Biblical Tradition (Ugaritisch-Biblische Literatur, 13; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996, p. 369.
8. Paronomasia: “naked” (‘êrôm, ‘ârûmmîm) and “wise” (‘ârîm). Wisdom is in part consciousness of one’s nakedness.
9. Is this a veiled allusion to the king’s role as re-enactor of the Chaoskampf in his battles? On the theme see N. Wyatt “There’s Such Divinity Doth Hedge a King”. Selected Essays of Nicolas Wyatt on Royal Ideology in Ugaritic and Old Testament Literature (SOTS Monograph Series; London: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 151-189.
And to Adam he said:

“Because you obeyed the voice of your wife
and ate from the tree which I commanded you,
‘You may not eat from it!’

Cursed is the ground because of you.
In distress you shall work it all the days of your life
but thorn and thistle it will grow for you.
So you shall eat the vegetation of the steppe.

By the sweat of your brow you shall eat food,
until you return to the ground, for from it you were taken.
Dust indeed you are, and to dust you will return.”

Then the Lord of the gods made clothes of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

Then the Lord of the gods said, “Look! The man has become one of us, knowing everything

10. Or “Man” as name: there is no article. Similarly at 3.21. In 2.24, in contrast, the article is lacking because the term is indefinite.
11. MT “eat” (tēʾōḵālēnnāh). Perhaps to be corrected to “work” (taʾābdēnnāh)? Thus Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia apparatus, p. 5 (consonantal text to read ḫnlk)
14. The plural usage implies the divine council as the place where these words are uttered. On the concept see H. W. Robinson “The council of Yahweh,” JThS 45 (1944), pp. 151-157; F. M. Cross, “The council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah,” JNES 12 (1953), pp. 274-277; N. Wyatt, Myths of Power, pp. 338-352. Notice also the kaph
So now, lest he stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat (it) and live for ever...”

So the Lord of the gods expelled him from the Garden of Eden, (to prevent him) from tilling the ground from which he had been taken.

So he drove the man out. And he set in front of the Garden of Eden cherubs and the flame of the whirling sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Discussion of the text

a) The rivers

Let us begin our discussion with the matter of the rivers. The rivers of Eden echo the widespread appearance of four streams diverging from a common source in ancient Near Eastern glyptic art. In both cases, it is one stream which becomes many, here apparently outside the garden (Genesis 2.10). We shall return below to the identity of these streams, and their significance for the garden’s location.

veritatis (see n. 6). This background is the basis for my translation “the Lord of the gods” (yhw ʾĕlōhîm).

15. The sentence remains unfinished.
16. This unusual translation will be justified in the discussion below.
17. On these see N. Wyatt, “Grasping the Griffin: identifying and characterizing the griffin in West Semitic tradition,” Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections 1 (2008), pp. 29-39. Griffins and cherubs were both winged quadrupeds, the former with falconiform, later aquiline, heads, the latter with human heads. The biblical seraphim were probably griffins rather than snakes as commonly supposed. See further discussion below.
b) A mountain tradition?

But the first problem to treat is the ultimate source of these rivers, the one primary stream. Is it, as most translators have it, a distillation from a mysterious “mist” (ʾēd\(^{19}\)) which wells up from the underworld? This would have no obvious parallel in the iconographic tradition, however realistic it may be. Cyrus Gordon’s suggestion that the term should be seen as relating to a Cretan (Minoan) term for or name of a mountain, as in Mount Ida, the traditional birthplace of Zeus, is intriguing. This would allow harmonisation with the Eden of Ezekiel 28, which is situated on a mountain. Gordon noted that Ida, the high mountain in central Crete, was associated in antiquity with artistic workmanship. The name “Ida” may be the clue to the source of major elements in the Hebrew creation account, which are not of Egyptian or Mesopotamian origin. Gen 2:6 states that “ʾēd rises out of the earth and waters all the surface of the ground.” The traditional rendering of “ʾid as “mist” and the pan-Babylonian identification with Sumerian id “river” are unsatisfactory. Rivers do not rise; they descend. What rises from the earth to water the ground is a mountain carrying its streams to the surrounding countryside. Accordingly, it is worth considering that “ʾēd means Ida, pointing to East Mediterranean elements in the Biblical Creation. There is one objection, however, that requires clarification; namely, that the Greek form of Ida begins with long i-, whereas “ʾēd reflects short i-.\(^{20}\)

Gordon also cited hdm id in the Ugaritic text KTU 1.4 i 34, though this text is preferably to be corrected to hdm *il, and hdm here is in any case probably Hurrian (atmi, admi), not Minoan.\(^{21}\) But this caveat does not affect Gordon’s overall argument. Further support for such a harmonisation can be found in the vision of a future paradise in Isaiah 11:6-8 (see v. 9).\(^{22}\) And even if Gordon’s particular argument be rejected, it remains a useful heuristic tool in pointing us in the right direction: the welling up of the primal stream still implies an upland, that is mountain, scenario. For what it is worth, it should

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be observed that on the Mari fresco, to be discussed below, the foreground at the bottom shows a scale-pattern, which is the conventional way of representing mountains in glyptic art.

The mountain would, as in the description here, not only arise out of the netherworld, but implicitly afford an entrance to it, a feature of cosmic centres such as this garden represents, if my argument is cogent. This centrality is borne out by the reference to the four rivers, logically (schematically) radiating out from the centre. This approach would also obviate the necessity felt by some scholars to see in Genesis 2-3 and Ezekiel 28 two different conceptions of Eden (one with, and one without, a mountain). It makes more sense to see two allusions to the same common symbolic tradition, and indeed in this instance to see one (Genesis) as literally dependent on the other (Ezekiel), as we shall see. Margaret Barker’s observations may also allow us to see these gardens harmonised in Isaiah 14, which, while not explicitly Edenic, surely represents the same mythical nexus, though it has now diverged, and deals more specifically with a mortuary context. In Isaiah 14, the disobedient royal figure is the king of Babylon, or some other great power, but the narrative is a West Semitic myth. Barker argued that:

Ezekiel’s oracles [in chapter 28] are clearly in the same setting [as that of Isaiah 14]. The first deals with a fallen god, and the second apparently with the first man in Eden. If we read the two together, in the light of the fallen figure in Isaiah, we see that the two figures are one, and that the problems in reading this text come from our using categories and distinctions quite alien to Ezekiel. The fallen god and the figure expelled from Eden were one and the same. Thus Ezekiel forms a link between Isaiah 14 and Genesis 2-3. Ezekiel’s Eden is a strange magical place: I believe that we glimpse here the mythology of the old temple … 23

The kind of intertextuality Barker recognised here is exactly the level of sensitive comprehension that is essential for the appreciation of the mythical world of biblical literature. Furthermore, Bernard Gosse, followed by Terje Stordalen, also noted that the oracle of Ezekiel 28,12b-15, directed in its present form against the ruler of Tyre, would originally have been addressed to the high priest (for which we should perhaps read rather the king) in Jerusalem. 24 The question is even worth raising—though any answer must remain speculative—as to whether the melek sôr in 28,11 (and the corresponding nêgid sôr in 28,1) really does designate the ruler of Tyre, and not rather the “ruler of the rock”, that is, the sacred mountain in Jerusalem.

This is all the more plausible in a world of divine kingship, since “Rock” (ṣôr) was a title of Yahweh himself.\(^\text{25}\) We may further note that Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Genesis 2,15 involves an allusion to a mountain; though it is not explicitly identified with the garden, this may be implicit:

And the Lord God took Adam from the mountain of the service, the place from where he had been created, and make him dwell in the Garden of Eden, so as to be serving in the Torah and observing its commandments.\(^\text{26}\)

*The location of Eden at the centre of the world*

Much ink has also been spilt on the vexed problem of the location of Eden, but the idea of four rivers radiating out from a single source (the reverse of what happens in nature, except at deltas) suggests the idea of a centre and its relationship to the cardinal points. Equally artificial is the location of El’s dwelling in Ugaritic tradition, which is also a cosmic centre, as described in Ugaritic texts KTU 1.2 iii 4, 1.3 v 5-7, 1.4 iv 21-22, 1.5 vi [-3 to -1, to be restored], 1.6 i 33-34:

> Then he set his face indeed towards El at the source of the rivers, amidst the springs of the two deeps …\(^\text{27}\)

Though I previously took these rivers to be plural (four in number, corresponding to those of Genesis 2),\(^\text{28}\) I think now that they may well be rather two, as riverine aspects of the two deeps of the second colon cited.\(^\text{29}\)

One lay above the firmament, and one below the earth or netherworld, as in Hebrew cosmology. A remarkable citation of this in the Qur’an (18.61-62) indicates the longevity of the cosmology behind the formula.\(^\text{30}\)

*The identity of the rivers*

As to the identity of the rivers, two, the Tigris and the Euphrates, are immediately recognisable. The other two have been regarded as problematic. The Gihon was identified with the Nile by the LXX of Jeremiah 2,18, followed by Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.1.3\(^\text{31}\), who also in the same passage

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identified the Pishon with the Ganges. But Jeremiah himself had used the term šihôr for the Nile, and the explicit identification with the Gihon can thus only be dated with certainty from the time of the Greek translation, ca 300 BC. On the contrary, it was the Pishon that was interpreted by Manfred Görg as the Nile, from the Egyptian expression p3 šny, “the encompassing one,” the river being conceptualised as an extension of the cosmic ocean surrounding the world. This is perhaps more compelling than Neiman’s proposal to link the Pishon to Hebrew peten, “snake,” a metaphor for the serpentine ocean, though the term discerned by del Olmo, who proposed that bâšân (Ugaritic bṭn, usually cited as cognate with peten) should be recognised as having serpentine and maritime associations in various geographical contexts, followed up by myself, seems to be another reasonable etymological possibility. So I have suggested in a discussion of oceanic language that in Deuteronomy 33,22 we should understand the text as follows:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Dān gūr ēryē} & \quad \text{Dan, the whelp of a sea-monster} \\
\text{yēzannēg mīn-habbāšēn} & \quad \text{springs forth from the Serpent (sc. the Ocean).}
\end{align*}
\]

This meaning is concordant with Dan’s original maritime location in the Shephelah (cf. Judges 5,17) before its migration to northern Galilee. A link with the sea peoples is suggested for Dan and Asher by Judges 5,17 and for Zebulun by Genesis 49,13. The Egyptian and Ugaritic etymological proposals for Pishon are both attractive.

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36. Wyatt, The Mythic Mind, p. 204. See reasons ad loc. for taking other Hebrew leonine terms as synonymous with labbu (lit. “lion”) with the sense of “(sea) monster.”
Regarding the Gihon of Genesis 2,13, Neiman also proposed an interesting link between the Hebrew gîḥôn, which he associated with the snake’s belly (gâḥôn—gêhonêkâ) in Genesis 3,14 and with Greek Ὁκεανὸς. The latter, in encircling the Greek world, is like the Gihon, which “encircles the whole land of Cush”. Whether or not this be regarded as a viable etymology, it is at least a likely paronomasia, and the Gihon also had a local reference, as the stream supplying Jerusalem with water, and also used in royal rituals, as in 1 Kings 1,33-34. 38-40 (Solomon’s coronation), and presumably in Psalm 110,7:

Minnâhâl badderek yištêh From the stream from the throne he
câl-kën yârîm rô’s drinks, and thus he raises up heads

I have taken derek in this latter passage to represent the idea of “dominion”, translated here metonymically as “throne”, to be compared with Ugaritic drkt, as perhaps in Job 12,24 and Psalm 107,40. The Gihon in Jerusalem is perhaps also alluded to in Psalm 36,9-10:

virwêyun middešen bétekâirw They are filled with the abundance of
wênahâl *êdenêkâ tašqêm your house; and the stream of your Eden gives them
ti’immêkâ mëqôr hayyîm to drink.
*bê’êrekâ nir’ê-ôr For with you is the fountain of life:
in your well a light is seen

reading the Masoretic text plural ʿâdânêkâ (“in your delights”) as singular *êdenêkâ, and Masoretic bê’ôrêkâ (“in your well”), in parallel with mëqôr, “fountain,” of the preceding colon. “They” of the first colon here are “the gods and the sons of man” of v. 8. The stream is to be associated with the throne, as will be demonstrated below. If the proposed singular reading *êdenêkâ be accepted, we have a clear, implicit identification of Eden with Jerusalem, since “your house” of the preceding colon can only be the Jerusalem temple.

The implications of the identity of the rivers for locating Eden

What are we to make of these riverine data in terms of actually locating the garden? It hardly provides compelling evidence for a Mesopotamian location, as for those who took the name Eden (ʿêden) to represent the Sumerian EDIN

= Akkadian *edinu*, the plain between the Tigris and the Euphrates.\(^{41}\) Such a location ignores the claims of the Pishon and the Gihon for inclusion within the writer’s immediate purview. To reject the original identification of the paradisal and the Jerusalem Gihon in view of this evidence, on the strength of its later identification with the Nile (Jeremiah LXX *et al.*) would seem to me to be perverse. What we have here are two different explanations for the data, which on any analysis remain incompatible. (On Neiman’s analysis, mentioned above, the two are even reconciled.) To my mind the local significance of the Gihon for Jerusalem is to be taken seriously, in view of the evidence we have adduced.\(^{42}\)

Even if the etymology of the cosmic Gihon be unknown, and unconnected with the Jerusalem stream (the latter means “Gusher”\(^{43}\)), which is quite improbable, it is hard to believe that the similarity—or even identity—of the two names was not clearly in the author’s mind. That is, he was intentionally evoking Jerusalem, even if not wishing to name it.\(^{44}\) This would also preclude any location of Eden further east, as far afield as Armenia, as proposed by a number of scholars,\(^{45}\) or even

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42. It should be clear that the claims of the Gihon in Jerusalem to be linked with that of the Eden narrative cannot be squared with claims for identification with the Nile.


44. Noort’s confident rejection of the equation, “Gan-Eden,” p. 28 n. 34, is unsupported by any justification, and seems cavalier. Regarding his identification of the Gihon with the Nile, see discussion above. Görg’s explanation of the Pishon as the Nile (see at n. 30) at least has philological plausibility.

India, as suggested on various mediaeval maps. Furthermore, it would certainly remove Eden from the “never-never land” category some other scholars seem determined to apply to it. The four rivers represent the three major systems of the ancient Near East and the world-ocean, but crucially link them with the sacred waters of the city of Jerusalem itself. The point of allusions to the Tigris and the Euphrates in a Jerusalem-centred text is surely to extend the sacrality of the latter, the place from which the Jews had been deported, to the place of their exile (a feature which obviously has a bearing on the dating of the text). We see a similar pattern of the implicit inclusion of the place of exile within the sacred territory in the stories of Jacob’s dream and of Moses’s vision of the burning bush.

Miqqedem in Genesis 2,8

The one feature within the text which might support an oriental location is the use of miqqedem in 2,8. This Hebrew expression, commonly translated in this passage as “in the east”, is however to be understood here as a temporal rather than a spatial formula, meaning “in the beginning,” so that it has no bearing on the garden’s location, which is to be deduced on other grounds.

We have in the description of the rivers a somewhat convoluted account of a classic cosmic model: the river emerges from its source at the true centre, and flows out via various branches to an ocean which surrounds a circular world. This is certainly the understanding of ancient cartography, mutatis


46. Among various examples, we may note the Vercelli world map (ca 1191-1218), where Paradise is located in India (Scafi, Mapping Paradise, figs 6.2a and b: pp. 132-133), while on Higden’s Polychronicon (ca 1350, figs. 6.3a and b, pl. 4: pp. 134-135) it lies northeast of India, in both cases on the edge of the cosmic ocean. The Hereford Mappa Mundi (ca 1300) is similar. Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci were even tempted to locate it in the New World! See M. Bockmuehl, “Locating Paradise,” p. 192 in Bockmuehl and Stroumsa, Paradise in Antiquity.


mutandis—which lasted until the Middle Ages! and also corresponds to
the notion of cosmic rule, in which kings reign “from sea to sea.”

The reasons outside the text that have appeared to reinforce the spatial
sense of miqqedem here are, firstly, the misapplication of the term edinu
noted above, and secondly the supposition that since Abraham came “from
Ur of the Chaldees” (Genesis 11,31), events prior to his migration to
Palestine must be located in the east, since even a spatial sense for miqqedem
in Genesis 3,24 would locate the garden west of the place of expulsion. The
patrarchal tradition, though couched in primordial terms, actually concerns
the exile of the Jews following the destruction of Jerusalem in 587-86 BCE,
so that Abraham’s departure on his long journey west is not an account of a
primordial (Bronze Age) journey, but rather a cipher for the exiles’ return,
following the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus in 539. Genesis 2-3 serves as a
narrative of an original, archetypal exile, prefiguring the historical one.

Other biblical support for the location of Eden in Jerusalem

A reason from within the text for supporting the line I take— that Eden is in
Jerusalem—is the fact which we noted above, that there is only one river
actually within the garden. Given the post-exilic dating now increasingly
recognised for the story, this is best understood as a deliberate allusion to
Ezekiel 47,1-12, which in the prophetic vision of the new temple, describes
a stream flowing out from beneath the stone pavement on the eastern side of
the temple building, and then flowing south out of the temenos, and on down
to the Arabah. This passage is echoed in Revelation 22,1, modelled on
Ezekiel, referring to:

the river of the water of life, shining like crystal, coming out from the throne
of God and of the lamb …

and 1 Enoch 14,19:

and from beneath the throne were issuing streams of flaming fire

47. See W. Horowitz, Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography (Mesopotamian Civilizations, 8; Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998; A. Scafi, Mapping Paradise.
51. See the selection of texts in Wyatt, Space and Time, pp. 81-88, 115-20, and cf. H.
P. L’Orange, Studies in the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship (Oslo: H. Aschehoug, 1953).
52. See D. J. Clines, The Meaning of the Pentateuch (JSOTS, 10: Sheffield: JSOT
Press, 1978), passim.
53. See also Barker, The Gate of Heaven, pp. 57-103; Stordalen, “Heaven on earth,”
36-47, 66; H. Shanks, Jerusalem’s Temple Mount from Solomon to the Golden Dome
(London: Publisher, 2007), pp. 22-23; A. Wood, Of Wings and Wheels. A Synthetic
Study of the Biblical Cherubim (BZAW, 385; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), p. 49;
Bockmuehl, “Locating Paradise.”
though this text has pluralised the river. Here are the justifications for recognising a throne in Psalm 110.7. As to the origin of this spring, it can only seriously be understood as emerging from the ēben šētiyyâ, the “stone of foundation” which formed the bedrock floor of the temple cella. This is widely identified with the rock under the Dome of the Rock, with its conspicuous crevices, into which water was poured during the New Year rites, to prime the source of all life.\(^{54}\) Furthermore, it is implicitly identical with the Gihon, the city’s only supply of water. Ecclesiasticus (Ben Sira) 24, 25-27, which evidently shares the cosmological presuppositions of Genesis 2, states that Wisdom brims like the Pishon, the Tigris, the Euphrates, the Jordan (!), the Nile (!) and the Gihon,\(^ {55}\) homing in on the local river, before extending out again in vv. 28-34 to the universal sea. The almost chiastic form of this passage, “in from the cosmic rivers and out again to the cosmic ocean”, highlights the geographical and cosmic centrality of the Gihon and implicitly of Eden. The passages above appear to locate the throne of God (and thus of the king\(^ {56}\)) over the ēben šētiyyâ, from which the stream flows.

In earlier engagements with this problem, I have identified Eden with the “garden” mentioned within the topography of Jerusalem, the so-called “King’s Garden” (gan hammelek)\(^ {57}\). Some other scholars have also endorsed this view.\(^ {58}\) The precise location of this garden is unknown, but it was probably situated adjacent to the royal palace and the temple, which were evidently part of one overall construction. It was associated with royal burials, and it is perhaps on this account—if my identification is correct—that post-biblical tradition located the burial places of various ancient patriarchs here. Adam is buried in Eden according to Jubilees 4, 29, and in the earthly paradise, while his soul ascends to the heavenly paradise above (third heaven), in the Life of Adam and Eve (Apocalypse version), with Abel in 37, 1-6; 40, 6 and with Eve in 43, 1.\(^ {59}\) The following passages are also worth noting, Testament of Dan 5, 12:

the saints shall rest in Eden,
and in the new Jerusalem shall the righteous rejoice
and I Enoch 61,12:

All the elect who dwell in the garden of life (shall bless him).  

This aspect of the garden belongs primarily to a discussion on the relation of this garden to a post-mortem Paradise, but it is reasonable to think that this eschatological element derives from the older ideological sense that I am attempting to reconstruct here.

Another candidate for the garden might be part of the so-called “House of the Forest of the cedars of Lebanon,” an important annexe to the temple which housed an armoury, presumably used for ritual purposes since the shields were all made of gold (1 Kings 10,16-17. 21 = 2 Chronicles 9,15-16. 20).  

Barker identified Eden with the temple itself, as did H. J. van Dijk.  

But perhaps we err in trying to make modern logical distinctions of this kind, where the ancients happily superimposed such levels upon one another. Perhaps the garden motif was intended to embrace the various aspects of the sacred landscape. On one level of understanding, the garden is a synecdoche for the whole kingdom, the land flowing with milk and honey.  

A remarkable confirmation of this is the vision of the restored Jerusalem in Isaiah 51.3, where Zion and Eden are equated:

Indeed Yahweh has had compassion on Zion
he has had compassion on all her ruins,
and will turn her wilderness into Eden
and her wasteland into the garden of Yahweh.  

It is evident that in the time of Deutero-Isaiah—the exilic period—Eden did have the larger reference. Here Zion itself is a synecdoche. The later eschatological Paradise of Christian doctrine was identified with the “City of


61. On this see Wyatt, “There’s Such Divinity,” p. 183.


64. See N. Lohfink, Das Siegeslied am Schilfmeer (Frankfurt: J. Knecht, 1965), pp. 91-92, cited by Mettinger, The Eden Narrative, p. 50; see also the discussion in Stordalen, Echoes of Eden, pp. 307-316.

65. Wyatt, “There’s Such Divinity,” p. 67. See also Stordalen Echoes of Eden, pp. 321-324 (though I am not convinced by his view that vv. 1-3 should be seen as a unity).
God,” the “New Jerusalem,” of Augustine’s account, based on Revelation 21-22, and the subsequent iconographic tradition. And the whole was filled with arboreal imagery. For such imagery (as architectural form) in the temple, see 1 Kings 6,29,32,35; 7,15-22; the tabernacle (some of its features are transparently elements of the [second] temple); the menorah (an almond tree): Exodus 25,31-40; the palace: 1 Kings 7,6-7; and the House of the Forest: 1 Kings 7,2.66 More relevant to our present discussion, and in pursuit of possible royal ideological aspects of this garden, is the conclusion to the Genesis account. This states (3,24) that

> the Lord of the gods] set in front of the garden of Eden cherubs and the flame of the whirling sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.

The cherubs were sphinxes, and are frequently found in royal contexts, as armrests on thrones,67 attendants at or browsers on trees, and so on. Hebrew distinguished šērāpîm, “griffins,” from kērubîm, “sphinxes,” though the Greek κῦω, cognate with κῆρυ, meant “griffin,” evidently associating them at least unconsciously.68 The primary function of both forms appears to have been as guardians of boundaries, being, if my analysis is correct, derived from the forms of the Ka of the king in Egyptian ideology. So their presence here should not surprise the reader. What does perhaps cause surprise is that the man, thrown out of the garden, suddenly becomes aware of these creatures from the wrong side of the fence, as it were. But the sphinxes were probably already there, guaranteeing his safety within the garden. This is supported by the cherub apparently provided as a guardian to the king69 (of Tyre) in the garden in Ezekiel 28,14.70 The sword is another matter, being unmentioned elsewhere. But since a sword is an essential attribute of the king as warrior, we may see something of this symbolic dimension in it. It is consonant with the idea of the House of the Forest as armoury. Or it may have something of a cultic overtone, since ḫereb can have the sense of a ritual harpe (a cognate term).71

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67. Wood, Of Wings and Wheels, pp. 9-31, argued cogently against the idea that the biblical cherubim formed Yahweh’s throne.
68. Wyatt, “Grasping the Griffin.” Hebrew šērāp is best explained as deriving from Egyptian srfw, “griffin.” Both griffins and sphinxes appear, together with kuribu figures, on the Mari painting discussed below.
70. See the Ahiram sarcophagus from Byblos.
71. See Wyatt, Religious Texts, p. 70 n. 2. My layout of the text above, making the allusion a bicolon, would accommodate any of these interpretations. If it is to be read
The problem of the number of trees in Eden

The Garden of Eden boasted two trees, one of knowing all things and one of life. Since they actually fused in later tradition, we may wonder whether their duality was not always problematic, or whether they really constituted one tree under two modes, varying according to the literary function of different parts of the narrative. We are led to this suspicion by the precise phraseology of various parts of the text. Thus Genesis 2:9 states:

Then the Lord of the gods caused to grow from the ground every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for eating, and the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowing all things.

The second tree here appears almost as an afterthought—in an appositional phrase—and certainly cannot logically, according to a straightforward prose understanding of this verse, which is usually presupposed, also be located as a separate tree at the centre of the garden, where we would expect to find it. To complicate matters, in 3:2-3, this statement appears to be contradicted:

Then the woman replied to the snake, “The fruit of the trees in the garden we may eat, but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden God has said, ‘you may not eat from it, nor touch it, in case you die.’”

This passage can only refer to the tree of knowing all things.

A contrary argument was advanced by Andreas Michel and Trygve Mettinger, to the effect that each tree relates to the “middle of the garden” by “split coordination.” But this looks like an elegant case of special pleading. A better solution was suggested to me by Anthony J. Frendo, that we should recognise here an example of waw explicativum, in which the phrase introduced by the particle further expounds the meaning of what precedes. Thus the latter part of 2:9 is to be understood, following his suggestion, as

the tree of life in the middle of the garden, that is, the tree of knowing all things.

as poetry, we should not be too demanding of a formal logic. But verse frequently performs exactly as Anthony J. Frendo suggested (see n. 74): successive cola draw out implications or hints addressed in the first colon of a strophe.

72. Interestingly, Philo placed the first tree (of knowing all things) outside the garden, because to have it inside would contradict the command to eat from every tree (2:16): *Legum Allegoriae* I, XXXI (97): C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo* (Peabody MA: Hendrikson, 1993), p. 36. But the logic of this is to require Adam and Eve to leave the garden in order to sin, which is not the understanding of Genesis.


74. A. J. Frendo, personal communication. For the phenomenon see Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, pp. 648-49 (§39.2.1b) and D. W. Baker, Further
That is, the second colon is an explanation of the first: the same tree performs two functions. The recognition that we have verse here, not prose, reinforces this view: the second colon draws out the implications of the first. Thus the same tree is to be understood.

So just as Jean Margueron found the one tree in the courtyard to correspond to two in the painting in the Mari palace (on which see further below), we may think similarly that the two trees in Eden are really one. Mettinger, surveying the extensive discussion over the number of trees, and the problem of priority if there is only one, pointed out that the characters in the story, Adam and Eve, know of only one tree.75 They learn of the second—if they ever do—only on finding that they have forfeited access to it, rather like their discovery of sphinxes (cherubs). Furthermore, one of the ideological features we shall note below contradicts the idea that eating from this tree intrinsically constitutes a crime. But the real issue to appreciate is the rich symbolism of the tree or trees, however understood. The final explanation offered here emphasises the symbolic richness.

The significance of the tree(s) in Eden

Now what is this symbolism? While we may suppose that general themes of fertility, security and utility were always present, at times specifically royal significance was attached to trees. This is clear from its role in Assyrian palace rites, in which the king or priests acting on his behalf, or even divine figures, appear to pollinate the fruit of the tree.76 M. Giovino showed, however, that this common explanation of the “Assyrian sacred tree” is not strictly accurate, since the stylised device is probably an artificial construction rather than an actual tree, and the supposed act of pollination is more likely one of unction,77 though perhaps the question of the precise examples of the Waw Explicativum, VT 30 (1980), pp. 129-136. Cf. Zevit, What Really Happened, pp. 93-94: he rejected this explanation, wanting to retain two trees. 75. Mettinger, The Eden Narrative, pp. 5-11.
nature of the ritual must remain open. This suggests that the “tree” somehow represented kingship in the Assyrian context, the sacral power of which was reinforced by the anointing process. And Babylonian and biblical usage both confirm that this symbolism was international.

Although it is probably beyond proof in the absence of clear evidence, it is tempting to see the asherah (‘ăšērâ) of the Judahite cult as a similar artificial construction, a surrogate tree, representing the goddess Asherah (a royal, solar goddess, who probably served also as the patroness of the city). As the mythic mother of the king, Asherah would certainly have been recognised by her devotees and the symbolism of the cult as the mother of the nation—incarnate in the queen mother, the Gebirah (gēbîrâ)—and so again intimately linked with royal ideology—a close counterpart to Eve (ḥāvā) as the “mother of all living things” (‘ēm kol ḥāy) in the Eden narrative. Following this intuition, it is tempting to go further and see in Eve’s handing to Adam of the fruit which grants knowledge, a metaphor for the role of Wisdom, who in Proverbs 1-9 appears to be the goddess Asherah restored in post-exilic literature to favour as an abstraction. Thus the patron goddess gives to her son, the king, the gifts of life and wisdom.

The theme of the garden is very widespread as a symbol of cosmic order, and as we shall see, above all of royal management of the cosmos. The


78. A symbolic tradition graphically reflected in Ezekiel 31,8-9.

79. On the tree as symbolising the king in biblical thought see Wyatt, Space and Time, pp. 169-172 (Daniel 4,7-19, Numbers 17,1-8 [Hebrew 16-23], Zechariah 3,1-10; 4,1-14); Stavrakopoulou, “Tree-hogging”, pp. 44-48. See also the “shoot” metaphor used in such passages as Isaiah 4,2; 11,1; 14,19; 37,31; 53,2, Zechariah 6,12; Testament of Judah 24,4-6; Psalm 1,3; Hosea 14,9, and Lamentations 4,20 (the shadow is that of a tree), passages discussed by G. Widengren, The King and the Tree of Life in ancient Near Eastern Religion (King and Saviour, IV, Uppsala Universitets Årskrift 1951:4), pp. 49-58 (and passim), and Stavrakopoulou, “Tree-hogging.” In Psalm 1,3, the k in kēʾēs is surely kaph veritatis—see n. 1—and this is in origin a royal psalm, according to W.H. Brownlee “Psalms 1-2 as a coronation liturgy,” Biblica 52 (1971), pp. 321-336, an assessment summarily rejected by H.-J. Kraus, Psalms 1-59. A Commentary (Minneapolis MN: Augsburg), 1988, p. 114, but without adequate argumentation.


Avestan word *pairidēza*, borrowed into late Babylonian as *pardēsu*, into Hebrew as *pardēs*, and Greek as παράδεισος, 82 appears to have meant originally “rampart,” and hence a ramparted place, such as an enclosed royal garden. The central figure in the garden is therefore implicitly the king, as borne out by Ezekiel 28,12-19. The biblical evidence is by no means the earliest attested treatment of the theme, and can be shown to be heir to a long tradition stretching back over more than a millennium.

*The pottery metaphor (Genesis 2.7)*

The term used of the fashioning of the man, *yāṣar*, has the specific sense of manufacturing a pot. This metaphor occurs frequently in biblical thought with reference to the creation of people in general, in Isaiah 29,16; 30.14; 41.25; 64.7; Jeremiah 18,1-12; Lamentations 4,2, and of enemy kings in the coronation Psalm 2,9. 83 But there is reason to think that this is not merely a neutral, if graphic, constructional figure. It is always used collectively of the nation, and perhaps the psalm citation hints at its primary reference: it is a royal metaphor, a well-known motif in Egyptian royal ideological contexts. Thus a relief in the *mammisi* (“birth-house”) at Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el Bahri shows the ram-headed god of Elephantine, Khnum, fashioning the king (! Hatshepsut was a woman) and his Ka on the potter's wheel, with an accompanying descriptive text:

Utterance of Khnum the potter, Lord of Herur:
'I have formed thee of these limbs of Amun, Presider over Karnak.
I have come to thee* to fashion thee* better than all gods.
I have given to thee* all life and satisfaction,
all stability, all joy of heart with me;
I have given to thee* all health, all lands;
I have given to thee* all offerings, all food;
I have given to thee* to appear upon the throne of Horus like Ra, forever;
I have given thee* to be before the Kas of all the living,
while thou* shinest as King of Upper and Lower Egypt, of South and North,
according as thy* father who loves thee* has commanded.” 84

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As part of a cumulative argument, we may discern the same metaphor in Genesis 2,7. In case there is doubt about the specific nuance, we should consider Jeremiah 1,5, in which the prophet describes in Yahweh’s words his prophetic calling in the idiom of royal usage, also familiar from other Egyptian parallels:

Before I fashioned you (‘ešārēkā: יָשָׁר) in the belly, I knew you, and before you came forth from the womb, I consecrated you.

Subtending the fashioning motif, Jeremiah mixes two further metaphors: “consecration”—a ritual form—and knowledge—ultimately a sexual image, and used here of divine paternity—are effectively equated. We may compare this with the following, of Sesostris I:

I conquered as a lad, I was mighty in the egg … He appointed me lord of the Two Lands as a child, before the swaddling-clothes were loosed for me, he appointed me lord of mankind

and of Piankhi, both:

Whose mother recognized that he would rule in the egg …

and:

I said of you when you were still in your mother’s body, that you would be ruler of Egypt, for I already knew you in the seed, when you were still in the egg, that you would become Lord...

The dust metaphor (Genesis 3,19)

The making of the man explicitly out of dust is another royal metaphor, as discerned by Walter Brueggemann. “It is terminology used to speak of the elevation of a man to royal office … Behind the creation formula lies a royal formula of enthronement,” he observed. Its double edge, as the seemingly neutral medium in 2,7 (“from dust from the ground”)—which however already implies autochthony and therefore a primal claim to territory—but as part of the curse in 3,19 (“Dust indeed you are, and to dust you will return”)

89. Brueggemann, “Dust,” p. 2. He cited 1 Samuel 2,6-8a, Psalm 113,7 in support.
is an echo of the oracle of Yahweh delivered to Baasha by Jehu son of Hanani in 1 Kings 16,2-3:

I raised you up from the dust and I made you prince over my people Israel...
Now I shall sweep away Baasha and his dynasty after him, and I shall make your dynasty like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat.

And just as one king’s elevation from dust to kingship is achieved only at the expense of his royal opponents, so the partial future redemption of the man hinted at in the curse of the snake in 3,15 (a clearly messianic oracle) is counterpointed by the snake’s diet of dust in 3,14. The same imagery, Brueggemann noted, is found in Isaiah 47,1 and Jeremiah 49,22-23, where the redemption of Judah will be at the expense of Babylon, whose citizens will eat dust; and Yahweh’s agent Cyrus also makes his foes eat dust at Isaiah 41,2.

The king as gardener

The putting of the man in the garden (itself, as we have seen, a royal garden) is another royal ideological motif. He is placed in the garden to till it and care for it. Not only is this transparently a figure for the king’s general duty of care for his realm, but it alludes quite directly to his cultic duties too. He is to perform ‘obdâ. This refers to the cultivation of the garden, but also the cult in the garden, for he is Yahweh’s ʿebed, his “servant.” The title ʿebed yhwh, familiar to us from the servant songs of Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 42,1-9; 49,1-7; 50,4-11 and 52,13-53,12), means not simply “Yahweh’s servant,” but more specifically “Yahweh’s gardener,” where “gardener” is a royal title of ancient pedigree. Widengren devoted a monograph to this topic. He stated that the Sumerian nu-kiri₄, Akkadian nukarribu (sic: read nukaribbu, syll. LÚ.NU. GIŠ.SAR⁹¹), amounted to a royal title. Two examples of its apparently royal usage are in the Legend of Sargon:

Akki, the drawer of water, appointed me as his gardener.
While I was a gardener, Ishtar granted me her love⁹²

and Gilgamesh vi 64-67:

You loved Išullānu, your father’s gardener,
who regularly brought you a basket of dates,
daily making your temple gleam.
You looked at him covetously and went up to him...⁹³

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⁹⁰. Widengren, The King and the Tree of Life.
Aqqi, drawer of water, set (me) to his orchard work.
During my orchard work, Ishtar loved me.
This implicitly ritual usage can certainly be understood as a plausible nuance of the Hebrew use of the term. The Assyrian iconography of the king anointing the tree appears to have the same reference.

Now if the man was placed in the garden to tend it, what of his expulsion? The common view is that it was after this event that Adam went out to practise agriculture (Genesis 3,23). The Jewish Publication Society translation of this verse is representative:

So the Lord God banished him from the garden, to till the soil from which he was taken.

But this understanding ignores the reason for him being placed in the garden to begin with, that is, to till the soil (with its cultic and royal ideological implications), and also ignores the overtones of the dust motif, in which his royalty lay in part in the means of his creation, from dust. To give his dusty origin, on this understanding, as the reason for him tilling the soil once expelled from the garden also ignores the fact that on the pregnant sense of this as a metaphor for raising a man to the kingship, it could no longer be a serious motive for his later work. Like Baasha, this king has been swept away. The syntax of 3,23 allows a contrary understanding, however, which makes far better sense in the context:

So the Lord of the gods expelled him from the garden of Eden, (to prevent him) from tilling the ground from which he had been taken.

This is to take the infinitive construct la’āḇōd to have a privative rather than purposive sense. The verse is not about agriculture as the new lifestyle at all, it is on the contrary about the cessation of the cultivation—and implicitly the cult—within the garden. This interpretation is supported by the description of what is to follow the expulsion (Genesis 3,17-19):

Cursed is the ground because of you.
In distress you shall work it all the days of your life
but thorn and thistle it will grow for you.
So you shall eat the vegetation of the steppe.
By the sweat of your brow you shall eat food...

The “vegetation of the steppe” in this passage is not agricultural produce, since the steppe is uncultivated land, but the grubbings of the hunter-gatherer and the nomad or of the dispossessed. Or if agriculture is involved—which seems unlikely, given the royal ideological dimension—it is on marginal land, and to no effect, yielding “thorn and thistle,” the hall-marks of the steppe. This new uncultivated life is a powerful metaphor for deportation and exile, implying the enforced cessation of the temple cult. Nor is the “sweat of your

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brow” an allusion to agricultural work, but simply to unremitting toil for mere survival.

A curious confirmation of the royal view of Eden in the context of the cultivation motif, which also throws light on early Christian exegesis of the Eden narrative, occurs in the resurrection narrative in John 19,41; 20,11-1695:

Now where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had been buried… Mary was standing by the tomb, weeping. And as she wept she looked inside the tomb, and saw two angels, in white, sitting one at the head and one at the feet where Jesus’s body had been lying. And they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She replied, “They have taken away my lord, and I do not know where they have put him.” And as she said this, she turned round, and saw Jesus standing, but did not realise that it was Jesus. Jesus said, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Thinking that he was the gardener, she said to him, “Lord, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I shall take him away.” Jesus said, “Mary!” She recognised him, and said in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (that is: Teacher).

Far from mistaking Jesus for the gardener—the occasion is saturated with irony—Mary recognises him: with the resurrection, the gardener expelled in Genesis 3 is now restored to his home. Paradise is restored. And nor is there yet anything necessarily eschatological about this event, even in nuce. It has already happened, within the Johannine narrative, as a “historical” event. If it is also eschatological, it is “realised eschatology”!

Royal wisdom

We noted above the problem of the second tree. It is arguable that it is at odds with the next royal feature, of the man naming the animals (Genesis 2,19).96 A persistent feature of royal power is the innate wisdom of the king, represented as we have seen by the image of the king receiving the fruit of wisdom. He is not as other men: he knows the secrets of the universe. He is, after all, divine. Such a perception is seen, for example, in two passages in Job, 15,7-9 and 38,4-7 (and the whole of 38,4-30):

Were you born the first, Adam, and brought forth before the hills?

95. For discussion see Wyatt, “There’s Such Divinity,” pp. 61-76. See also J. Schaper, The Messiah in the garden, pp. 17-27 in Bockmuehl and Stroumsa, Paradise in Antiquity.

Have you listened in at the Council of God
and taken all wisdom to yourself?
What do you know that we do not know,
or understand, which we do not?

and

Where were you when I prepared the foundations of the earth?
Say, if you have understanding
Who determined its measurements? {Surely you know!}
Or who stretched the measuring line over it?
On what were its pillars based?
or who laid its cornerstone...?

Both passages challenge Job. Who is he to quarrel with God? The explicit point of the first passage, implicit in the second, is that Adam, the son of God—the king—who spoke to God face to face, would both listen in at the council of God and know all wisdom. Job as a commoner cannot. The invention of the second tree in the narrative seems to be a reflection of post-monarchical thought, seeing the king’s misuse of wisdom as an act of hubris. Thus the tree of knowing all things is a cipher for the king himself, whose presence in the garden has turned out to be problematic. The assessment of wisdom as a bad thing was already hinted at in the critique of the monarchy given in Deuteronomy 29,8; 30,11-14,98 and found expression in such later texts as 1 Enoch 7,1 (where angels teach women magic and herb-lore), 8,1 (where Azazel teaches men metallurgy, cosmetics, jewellery and alchemy), 8,3 (where other angels teach herb-lore, incantations, astrology), 61,1-2 and 69,1-12 (which speak of angels who revealed secrets).99 There is no intrinsic reason to judge all of this material to be late in authorial terms, even if it occurs in late compositions: it probably reflects fairly faithfully the world-view of the author of Genesis 2-3.100 This all reads, as does Genesis 3, like a rather jaundiced evaluation of a monarchical system which had overreached itself and brought divine punishment down on the nation. The tree is therefore reinterpreted, and given a second, ironic role, so that while it could have been the key to immortality, it actually cheated the man and his wife. The irony is the same as occurs in Gilgamesh and Adapa.

The king as divine

97. The setting of Isaiah’s inaugural vision (Isaiah 6) is modelled on a royal pattern.
98. Wyatt, Myths of Power, pp. 280-82.
99. Though it is to be noted that Enoch himself is a model of the new king, initiated into all wisdom.
100. The fact that Genesis 2-3 is undoubtedly later than the final form of Deuteronomy raises the question as to whether it was partly inspired by Deuteronomistic teaching.
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One final motif concerns the man’s intrinsic divinity, from the moment he eats of the fruit. 3,5 reads:

on the day that you eat from it your eyes will be opened and you will be gods (kēʾlōhîm) . . .

and 3,22 has God say

“Look! The man has become one of us, knowing all things . . .”

Rather than read this as a comparison (“like gods . . . like one of us”), it seems preferable, in view of the special status of the man—the king—to read the k of kēʾlōhîm as yet another example of kaph veritatis, indicating identity rather than comparison. It is perhaps as part of this primordial and divine status that we should also recognise in the man an androgyne: his female aspect is extracted from him only at the point at which his rib is withdrawn (2,21).

Dating the Eden narrative

102. See n. 1. The same idiom occurs in Psalm 1.3—see n. 64. Noort, “Gan-Eden,” p. 25; he appears to agree, though he also retained the comparison on pp. 24-25. See also my study of Psalm 82 (Wyatt, Myths of Power, pp. 357-365) in which I argued that the point of the judicial scene envisaged in the psalm is not the demotion of old gods, as is generally thought to be the point of the scene described, but the reduction of Judah’s divine kings to merely human status:

‘I had thought that you were gods, and all of you were sons of the Most High. But like Man shall you die and like the first of rulers shall you fall!’ (Psalm 82.6)

The passage not only demotes the kings of Judah, but compares their fall to Adam’s fall—he being the first king, “the first of rulers.” On the general divine condition of the king see Wyatt, Myths of Power, pp. 283-322; “There’s Such Divinity,” pp. 191-220.

All this symbolic language is addressed to the real political world. While couched in the language of timeless myth, and of the universal human condition, the Eden story really speaks of the historical situation of the post-exilic world, after the destruction of the monarchy and before the construction of the second temple. In so far as it is a universal story, it speaks volumes for the significance of the king in the national psyche, and especially when the idea was emancipated from the cut and thrust of a real monarchy, and idealised.

How precisely it is to be dated within this period is another matter. We should abandon any attempt to date it to the tenth century on the basis of the old documentary hypothesis. Similarly with Zevit’s recent attempt to fix it in the ninth century. Nothing within the text requires such an understanding. It is certainly later than Ezekiel, or at least those passages identified above in chapters 28 and 47 (terminus a quo early sixth century). The fact that the story is not retold with any variation, except for the post-mortem rehabilitation of Adam, until the Christian reinterpretation by John, suggests that events such as the rise of Zerubbabel or of the Hasmonean monarchy either had no lasting impact as redeeming the condition the story describes, or more probably that these events had not yet occurred. And yet Zerubbabel had raised considerable expectations, being the grandson or great grandson of Jehoiakin, the king deported in 597. This latter, preferable scenario would give a terminus ad quem of Zerubbabel’s time, that is ca 520 BCE. This would also be consonant with the status of the temple, still not yet fully rebuilt and reconsecrated. The Genesis 2-3 narrative may therefore be interpreted as a midrash on the theme of the demise of the kingdom, concentrating on all those symbolic aspects which had been fundamental to its existence.

Bremmer’s treatment of the Eden narrative, dealing in particular with the ideological content of the term παράδεισος, and in particular its eschatological usage as developing in the intertestamental literature, has no direct bearing on the issue of the original date of the story, since the Greek term, assigned only with the composition of the LXX, naturally brought its own literary and ideological baggage into the discussion. The Hebrew text used not pardēs, which would have reflected that derivative ideology, but gan, which perpetuates a much older one, with antecedents in the wider Semitic world.

The Garden in the broader Ancient Near Eastern context

Let us try to set the Garden of Eden in the broader ancient Near Eastern context. Conceptually, Eden may be identified in principle with other...
“gardens” in ancient Near Eastern tradition, such as the scene in the Mari coronation painting, as well as with royal Assyrian gardens, throne rooms, and so on. This is because they all shared a common symbolism, without any particular one being derived from any other.

Jean Margueron stated that no garden has yet been identified in the palace at Mari, but the investiture painting shows that at least the concept was present, and was evidently important for ritual purposes. It is most likely that the palm court (court 106) was the garden, even if somewhat unconventional, used precisely for ritual purposes in conjunction with the throne-room, even if the precise rites have left no record. And the vase and streams motif was common and widespread in ancient Near Eastern glyptic art; moreover, the famous marble statue of the goddess holding a vase from which water flowed was actually situated at the threshold of the throne room, the whole architectural complex thus functioning as a symbolic garden.

The famous wall-painting from the royal palace at Mari, already building on a rich tradition, depicts the scene commonly known as the reinvestiture of King Zimri-Lim of Mari, after he had regained his throne, though Margueron has now argued that it actually belonged in the reign of his father Yahdun-Lim. Its date is to be estimated as ca 1840-20 BCE, no greater precision being possible.

The location of the painting is a guide to its spatial interpretation. It is at the side of the door going from the palm court (court 106) into the throne-room of the palace. This lateral location suggests—and this can only remain within the realm of possibilities—that it may have been duplicated on the other side of the entranceway. It is reasonable to see it having served as a thematic linkage between the two areas, the court and the throne-room connected by the antechamber, communicating between the two and transferring the symbolism of one into the other, or of each to the other. Thus the spacious courtyard, originally with a palm tree in the middle, seems to have represented a garden, and the painting shows four trees of indetermi-
nate species—though they are probably to be identified as date palms—with figures of a lamassu goddess standing between each outer pair. The inner two are flanked by winged sphinxes and griffins, above and below respectively, common motifs in royal palaces, since both mythical animal forms are royal symbols. There are two registers in the central tableau, which, while located in the garden, represent respectively the antechamber housing the statue of goddess and vase, and throne room beyond. The upper register lies behind the lower, in a primitive form of perspective. The lower has two goddesses standing, holding vases, from which streams of water flow. As these blend and fall, they become four streams (one original stream becomes two and then four). The upper scene, viewed as it were through the flowing streams, since it lies “behind” them, has the goddess Ishtar hand Zimri-Lim (or if we follow Margueron, Yahdun-Lim) the ring and the rod, symbols of his kingly office. They are flanked by two attendant deities.

The diagrammatic treatment given by Margueron suggests that the painting or paintings, if paired, allowed persons entering the throne-room to anticipate their progress towards it from the court. Thus the inner trees (doubled)—correcting Margueron—represent the palm in the centre of the court. The goddess (a single figure) with the vase who stands immediately inside the antechamber leading to the throne-room by its two entrances, one at either end, is preceded by the two vase-holding goddesses of the painting. The painting allows the viewer to “see” through the antechamber wall to the scene in the throne-room beyond.

All the motifs here present, the trees, the rivers, the divine figures, the king (robed), and the sphinxes and griffins, which will trigger responses in the reader familiar with the biblical narrative, were already clichés in Marian and wider ancient Near Eastern iconography. They occurred widely on cylinder seals, on statuary and reliefs, and in derivative forms occur throughout the ancient Near East over a protracted period of time. And

113. Did they symbolise the cardinal points? On the significance of orientation see Wyatt The Mythic Mind, pp. 125-50. Since it is the inner trees which are flanked by sphinxes and griffins—see immediately below—I am inclined to think that Margueron’s diagram errs on this matter, and that the arrows in the diagram should point to the two inner trees.
114. Apart from the problematic Susa example, griffins do not clearly appear in Assyrian art before the first millennium. But West Semitic iconography already used the motif in the second millennium, derived from Egypt, and Mari belonged in some respects to this western tradition. See Wyatt, “Grasping the Griffin,” pp. 29-39, where many second millennium West Semitic examples are cited.
115. Wyatt, “Grasping the Griffin.”
116. See Black and Green, Gods, Demons and Symbols, p. 156.
117. Margueron Mari, p. 511 fig. 499.
wherever found, their significance was not simply decorative, but ideological. Their impact may of course have been limited to the literate classes who formed the palace and temple personnel and the civil service. They would be the people who carried seals, for example. But they had a common vested interest in maintaining the mystique evoked in such devices. However, many royal motifs did filter down in attenuated forms, to be recognised by all as symbols of royal authority.

This temporal and spatial ubiquity suggests that the motifs maintained a relatively stable symbolic value throughout the two millennia from at least 2000 BCE. This is significant when it comes to assessing later, apparently quite distinct materials, such as the tree(s) in the biblical Eden narrative. While biblical scholars are generally at pains to insist on the 

sui generis

nature of this tradition, it is more consistent with our broad understanding of ancient Near Eastern culture to think in terms of a common repertoire, a 

doKoine. This is in no way to underestimate local distinctions, where these are accessible to our understanding. But all too often our sense of the distinctive-ness of biblical motifs is a measure of our ignorance of their ancient Near Eastern roots.

Now if we put aside all the distinctive narrative elements of the biblical Eden story, we are left with those elements (almost stage props) which made up the Marian repertoire and which, though never attested 
in toto elsewhere, were so much a part of the general iconographical scene as to be reasonably understood to belong there too, as for example in Ebla and Ugarit.

Royal and patriarchal burials

One final point at this stage in our discussion brings us back to the theme of patriarchal burials in the garden, an extension to universal time of the local tradition of the royal burials also taking place in the garden. This also marks the process of “eschatologisation” of the tradition.

The kings had been discredited, like Adam, a point consistently argued by
the Deuteronomistic historians (cf. n. 100). Was a secondary, unspoken purpose of the narrative perhaps a formal discrediting of the old mortuary and necromantic practices which would have typified the ancient monarchy, in which dead kings (cf. the Rephaim) would be invoked and celebrated in kispum rites118 and oracular enquiries? This is a question worth asking, for there is clear evidence, long largely unrecognised by scholars, of these as vital features of the pre-exilic world.119 The Eden burial tradition is selective,

118. Perhaps it was fear of their attraction as figures of cult that partly explains the prominence given to the Rephaim. See Wyatt, The Archaeology of Myth, chapter 3, and reference in next note.
119. See further on the post-mortem significance of the garden in N. Wyatt, “After death has us parted: encounters between the living and the dead in the ancient Semitic world,” in G. del Olmo Lete, J. Vidal and N. Wyatt (eds), The Perfumes of Seven Tamarisks: Studies in Honour of Wilfred G. E. Watson (AOAT 394; Münster:
However, and Hebron proved to be an important rival tradition, presumably dating from a time when Jerusalem was not regarded as cosmic centre, perhaps within the exilic or also early in the post-exilic era. This is because following Josiah’s reform, only Jerusalem could conceivably have had this central function down to the exile, and the alternative tradition can scarcely predate the situation in Jerusalem from the period 597-586, since the patriarchal narratives also betray many late features, and appear to reflect the exile as a present fact. Abraham and Sarah had been buried in Hebron, according to Genesis 23,1-20; 25,9-10, as had Jacob (Genesis 50,12-13), and implicitly Isaac (Genesis 35,27-29). All Jacob’s sons were buried there according to the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.

So the question arises as to the relative claims of the two sites, and the implications of these rival burial traditions. There was obviously a considerable historical gap in the Jerusalem and Eden tradition, between the burial of the last pre-exilic king, and the rehabilitation of the site in the Adam tradition. The Hebron tradition must have filled this gap, and once established in the post-exilic period, was never fully eclipsed. But it never developed an eschatological character, while the earlier Eden tradition, once resumed, did so precisely with this new quality.

External influences may also have played a part in the development of a post mortem reference for Paradise, which was evidently already under way before its full Christian interpretation in this mode. We may briefly cite just two.

Firstly, Ugaritic tradition spoke rather mysteriously of the threshold of the netherworld and the end of the world (which while distinct, are related) in the following terms:

\[ \text{sbn[y lq]st [a]r[s]} \]  
we travelled to [the ends of the earth],

\[ \text{c’d lksm mhyt} \]  
to the edge of the abyss;

Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), pp. 259-292, and references cited there, concerning the kispum rite and its analogues.

120. But contrast Testament of Abraham 20,18-19, according to which Abraham will dwell in Paradise. But as Goodman noted, “Paradise, gardens...,” p. 58 in Bockmuehl and Stroumsa, Paradise in Antiquity, this text has many Christian interpolations. This passage may therefore have served to subvert contemporary Jewish thinking.

121. For an important recent re-evaluation of the patriarchal narratives with regard to land tenure, and the importance of Hebron in particular, see F. Stavrakopoulou, Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims (London: T&T Clark, 2011), especially chapter 2.


123. The damaged text is restored by comparison with KTU 1.16 iii 2-4. See Wyatt, “There’s Such Divinity,” pp. 140-41. There appears to be further text between these cola in the present text, but not in the Kirta passage, and it is in any event unreadable.
we came to Paradise, the land of pasture,
to Delight, the steppe by the shore of death.

We came upon Baal fallen to the earth:
dead was Valiant Baal,
perished was the Prince, Lord of the Earth!"

(KTU 1.5 vi 3-10)

I have deliberately chosen provocative translations of the terms n’my (lit. “gracious [place]”) and ysmt, as “Paradise” and “Delight,” in the foregoing translation, because it is my contention that the location is precisely an entrance to the netherworld, as the limen between two ontological realms, just as Eden is implicitly in the biblical story. And the Ugaritic material undoubtedly echoes mortuary aspects of Ugaritian royal ideology. It is perhaps the germ of an idea which develops more fully in late biblical thought. The cosmological centrality of Eden, for which I have argued, in no way diminishes its liminality (as the threshold between two orders of reality), which is horizontal (inside versus outside) as in the present passage, which appears to be on the cosmic seashore, with another transcendent realm lying beyond. This will immediately become clear in comparison with what follows here. We may suppose that the later speculation concerning the location of Paradise at the ends of the earth, rather than at its centre, is a product of the merging of the eschatological conception of it with Greek, Persian and other cosmological enquiries, together with the spatial interpretation of miqqedem; but the Ugaritic evidence, already hinting at it, is more akin to the Mesopotamian description in Gilgamesh.

The Greek counterpart to this mysterious realm is the “meadow of asphodels” of the Homeric tradition. This is mentioned by the dead Patroclus (Iliad 23.73) and in Circe’s instructions to Odysseus (Odyssey 10, carried out in 11). This place too is on the further side of Ocean, not below the earth.

These two views of an eschatological garden place it beyond the earth-surrounding ocean. The roots of this idea may perhaps be found in Gilgamesh 10.72-194, where Utanapishtim, to whom the hero pays a visit, lives on the further shore of the ocean. In this respect, these ideas are to be distinguished from the eschatologised version of Eden in John 20.11-16, cited above, which

appears to retain its central location, in what will become the heavenly Jerusalem.

Conclusion

Our discussion has argued the case for understanding the primordial nature of the Garden of Eden and Paradise (miqqedem), its evident reference to the historical life of the Judahite monarchy, and its potential for an eschatological understanding. If we wish for a comprehensive term to characterise it, recognising the various dimensions of the concept, then perhaps we may call it “transhistorical.” It is the historical aspect of this, over against the mythic emphasis of the primordial and eschatological dimensions, which is the most sensitive to its transcendent qualities, for which I have argued here. For the royal cult, in a garden inhabited by gods (Yahweh is “lord of the gods”: yhwh ēlōhîm: see n. 14), sought both to preserve the former, the king’s cultic activity maintaining the archetypal divine institution, and to incorporate the latter, since each deceased monarch was ideally interred within the garden, and thus remained among its population. Both were to be incorporated through the cult into the eternal present actualised in the ritual life of the kingdom. It was the destruction of the state, expressed in the metaphor of expulsion from Eden, which released the futuristic aspect from this ancient nexus, and permitted its development into a fully eschatological dimension.