

# Water and Justice: Reading the Irony of Qoheleth 2:4-6 against the Selfish Distribution of Resources on the African Continent

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## Abstract

The whole text of Qoheleth 2 notes the disappointing effect of the misuse of power to gather wealth for oneself to the detriment of many. In accord with the irony of Qoheleth 2:4-6, this article investigates the appropriate role of governments in addressing problems related to the availability and issues surrounding distribution of resources, especially water, as a matter of public justice. Qoheleth 2:4-6 is contrasted with Ancient Near Eastern inscriptions in which kings rather boast for the good they did for their people, for example, the provision of water. The unsatisfactory feeling of Qoheleth discouraged the self-centred distribution of resources for personal gain.

**Keys words:** Water supply, access, Ancient Near Eastern Inscriptions, sanitation, gardens, vineyards, orchards and pools of water.

## Introduction

Water scarcity has emerged as one of the most pressing issues in the twenty first century making many people unable to lead healthy lives and lacking in the ability to build secure livelihoods (Mehta, 2009:1). However, it is currently argued that contemporary water shortages around the globe are not necessarily due to the lack of water *per se*, but very often due to issues of the uneven distribution of the existing supplies of water.<sup>2</sup>

Qoheleth 2:4-6 ironizes the unbalanced distribution of water where he creates the irrigation and sanitation systems for his own personal benefit contrasting with most of the Ancient Near Eastern

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<sup>2</sup> There is enough fresh water on the planet for all. However, due to bad politics, millions of people, mostly children, die every year from water-related diseases associated with inadequate water supply, sanitation and hygiene. See <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/> (accessed 26 March 2017).

royal autobiographies in which kings rather boast about what they did for their people<sup>3</sup>. Prior to his ironic conclusion that “all is הֶבֶל” (v.11), Qoheleth made remarkable self-centred water-related declarations that can be paraphrased as follows:

- v.4 I made vineyards for myself (נָטַעְתִּי לִי כֶרְמִים);
- v.5 I made gardens and orchards for myself (עָשִׂיתִי לִי גִנוֹת וּפְרָדִסִּים);
- v.6 I made pools of water for myself (עָשִׂיתִי לִי בְּרִכוֹת מַיִם).”

Enough attention has not yet been given to these selfish (לִי) water-related projects. Scholars only name them as measures of a life of luxury (Murphy, 1992:18; Seow, 1997:150; Brown, 2000:32; Horne, 2003:405; Koh 2006:30). This article is devoted to the ecological significance of the irony of Qoheleth 2:4-6 regarding his self-centred water-related projects. The article determines whether Qoheleth’s self-centred distribution of water (v.4-6) and his conclusion that “all is הֶבֶל” (v.11) can provide us with means to challenge selfish distribution of water and other resources.

The investigation, thus, compares Qoheleth 2:4-6 with the Ancient Near Eastern kings’ water-related projects in dry environments. The egocentric water-related projects of Qoheleth 2:4-6 are contrasted with the Ancient Near Eastern inscriptions in which Kings rather boast for water and projects they made for their people (Koh 2006:81). Using elements of socio-literary analysis and guided by eco-justice awareness, this article examines the appropriate roles of governments to address problems related to the availability, management and eco-justice issues that surround the distribution of water in light of Qoheleth 2:4-6.

### **Brief overview of approaches to Qoheleth 2:4-6**

To my knowledge, there is no eco-theological study on Qoheleth 2:4-6. Publications merely name the water-related projects (gardens, vineyards, orchards and pools of water) as part of Qoheleth’s extravagant life of utter luxury (Murphy, 1992:18; Koh, 2006:81). These aforesaid classic readings often fail to question the self-centred declarations of Qoheleth’s which tend to focus solely on the extent of his own wealth acquisition, while nothing is left for his people and thus, he is going against Ancient Near Eastern customs where kings rather usually boasted concerning the good they have done for their people.<sup>4</sup>

### **The approach of this article**

The irrigation systems depicted in Qoheleth 2:4-6 are indeed part of Qoheleth’s luxurious life. While agreeing with this interpretation, this article is curious about a king boasting about his private wealth, rather than concentrating on the improvement of the life of his people as it is the case in the Ancient Near Eastern inscriptions and other biblical texts.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, why would

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<sup>3</sup> The inscriptions of Azatiwada, Hadad, Kilamuwa, Mesha and Panamu boast of the good that they had done in favour of their people in terms of securing peace and prosperity of the land, including the building of irrigation systems) (Koh 2006:81).

<sup>4</sup> For further details about Ancient Near Eastern royal inscriptions, see Lee (2005:35-39 and Koh (2006).

<sup>5</sup> See Sirach 48:17 & 50:4-5; Nehemiah 3:15.

Qoheleth 2:1-11 conclude with the words “all is הֶבֶל” (v.11) after having set the reader up for the expectation of something good to come of all his self-centred achievements?<sup>6</sup>

In this sense, elements of socio-historical critical methods are utilized to compare Qoheleth 2:4-6 to Ancient Near Eastern inscriptions about parks, cisterns and reservoirs as well as biblical texts, highlighting the garden motif (Songs 4:12-15 or Genesis 2:5-6)<sup>7</sup>. Thereafter, elements of the literary approach facilitate the analysis of Qoheleth 2:4-6 in conjunction with Nehemiah 3:15; Sirach 48:17 and 50:1-4 in which the king’s pride resides not in his private wealth, but rather in the good done for his people in terms of securing a needed water supply for the city.

This study is motivated by the fact that, as in Qoheleth’s context, contemporary African leaders live a luxurious life, while a great number of their people live in abject poverty, lacking access to even the most rudimentary social services such as drinking water and sanitation.<sup>8</sup> The irony is that they are never satisfied by the wealth which they have gathered, while the situation of dire straits in which their people continue to drown is not addressed. The irony of Qoheleth 2:4-6 is insightful against the selfish distribution of resources for personal gain.

### The Masoretic text of Qoheleth 2:4-6

4 הַגְדַּלְתִּי מַעֲשֵׂי בְנֵיתִי לִי בַתִּים וְנָטַעְתִּי לִי כַרְמִים:

5 עָשִׂיתִי לִי גִנּוֹת וּפְרָדִסִּים וְנָטַעְתִּי בָהֶם עֵץ כָּל-פְּרִי:

6 עָשִׂיתִי לִי בְרִקְוֹת מַיִם לְהַשְׁקוֹת מִהֶם יַעַר צוֹמֵחַ עֵצִים:

### Translation of Qoheleth 2:4-6

This translation comes from the New Revised Standard Version (1989) as follows:

<sup>4</sup> I made great works; I built houses and planted vineyards for myself;

<sup>5</sup> I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees.

<sup>6</sup> I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees.

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<sup>6</sup> Normally, the aim of a royal autobiography is to bring the subjects to admire the king’s quest for wisdom, wealth and pleasure (Enns 2011:41).

<sup>7</sup> See also Song of Songs 8:11; Sirach 48:17 & 50:4-5. Other references are Jeremiah 39:4; 52:7; 2 Kings 25:4; Nehemiah 3:15 etc.

<sup>8</sup> <http://triplecrisis.com/rich-presidents-of-poor-nations/> (accessed 27 March 2017)

## Literary considerations

Qoheleth 2:4-6 belongs to the internal part<sup>9</sup> of Qoheleth dealing with his quest for what is good in human life (Perdue, 2007:205). The good that Qoheleth found is the enigmatic *Carpe Diem*<sup>10</sup> situation. The larger literary context of Qoheleth 2:4-6 is Qoheleth 1:1-2:26 dealing with the inscrutability of human life (Johnston, 1976:15; Koh 2006:26).

Despite arguing that the “royal fiction” is limited to Qoheleth 1:12-2:11,<sup>11</sup> Loader suggested that Qoheleth 1:12-2:26 is a literary unit comprising Qoheleth’s self-introduction, the announcement of his royal deeds, and their results.<sup>12</sup> The unit is framed by the claim that God is responsible for giving humans their grievous tasks and thus keeping them busy (Qoh 1:13), and he concludes with God giving human beings the possibility to enjoy what they do (Qoh 2:24-26).

In his quest for what is good for mortals to do under the sun during the few days of their life, Qoheleth indeed created prodigious works, including the constructing of vineyards, gardens, parks, irrigation systems and reservoirs for water (2:4-6). Qoheleth declares also to have gained fabulous wealth in the form of slaves, flocks, silver, gold, regions, singers and concubines (2:7-9), but deemed these as הֶבֶל and akin to ‘chasing after the wind’ (v.11). Qoheleth 2:4-6 shows us a figure as narrated in the texts who is disappointed by the use of power for his own benefit but still realises that all is הֶבֶל.

## Socio-literary analysis of Qoheleth 2:4-6

### Qoheleth 2:4-6 versus Ancient Near Eastern royal inscriptions

The boasting of a king over his achievements was a major feature in royal inscriptions in the Ancient Near East. The list of great royal works includes memorial statues, temples, the kings’ palaces, defence, civil works and the rebuilding of cities.<sup>13</sup> Inscriptions often comprise claims of

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<sup>9</sup> Rousseau (1981:213) argued that the internal part of the book covers seven major sections characterised by ironic *Carpe Diem* claims at their end: 1:12-2:26; 3:1-13; 3:14-22; 4:1-5:19; 6:1-8:15; 8:16-9:10; 9:11-11:10.

<sup>10</sup> The ironic *Carpe Diem* statements at the end of the sections are the following: 2:24-26; 3:12-13; 3:22; 5:17-19; 8:14-15; 9:7-10; 11:9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Loader (1979:19) argues that apart from Qoheleth 1:1, the royal fiction occurs nowhere else except in 1:12-2:11 (1979:19).

<sup>12</sup> See Loader’s schematic presentation of Qoheleth 1:12-2:16 in Loader (1979:35-39).

<sup>13</sup> For the details of inscriptions, see Donner, H & W Röllig 1964 (eds). *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. Azatiwada’s inscription declares the abundant supply of grain and filled granaries, fine food, and new wine for his people (Donner & Röllig 1964:36, Inscr.26, Text A, Section I, lines 1, 6; Section II, lines 7-8; Section III, lines 7-9), while Hadad’s list mentions his realisation in terms of the richly cultivated land of barley, wheat, and garlic, as well as the abundant provision of food and drink for the people (Donner & Röllig 1964:215, Inscr.214, lines 5-7, 9). In the Kilamuwa inscription, the king boasts of securing livestock, gold and silver, and linen for his people (Donner & Röllig 1964:31, Inscr.24, lines 11-13), while Bar-Rakib’s memorial inscription to his father (Panammu) boasts of the economic and social well-being of the citizens during the days of his father’s rule, where everyone had plenty to eat and drink (Donner & Röllig 1964:223-224, Inscr.215, lines 8-9). Meshah’s inscription declares his realisation in terms of rebuilding the ruined cities and water supply (Donner & Röllig 1964:168-169, Inscr.181, lines 9, 21-24).

kings for the deeds done on behalf of their people: economic growth, peace in the land, abundant crops harvest and livestock (Koh, 2006:79).

Qoheleth adopted the ANE literary convention although there is a significant difference between his self-centred boasting and a people-centred approach in neighbourhood inscriptions (Koh, 2006:79). While other inscriptions (Azatiwada, Hadad, Kilamuwa & Mesha) mainly boast concerning the good that kings had done for their people in terms of securing peace and prosperity in their lands, Qoheleth enlists the extent of his private wealth and efforts in the pursuit of pleasure. Qoheleth boast of palaces, vineyards, gardens, parks, pools of water and irrigation systems undetraken for his own personal pleasure. The Hebrew word 'for me' (אֵלַי) is repeated four times in the text to emphasise the self-centred vision of Qoheleth (vv.4-6). Qoheleth is not talking about public works, but projects created for his 'self-pleasure' (Longman III, 1998:217).

The self-pleasure vision is also found in the Ancient Near Eastern Tell Siran inscription,<sup>14</sup> which is a tribute to Amminadab, the king of the Ammonites. It presents syntactic similarities with Qoheleth 2:4-6 as illustrated in the following quotation:

May the product of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites, the son of Hissil-'El, king of the Ammonites, the son of Amminadab, king of the Ammonites – the vineyard and the orchard and the park and <the> pools – give pleasure for many days and for years far off (Coote, 1980:93).

Like Qoheleth, the Tell Siran script wishes that the orchards, parks and their pools of water bring enduring pleasure only to the king. By contrast, the Moabite stone inscription shows the boasting of Mesha, the king of Moab, over the good he did for his people: he provided water facilities in the city for the sake his people (Albright, 1969:320). Mesha also claims to have encouraged his people to own private cisterns in their houses, as stated in the following:

It was I [Mesha] (who) built Qarhoh, the wall of the forests and the wall of the citadel; I also built its gates and I built its towers and I built the king's house, and I made both of its reservoirs for water inside the town. And there was no cistern inside the town at Qarhoh, so I said to all the people, "Let each of you make (25) a cistern for himself in his house!" And I cut beams for Qarhoh with Israelite captives. I built Aroer, and I made the highway in the Arnon (valley); I built Beth-bamoth, for it had been destroyed; I built Bezer — for it lay in ruins—with fifty men of Dibon, for all Dibon is (my) loyal dependency (Albright, 1969:320-321).

In so doing, Mesha claims to be the portrait of a great leader of Moab.

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<sup>14</sup> The Tell Siran inscription was discovered in 1972 by a student excavation on the campus of the University of Jordan. This Ammonite bronze bottle inscription is generally dated during 600 BCE. For further remarks on the Tell Siran Inscription, see Tompson and Zayadine (1973:9).

## **Biblical kings and water-related projects (Sir 48:17-18)**

### **Hezekiah Tunnel and the Siloam Inscription<sup>15</sup>**

The eloquent evidence of water-related projects is King Hezekiah's tunnel depicted in Sirach 48:17-18. To ensure a suitable water supply for the city of Jerusalem, King Hezekiah of Judah had a tunnel cut through solid rock to connect the spring at Gihon to the reservoir of Siloam (2 Chr 32:30). The Hebrew verb חָצַר (cutting through) and the substantive צַר (rock) both occur twice in the Siloam Inscription showing the skill of Hezekiah's engineers cutting through the rocks with iron tools – an unusual expertise<sup>16</sup> in the eighth century B.C (Skehan & Di Lella, 1987:538).

The Hezekiah Tunnel is the largest ancient hydro-technical structure of Israel and can be studied both for its military and also for its city planning aspects (Abrahams, 1978:407). As the only source of underground water in Judah, the Gihon Spring was critical to the city of Jerusalem.<sup>17</sup> Prior to the erection of rainwater reservoirs and rock-hewn cisterns, Gihon was the only source of water for the public to use.

Hezekiah's tunnel thus made possible the absolute control of the Gihon Spring waters in a single, large and fortified reservoir for his people (Abrahams, 1978:407). In an agricultural society of the Ancient Near East, part of these building projects was also to 'make the land fruitful' through irrigation (Green, 2010:272). That is why Sirach 48:17 praises Hezekiah for this visionary project for his people and their prosperity.

### **Other biblical evidence (Nehemiah 3:15 and Sirach 50:1-4)**

The Bible talks about other kings' water-related projects. In Nehemiah 3:15, Shallun, the ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the fountain gate and the walls of the pool of Siloam<sup>18</sup> to ensure safe water access for the people after the exile. It is probably the gate tower and walls around the Siloam Pool established by Hezekiah to defend the pool against any possible enemy (Abrahams 1978:406). For this water-related project, Shallun is credited with good leadership and features amongst the builders of the ruins of Jerusalem in Nehemiah 3.

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<sup>15</sup> Discovered in 1880, the Siloam Inscription is written in pure Hebrew but in the cursive Phoenician alphabet, the oldest known specimen of that alphabet. It tells of the digging operations of Hezekiah stopping the waters of the Upper Gihon Spring, located outside the defensive wall of Jerusalem, and bringing by means of a circuitous tunnel under the city walls to pool of Siloam inside the city wall (Abrahams 1978:406). The biblical evidence for the tunnel are the texts of 2 Chronicles 32:29-30 and Sirach 48:17-18.

<sup>16</sup> King and Stager (2001:210) inform that during the Iron Age, Israelite engineers made four significant urban water systems. The northern urban water system includes Gibeon, Hazor, Gezer, Arad, Meggido, while the southern water system includes Beth-Shemesh, Kadesh-Barnes and Tel Sheva and Meggido.

<sup>17</sup> The Siloam tunnel is usually associated with preparations for the Assyrian invasion of Jerusalem. However, recent findings have shown that the Gihon Spring was already well fortified since the Middle Bronze Age. The purpose of the tunnel was most likely to bring water to the burgeoning population on the Western Hill, rather than to prepare for an Assyrian invasion. For details, see Rendsburg and Schniedewind (2010:189).

<sup>18</sup> The expressions "Fountain Gate" and "the wall of the Pool of Siloam" are only a description of both water channels running from the Gihon to the water supply reservoir (Mulder 2003:111).

According to Sirach 50:1-4, these kinds of leaders are “the pride of their people” (v.1). The high priest Simon son of Onias is presented as a leader of his brothers and the pride of his people for the role he played in rebuilding the city and its water-related infrastructures after the ruins laid by the Ptolemeans<sup>19</sup>. He is therefore, presented at the climax of the hymn of the praise of the fathers in Sirach 50:1-28. In Sirach 50:1-4, Simon is presented as the living personification of Hezekiah, the builder of the city and its water works (Mulder, 2003:110).

As in 48:17, Ben Sira also mentions a water reservoir מקוה in 50:3, but its location and settings surrounding its construction differ from that of Hezekiah. Verse 3 says: “In his day the reservoir was dug, the pool with a vastness like the sea’s.” Mulder (2003:114) reasons that a smaller water reservoir was enlarged as water demand increased during Simon’s days. The purpose of Simon water-related facilities is to provide the city and Temple with a reliable water supply all the time and even in the event of a siege by an enemy force (Skehan & Di Lella, 1987:538).

## **Eco-theological significance of Qoheleth 2:4-6**

### **Qoheleth 2:4-6 as a caricature of failing leaders**

The irony of the ego-approach of Qoheleth has to be understood as the caricature of Solomon.<sup>20</sup> Given the Hellenistic context of the book of Qoheleth, the critical portrayal of the text may also infer the Hellenistic rulers and their representatives in Judea. One of them is Tobia Joseph, an egocentric man who based his happiness on his personal wealth and ‘built his son Hyrcanus a palace with park and irrigation system’ between 182 and 175 BCE (Krüger, 2004:66). It is implied in the text that in his pursuit of making their own happiness, leaders do not care about the good of the people who are ‘used’ and oppressed to carry out ‘great works’ for them (see Qoh 4:1-3).

The text is informative for contemporary readers in criticising current resource abuses, including water resources, to serve the happiness and interest of those in power. Qoheleth concludes, thus, that at the end of his projects, he has still achieved no gain (Qoh 2:11), but *hebel* and ‘striving after wind’. Qoheleth is actually saying that even if he obtained many things, they didn’t satisfy him. Qoheleth 2 notes the unsatisfactory effect of the misuse of power to gather wealth for oneself to the detriment of many. His ironic autobiography is thus, against the injustices that surround the distribution of resources ‘under the sun’ (see Qoh 3:16 and 4:1-3).

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<sup>19</sup> Most exegetes identify Simon with Simon II, who served as High Priest from circa 220–190. Simon is most often identified with Simon, the Righteous. See VanderKam (1995:303-318).

<sup>20</sup> According to Old Testament traditions, Solomon is the wise king who acquired much wealth (1 Ki 4:21ff), many wives (1Ki 11:1ff) and undertook many great works, including the building of the Temple and assurance of prosperity to his people (1 Ki 4:20,25). While 1 Kings 1:37,47 states that God made Solomon’s throne great (לָגַל, *piel*), here Qoheleth makes his works great (לָגַל, *Hiphil* v.4). It should be noticed that Qoheleth’s critical thesis led him to focus only on the caricature of Solomon’s wealth. However, hydraulic engineers 2,000 years ago were significantly skilled and brought water from a collection of springs 15 miles south of Jerusalem to the Temple Mount. Thus, water could easily flow down through a series of pools, aqueducts and tunnels on its way to its destination in the cisterns and pools of Jerusalem, including the parks and gardens. See Shanks (1984:49-54).

### The failed ‘Eden’ project in Qoheleth 2:4-6

Scholars have made interesting statements about literary similarities between Qoheleth 2:4-6 and Genesis 1-2.<sup>21</sup> The mention of עץ כל-פרי (‘every kind of fruit tree’) would remind us of the fertile land of Genesis 1:11 yielding fruit trees (עץ פרי). In so doing, Qoheleth not only acts as a king, but as God trying to create a garden (גנה) and parks (פרדסים)<sup>22</sup> in a land where water is a scarce resource (Verheij, 1991:114). The problem is that unlike God who made the Garden for all human kind, Qoheleth pledged to do it for selfish reasons.

Furthermore, the word Eden in Genesis 2:8 refers to a well-watered land rather than a field as it is often proposed.<sup>23</sup> The Tell Fakhariyah inscription<sup>24</sup> written in early Aramaic and Assyrian languages supports this interpretation. Its Aramaic text praises Hadad who *m’dn* the regions, or who provides abundant water (Hess 1991:32). The corresponding word of *m’dn* in the Assyrian version is *mutlahÉhÉidu* referring to the abundant attractiveness of a royal ornament as assumed in Qoheleth 2:4-6 (Millard 1984:104).

In this sense, the LXX has rendered the Hebrew words עַדְנַיִם by παραδεισος in Genesis 2:15, a place of plentiful water. The reason is given in Genesis 2:5 that there was no “flora” on the earth because God had not yet “caused it to rain and there was no one to till the ground.” Then God decided to make a well-watered garden (Gen 2:8-10). The idea rebounds in Song of Songs 4:12-15 where a woman’s sexuality is depicted in terms of a well-watered garden yielding all kinds of fruit-trees and perfumes which are used to attract.

Ironically, Qoheleth states that these pleasurable facilities never brought him satisfaction. In this way, it must be admitted that Qoheleth 2:4-6 can be read as “referring to a failed attempt on the part of Qoheleth at creating something like Paradise” (Verheij, 1991:115). While God saw everything that he had done was very good (Gen 1:31), Qoheleth 2:1 states:

Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity [*hebel*] and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun (NRSV).

Qoheleth 2:4-6 is, thus, an adequate ironic text which can be used to criticize contemporary injustice related to the distribution of wealth in countries.

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<sup>21</sup> The fact Qoheleth understands himself as the creator of his own happiness is shown by several words echoing Genesis 1-2. The expression ‘I planted all kinds of fruit trees’ (v.5) echoes Genesis 1:11; 2:8, while to irrigate recalls Genesis 2:6,10 etc. For further similarities between Qoheleth 2 and Genesis 2, see Verheij (1991:114).

<sup>22</sup> Qoheleth intentionally uses here the words גנה and פרדסים instead of גן. Although the biblical lexica do not significantly differentiate גנה and גן, the latter refers to a garden or park which was intended for enjoyment and pleasure, while the former can mean both a garden which was cultivated for producing fruits, nuts and vegetables and a place for enjoyment. The word פרדסים is a Persian loan which occurs only in three passages (Qoh 2:5; Song 4:13 & Neh 2:8) and has the same meaning as גנה. For more details, see Rütterswoden (1998:1155).

<sup>23</sup> Scholars link עַדְנַיִם with the Sumerian *edin*, which means plain or steppe. See Millard (1984:103-104).

<sup>24</sup> The Tell Fakhariyah (9<sup>th</sup> Century BCE) – the bilingual inscription in Assyrian and Aramaic discovered in 1979 in Syria – praising Hadad as the one who abundantly irrigates all the lands and controls the rivers. The translation of Tell Fakhariya can be found in Millard and Bordreuil (1982:137).



## Water and sanitation

Historically, the idea of the king creating a garden out of barren land, bringing order out of chaos and thus, duplicating the divine paradise on earth, was a powerful project in the Ancient East denoting fertility, power and legitimacy.<sup>25</sup> In other words:

The botanical garden, filled with exotic trees and flowing streams, was the parade example of the king's life-giving role as gardener, and visible proof that his wise rule brought fertility and fruitfulness to his whole land (Green, 2010:273).

In the Ancient Near East, gardens, especially royal gardens, were mythically seen as a symbol of successful "sanitation in the city" to the point that Jewish readings (Midrash) read the Garden of Eden as the depiction of the Promised Land (Morris, 1992:118). That is why the depiction of the Promised Land in the book of Deuteronomy 11:8ff present many similarities with the Garden of Eden in terms of water availability, sanitation and land fertility<sup>26</sup> (von Rad, 1966:85).

Gardens involved significant budgets as to their watering and sanitation. The Hebrew word *פַּרְדֵּי* – a loanword from the Persian *paradaida* and the Greek *παράδεισος* – refers to specially watered parks and pleasure gardens (Can 4:13). In Qoheleth 2:4 it is supplemented by *גִּבְעוֹת* denoting the idea of "enclosure" deriving from the root *גָּבַח* (to close), and suggesting a private property (Van Paridon, 2005:232). In the context of Qoheleth, *פַּרְדֵּי* and *גִּבְעוֹת* denote not only a place for pleasure, but also an investment. In fact, the usage of the Greek *παράδεισος* during the Ptolemaic period referred to an ecologically and economically productive orchard yielding every kind of fruit tree and botanical environment enabled by water availability (Rudman, 2001:15).

Qoheleth's measures of water irrigation testify to his awareness about water management and sanitation as the key for a delightful and special natural environment. However, by concluding with *hebel*, Qoheleth 2 notes the unsatisfactory effect of the misuse of power to accumulate wealth for oneself. Water and sanitation are among the resources that Qoheleth selfishly used to serve his pleasure to the detriment of many people under his charge.

Unlike Qoheleth, Hezekiah created a water supply and sanitation for his people. As a great king, Hezekiah counts his achievements in terms of making pools and aqueducts for the city (2 Kings 20:20; Sir 50:4-6) along with vineyards and gardens and the irrigation channels and reservoirs. Like Qoheleth, many modern African leaders accumulate resources and wealth for themselves while their people live in starvation. Qoheleth 2 is, thus, a fight against injustices surrounding the distribution of resources, including especially water.

## Water as an agent of life

References to a fertile and well-irrigated garden in Qoheleth remind the reader of the relevance of water in the region despite the fact that all the measures adopted served the egotistical interest of a single person. In a dry land like Palestine, water and trees are two visible signs of life and

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<sup>25</sup> For more details, see Eliade (1975:59-72; and Ansari, Taghvaei & Nejad (2008:122-123).

<sup>26</sup> See Genesis 2:10-14 & Deuteronomy 11:7ff.

beauty. Ansari (1989:109) states that in hot and dry places, gardens (i.e. water and plants) are symbols of freshness: “they are examples of paradise on the earth.”

In fact, a garden is unthinkable without a source of water and regular irrigation of the trees. In this sense, various methods and labours were involved in distributing water from the main supply to various reservoirs for water storage – for insurance against drought – and were placed at the inlet of the irrigation system of various fields, including gardens and parks (Kang, 1972:622).

Qoheleth provided his man-made Eden (parks and gardens) with irrigation pools to ensure the necessary water for the growth of the fruit trees. The provision of water in royal gardens and parks is also attested to in numerous extra-biblical texts, namely during the Achaemenid period:

[p]lants gathered from all over the empire were planted in carefully planned gardens. Sections of the parks were laid out as lush woodlands, well supplied with water, forming orderly and fertile oases in the midst of barren landscapes. These forested sections also served as game reserves, stocked with animals (lions, tigers, bears), where kings and courtiers hunted, allowing the former to exhibit his physical prowess (Kuhrt, 2010:272).

The construction of this kind of garden involved a number of measures of water supply provision including the maintenance of water channels or aqueducts connected to the major basins or pools to ensure the regularity of water:

The channels and basins served both a practical irrigation function and an aesthetic function. Besides, they also modified the climate of the immediate surroundings (Stronach, 1989:176).

The problem is that it is assumed that all these measures are made only for the benefit of a single person in Qoheleth 2:4-6.

## **Conclusion**

This article shows how Qoheleth ironizes the vainness of accumulating wealth for oneself to the detriment of many. Qoheleth concludes that he did not find any real pleasure despite the water systems, pleasurable gardens, wealthy vineyards and orchards he created for himself. The rhetoric of Qoheleth is that of the truly unsatisfactory effect of the use of power to serve the interest of one person or a small group while depriving many from accessing basic needs, such as water and sanitation. However, unlike Qoheleth, king Hezekiah made water and sanitation available for his people, for which he received the credit of the title “Great King” in Sirach 50. This is a great message for the many unscrupulous dictatorial and greedy leaders on the African continent to heed. Providing service to humanity must precede personal wealth acquisition by leaders.

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