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**DAVID P. MELVIN,
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CIVILIZATION IN MESOPOTAMIAN LITERATURE
AND IN GENESIS 1–11**

DIVINE MEDIATION AND THE RISE OF CIVILIZATION IN MESOPOTAMIAN LITERATURE AND IN GENESIS 1–11

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INTRODUCTION

In the study of Genesis 1–11, it is common for scholars to make comparisons between the biblical material and ancient Near Eastern myths. The discovery of large numbers of texts from Mesopotamia and Ugarit during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries created a veritable deluge of comparative studies of the primeval history. While the observation of the many continuities between Genesis 1–11 and Mesopotamian myths has contributed greatly to our understanding of this portion of the biblical text, it is also important to note the *discontinuities* between the biblical and extra-biblical material. One such discontinuity relates to the origin of human civilization. In Mesopotamian myths, civilization arises via the intervention of gods or other divine beings. It is portrayed variously as a gift bestowed directly upon humanity, an institution preceding the creation of humanity (via the creation of patron deities of various technologies), or the bestowal of knowledge upon humans by gods, sometimes through intermediary beings.

In Genesis 1–11, on the other hand, there are no divine mediators,¹ and there does not appear to be any divine assistance in the rise of civilization. Rather, civilization is the product of human endeavor. In Gen 4:17–22, humans discover or invent various aspects of civilized life: city-building, animal husbandry, music, and metallurgy. The human source of city-building is further underscored in Genesis 10–11 with the construction of cities by Nimrod

¹ Late Second Temple period expansions of the tradition preserved in Gen 6:1–4, such as *1 En.* 6–11 and *Jub.* 4:15, 21–23; 8:1–4, do include angelic revelation of secret knowledge which contributes to human civilization. Although a few scholars, most notably J. T. Milik and Margaret Barker, have argued that these works preserve elements of an earlier, more extensive tradition which Gen 6:1–4 has abridged, their proposals have not met with much acceptance. See J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 30–32; Margaret Barker, *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1987), 18–19; see especially the review of Barker by Nickelsburg in *JBL* 109 (1990), 335–37. See below for a further discussion of this possibility.

(10:8–12) and the building of the city and tower of Babylon (11:1–9).

I propose that the absence of divine mediation from Genesis 1–11 shifts the responsibility for civilization and the evils which accompany it onto humanity, particularly through the Eden narrative’s portrayal of civilizing knowledge as illicitly acquired divine knowledge. In order to make this case, I will first examine the Mesopotamian literature to establish the mythological background which Genesis 1–11 rejects. Then, I will analyze the relevant biblical texts in order to demonstrate the absence of the instruction motif. Finally, I will argue that the Eden story in Genesis 3 is the key to understanding how and why the mythological motif of divine instruction was excluded from Genesis 1–11.

THE DIVINE SOURCE OF CIVILIZATION IN MESOPOTAMIAN MYTHS

The motif of the divine origin of civilization is common in the ancient Near East, especially in Mesopotamia,² and it stands in stark contrast to the portrayal of the rise of civilization in Gen 1–11. In a number of mythological texts, civilization is portrayed as a gift bestowed upon humanity by the gods, and human advancement is generally a positive development. Often the arts of civilization come to humanity through divine or semi-divine intermediaries, such as the *apkallus* or heroes who are either semi-divine (e.g., Gilgamesh) or divinized humans (e.g., Lugalbanda, Utnapishtim).

According to the *apkallu* tradition, which comes to us from a wide array of sources ranging from the bi-lingual (Sumerian-Akkadian), “Etiological Myth of the Seven Sages” in the *Bit Meseri* texts³ to the much later writings of Berossus (4th century BCE) and

² Although many of my observations with regard to the view of the rise of civilization presented in Mesopotamian mythology could also be made within the mythic traditions of other ancient cultures (e.g., Egypt, Greece, Canaan), Bernard Batto notes, “[f]or reasons not entirely clear to us the opening chapters of Genesis are typologically and content-wise more akin to the mythic traditions of Mesopotamia than of territorially closer Canaan—the reverse of the normal situation in the Hebrew Bible” (B. Batto, “Creation Theology in Genesis,” R. J. Clifford and J. J. Collins [eds.], *Creation in the Biblical Traditions* [CBQMS, 24; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992], 16). For this reason, as well as the general consensus that the compilation of Genesis 1–11 occurred in the exilic or early post-exilic period, in large measure as a polemic against the Babylonian cosmological worldview in which the Jewish community found itself immersed, I have limited my comparisons of the biblical material to a number of Mesopotamian myths.

³ Erica Reiner, “The Etiological Myth of the ‘Seven Sages,’” *Or* 30 (1960), 4. See also Alan Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods: Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel* (SAAS, 19; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2008), 106–20. A similar description of the *apkallus*

the Uruk Sage List (c. 165 BCE),⁴ as well as the *Adapa* myth and the epic myth *Erra and Ishum*, semi-divine beings sent by Enki/Ea instructed antediluvian humans in the arts of civilization.⁵ The *apkallus* were teachers of early humanity whom Ea had endowed with “broad understanding” (*uz̄na rapašta*).⁶ According to Berossus, they taught the people of Sumer “writing, science, and technology of all types, the foundation of cities, the building of temples, jurisprudence and geometry,” as well as such necessities as agriculture.⁷ In lists, they usually appear paired with the king whom they purportedly advised as a sort of vizier.⁸

Elements of civilization are also attributed to the semi-divine hero, Gilgamesh. The opening lines of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* celebrate his great wisdom:

He who saw the Deep, the country’s foundation, [who] knew..., was wise in all matters! [Gilgamesh, who] saw the Deep, the country’s foundation, [who] knew..., was wise in all matters! [He ...] everywhere [...] and [learnt] of everything the sum of wisdom. He saw what was secret, discovered what was hidden, he brought back a tale of before the Deluge.⁹

The text goes on to describe Gilgamesh’s achievements in building the edifices of the city of Uruk, especially its wall. Here the text highlights the great wisdom required for such construction by ascribing the foundations of the city wall to the wisdom of the “Seven Sages” (*apkallus*).¹⁰ Moreover, within the epic, the greatest achievements of Gilgamesh are the building of the wall of Uruk and the wisdom he obtained and passed on to subsequent generations.¹¹ The source of this wisdom is his encounter with the divi-

appears in the myth *Erra and Ishum* (COS 1.113:408).

⁴ See the detailed description of the *apkallus* in Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (trans. Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieroop; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 246–49. For a discussion of the Uruk Sage List, see Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods*, 106–09.

⁵ See Helge S. Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic: The Mesopotamian Background of the Enoch Figure and of the Son of Man* (WMANT, 61; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag), 295–318; Paul D. Hanson, “Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11,” *JBL* 96 (1977), 226–29.

⁶ See Reiner, “Etiological Myth,” 1–11.

⁷ Bottéro, *Mesopotamia*, 247.

⁸ For example, the Uruk Sage List (see Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods*, 106–09).

⁹ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, SBV I.1–8 (Andrew George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: A New Translation* [London: Penguin, 2000], 1).

¹⁰ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, SBV I.18–21 (George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 2).

¹¹ Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 142–49; 213.

nized Flood hero, as the Sumerian text *The Death of Bilgames* indicates:

...you reached Ziusudra in his abode! The rites of Sumer, forgotten there since distant days of old, the rituals and customs—it was you brought them down to the land. The rites of hand-washing and mouth-washing you put in good order, [after the] Deluge it was you made known all the tasks of the land [...].¹²

Thus, Gilgamesh acts as a mediating figure between the divine source of the knowledge necessary for aspects of civilization and the people of Sumer. The source of his divine knowledge is the divinized Flood hero, who had in turn received his knowledge from Enki/Ea,¹³ as well as perhaps his divine mother, Ninsun.¹⁴

In similar fashion, Enmerkar acts as a mediator of divine knowledge which benefits humanity by aiding in the rise of civilization. In the Sumerian myth *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, Enmerkar competes with the Lord of Aratta for supremacy in the region. They engage in a battle of wits in which the Lord of Aratta issues various seemingly impossible challenges for Enmerkar, and in each case, Enmerkar succeeds by receiving divine inspiration from a deity. Thus, for example, when the Lord of Aratta challenges Enmerkar to carry grain from Uruk to Aratta in a net, he receives the solution from the grain goddess, Nidaba, who “open[s] for him her ‘Nidaba’s holy house of understanding.’”¹⁵

By his reception of divine knowledge, Enmerkar is able not only to meet the Lord of Aratta’s challenges, he also invents several new technologies (e.g., writing) along the way. Because of the crucial role divine counsel plays in Enmerkar’s cultural achievements, his accomplishments become, indirectly, the work of the gods in brining about human civilization.

¹² *The Death of Bilgames*, M 57–62 (George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 198–99).

¹³ See *Atrahasis* OBV I.364–67; III.11–35 (Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* [3rd ed.; Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2005], 329, 247–48).

¹⁴ In *The Death of Bilgames*, Enki, following the recounting of Gilgamesh’s great achievements and wisdom, states, “And now we look on Bilgames: despite his mother we cannot show him mercy!” (M 78–79 [George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 199]). In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Ninsun counsels Gilgamesh by her divine wisdom following his dreams portending Enkidu’s arrival, and, like the *apkallus*, Gilgamesh is said to have been granted “broad understanding” by the gods (SBV I.242–98 [George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 9–11]).

¹⁵ *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, lines 324–26 (Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once...: Sumerian Poetry in Translation* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987], 301).

At other times, the gods create civilization directly, either through the birth of the patron deities of aspects of civilization (e.g., agriculture)¹⁶ or by means of the *mes*.¹⁷ In *The Song of the Hoe*, Enlil invents the hoe, first, in order to prepare the ground for sprouting humans,¹⁸ and second, for humans to use in their work of temple-building.¹⁹ Similarly, in *Cattle and Grain* the arts of animal husbandry and agriculture are tied to their patron deities, Lahar and Ashnan.²⁰ In another text, Enki decrees the fates of the cities of Sumer, blessing them and causing civilization to develop.²¹

Batto notes that a number of texts present the earliest humans (i.e., humans prior to the divine bestowal of the gift of civilization) as animal-like. Thus, in *Cattle and Grain*, early humans walk about naked, eat grass like sheep, and drink water from ditches. Both *The Rulers of Lagash* and *The Eridu Genesis* present early humanity as similar to animals in that they slept on straw beds in pens because they did not know how to build houses and also lived at the mercy of the rains because they did not know how to dig canals for irrigation. Batto concludes that Mesopotamian literature depicts the advancement of early humans as their evolution from a low, animal-like state to a higher, “civilized” state by means of gifts from the gods.²²

A further illustration of the role of the gods in the rise of civilization in Sumer is the myth *Inanna and Enki*. In this text, Inanna steals the *mes* (in this case, corresponding to the arts of civilization) from Enki in Eridu and brings them to Uruk, thus transferring

¹⁶ This phenomenon is especially prevalent in Sumerian creation accounts, which often emphasize the importance of agricultural technology by placing the creation of tools prior to and even necessary for the creation of humans (see, for example, “The Song of the Hoe” [COS 1.157]) and by presenting the development of agriculture as a theogony in which the patron deities of various agricultural technologies are born. See “Cattle and Grain” in Samuel N. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology: A Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievement in the Third Millennium B.C.* (rev. ed.; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 72–73.

¹⁷ See “Enki and Inanna” (COS 1.161). See also Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology: A Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievement in the Third Millennium B.C.* (rev. ed.; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 64–68; Bottéro, 238–39.

¹⁸ In Mesopotamian Creation myths, the origin of humans is usually described in one of two ways. The first is that they are fashioned from clay, usually mixed with the blood of a slain god (cf. *Enuma Elish*; *Atrahasis*). The second is that they sprout up from the ground like plants, as is the case here.

¹⁹ COS 1.157.

²⁰ See Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 72–73; Tigay, *Evolution*, 204–05.

²¹ See Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 59–62. See also Bottéro, *Mesopotamia*, 236–37.

²² Batto, “Creation Theology,” 18–22.

civilization to Uruk.²³ The text mentions 94 individual elements of civilization, including:

the craft of the carpenter, the craft of the copper-smith, the art of the scribe, the craft of the smith, the craft of the leather-worker, the craft of the fuller, the craft of the builder, the craft of the mat-weaver, understanding, knowledge, purifying washing rites, the house of the shepherd,...kindling of fire, extinguishing of fire....²⁴

Key in this myth is the fact that it is the divine *mes*, originally bestowed by Enki upon Eridu alone but subsequently transferred to Uruk by Inanna, which give rise to civilization.

What is nearly universal in the Mesopotamian literature, as far as the available texts indicate, is that the source of human civilization is divine, with humans acting primarily as recipients of divine knowledge. Because of its divine origin and the clear benefits which it provides for humans—at least for those favored humans on whom the gods bestow it—civilization is portrayed in an overwhelmingly positive manner in these texts.

THE HUMAN SOURCE OF CIVILIZATION IN GENESIS 1–11

The portrayal of the rise of civilization in Genesis 1–11, on the other hand, is generally negative²⁵ and is devoid of any hint of divine assistance or bestowal of the arts of civilization. A key text in this regard is Gen 4:20–22, in which the descendants of Cain found the guilds of nomadic shepherding, music, and metallurgy. The statements are brief, merely indicating that Jabal was the founder of nomadic shepherding, Jubal was the founder of the art of music,

²³ COS 1.161. See also Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 64–68; Bottéro, *Mesopotamia*, 238–39.

²⁴ COS 1.161:523

²⁵ But see Claus Westermann, who contends that the Hebrew Bible in general, and Genesis 1–11 in particular, has a more *positive* view of human achievements than the bulk of the ancient Near Eastern myths (*Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, [trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984], 60–61). But by this Westermann primarily means that the “progress” in Genesis 1–11 (and Gen 4:20–22 in particular) is *human* progress, whereas the source of civilization in the myths of the ancient Near East is usually divine. Therefore, while the biblical writers have portrayed the origin of civilization as tainted by sin, and indeed, they do not place much emphasis on “progress” at all, the achievements which they do describe are truly *human* achievements.

While I would contend that Westermann’s reading still does not fully recognize the significance of the negative portrayal of civilization in Gen 4:20–22 (and the rest of Genesis 1–11), his observation of the difference in the human-divine element in progress is significant. As the text now stands, there is no divine aid in the development of the arts of civilization in Gen 4:20–22.

and Tubal-cain was the first to work with metals. If one considers the entirety of Genesis 4, one may also add to the list of new developments animal husbandry (v. 2), agriculture (v 2), city-building and urbanism (v 17), and polygamy (v 19).²⁶ Gunkel, following Wellhausen, reads the account as brief fragments of what were originally much fuller mythological narratives and suggests that they may originally have referred to deities,²⁷ but even if this reading is correct for the original myths, the text in its present form has been largely de-mythologized, and the individuals and their accomplishments are completely human.

Further indication of the human origin of civilization in Genesis 1–11 appears in the motif of city-building and urbanism. Interestingly, Mesopotamian myths attribute the origin of the earliest cities to the work of gods (e.g., Marduk’s construction of Babylon) or semi-divine heroes (e.g., Gilgamesh’s building of the walls of Uruk), while Gen 4:17 attributes the first city to Cain, who names it after his first son, Enoch, with no indication of divine assistance.²⁸ Similarly, the building of several key cities in Meso-

²⁶ See John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (2nd ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930), 115.

²⁷ Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 50. Wellhausen argues that the genealogies in Genesis 4 and Genesis 5 refer to the same individuals and were originally identical. See Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, (New York: Meridian, 1957), 308–09; see also E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB 1; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 35–36. If this is the case, then it is important to note that Cain’s genealogy has been distinguished from Seth’s by the insertion of episodes which give the entire list a negative overtone (e.g., Cain’s fratricide, Lamech’s murders). See Skinner, *Genesis*, 115. Since the statements concerning the arts of civilization appear only in the Cainite genealogy, it is likely that their inclusion is for the sake of bringing upon them “guilt by association” with the dark line of Cain. Seth’s genealogy, by contrast, includes a number of statements which give a more positive impression to the whole list (e.g., humans calling on the name of Yahweh, Enoch walking with God). However, Gordan J. Wenham makes a case against seeing the two genealogies as originally identical. See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC, 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 110.

²⁸ Westermann notes that the reading of the Hebrew text seems to indicate that it was actually Enoch who built the city, rather than Cain, until one reaches the phrase **כשם בנו** “according to the name of his son,” which he suggests may originally have read simply **כשמו** “according to his name” (*Genesis 1–11*, 327). He further argues that it would be unusual for Cain to have been both the founder of agriculture and the first city-builder. Such accounts of the development of civilization typically do so by a succession of births in which each generation makes but one new contribution. But this is not always the case, as the *Phoenician History* shows by attributing to Chousor (Kothar) the arts of magic, divination, prophecy, sailing, and fishing (see Albert I. Baumgarten, *The Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos: A Commentary*. [Leiden: Brill, 1981], 143).

potamia, as well as the formation of the world's first empire, is attributed to Nimrod in Gen 10:8–12.

The story of the Tower of Babel in Gen 11:1–9 provides further evidence for the human origin of civilization in the form of city-building. As Theodore Hiebert notes, the story of the Tower of Babel in Gen 11:1–9 is not chiefly concerned with the construction of a tower, but rather with the founding of the city of Babylon.²⁹ The biblical text portrays the entire enterprise as an expression of human *hubris* in the face of the divine command to “fill the earth” (Gen 1:28; 9:1; cf. Gen 11:4), and their efforts are met with direct divine opposition. Here postdiluvian humanity resolves to: 1) build a city and a tower “with its top in the heavens”, and 2) make for themselves a “name”, so that they will not be scattered upon the face of the earth (Gen 11:4). Traditional interpretation has viewed this as an act of prideful defiance of Yahweh, although a number of post-colonial interpreters see the story of Babel as an attack on imperial domination.³⁰ Similarly, Walter Brueggemann reads the story as a “polemic against the growth of urban culture as an expression of pride,” specifically, pride before Yahweh.³¹

Needless to say, the biblical story of Babel does not depict the city of Babylon as a product of divine action, but rather the story appears to be a polemic against the tradition of the divine origin of Babylon represented in the myth *Enuma Elish*. In Gen 11:1–9, there is no divine assistance in the founding of the city, nor does Yahweh (or any other deity) bless or inhabit it, but rather Yahweh's intervention to stop the construction by confusing the languages of humanity indicates direct divine opposition to the endeavor.

Westermann's observations that civilization in Genesis 1–11 is depicted positively insofar as it is 1) actual *human* progress, without divine assistance as in the Mesopotamian myths, and 2) the working out of the divine blessing of Gen 1:28–30 (and later 9:1–7)

Wenham finds it odd that an individual condemned to wander as a nomad would be the founder of city-life, and he suggests that Enoch built the city and named it after *his* son, Irad. Thus, the name of the first city would have been “Irad”, which is very close to “Eridu”, the oldest city and the first cultural center of the world, where Enki/Ea dwelled (*Genesis 1–15*, 111).

²⁹ “The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World's Cultures,” *JBL* 126 (2007), 34–35.

³⁰ See, for example, Christoph Uehlinger, *Weltreich und “eine Rede”*: Eine neue Deutung der sogenannten Turmbauerzählung (Gen 11, 1–9) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 514–58. By way of contrast, Hiebert contends that the account is not about pride and punishment at all, but rather seeks to provide an explanation of the origin of the various cultures of the world (“The Tower of Babel,” 31).

³¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 98.

notwithstanding,³² it is clear that Genesis 1–11 has greatly muted the positive depiction of civilization found in Mesopotamian litera-

³² Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 60–61. Similar to Westermann's is the evaluation of Batto, who reads the Yahwistic account of primeval history as, "the story of a continuously improved creation, which reached its culmination in the final definition of humankind at the conclusion of the flood in Genesis 8." Batto reads the J portions of Genesis 1–11 in tandem in the *Atrabasis* myth as portraits of the attempt of a naïve and inexperienced (and at times bumbling) creator deity to properly define the status and role of humanity. Most of Genesis 2–9 consists of humanity's attempt to attain divinity by breaking free of the loosely and inconsistently established boundaries established by Yahweh. At the same time, Yahweh must contend with humanity in order to force them to accept their divinely appointed role as creatures of the soil, only achieving success in Gen 9:20, when Noah accepts his lot as a "man of the soil" (i.e., a farmer). Batto compares this reading of Genesis 2–9 with Enlil's creation of humans for the purpose of serving the gods (e.g., working the ground, digging canals, feeding the gods) in *Atrabasis*. In both *Atrabasis* and Genesis, "humankind's refusal to accept its servant role, grasping at divinity instead" culminates in the flood and finally the concrete definition of humanity as mortal. It is only with the later Priestly redaction of Genesis 1–11 in the exilic/post-exilic period that Genesis 2–11 becomes the story of "the fall" of humanity from its originally perfect created state in paradise (Batto, "Creation Theology," 26–38).

Batto's readings of both Genesis 1–11 and *Atrabasis* are faulty. Although Batto is correct to point out that the original setting of the creation of humanity in Genesis 2 is a dry, barren wasteland, rather than paradise, it does not follow from this fact that all of the Yahwistic Primeval History is a story of the continued improvement of creation. Batto makes no attempt to account for how the expulsion of humans from the garden (which has by this time truly become paradise) and the cursing of the soil is an "improvement." Neither is there as much similarity between the motives for the deity's sending of the flood in Genesis 6–9 and *Atrabasis* as Batto maintains. As Robert Di Vito points out, the argument that the boundary between the divine and the human and humanity's repeated attempts to achieve divinity are the chief concerns of Genesis 2–11 has been greatly overstated. The primary sin of the first human couple was that they disobeyed God, and the reason for the flood was the wickedness (especially "violence" [חַמַּס]) of humanity—not "the violation of ontologically defined boundaries" ("The Demarcation of Divine and Human Realms in Genesis 2–11," Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins [eds.], *Creation in the Biblical Traditions* [CBQMS, 24; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992], 50). While Di Vito goes too far in his denial of the motif of human/divine boundaries in Genesis 1–11—transgression of the boundary between the human and the divine does seem to be an issue in Genesis 3 and in Gen 6:1–4 (see David L. Peterson, "Genesis 6:1–4, Yahweh and the Organization of the Cosmos," *JOT* 13 [1979], 47–64)—Batto's attempt to see humanity's refusal to accept its role as creatures of the soil and servants of the divine reads far too much into the text, while ignoring much of what is there. Likewise, Batto's contention that humanity's refusal to accept its role as servants of

ture. In the Mesopotamian traditions, civilization arises via divine intervention, either directly in the form of a gift bestowed upon humanity, or indirectly through semi-divine mediators. Moreover, in these mythic texts human progress moves along an upward trajectory, from the earliest stages, in which humans are animal-like and incapable of harnessing the elements of nature for their benefit, to civilized life, in which they enjoy the blessings of divine gifts and a more “god-like” status.³³

In contrast, the developments in human civilization according to Genesis 1–11 occur without any level of divine assistance, and indeed, in some cases (e.g., the construction of Babel and its tower) meet with divine opposition. Moreover, the overall tone of Genesis 3–11 is that of an increasing descent of humanity into sin, and the origins of various aspects of civilization, while not necessarily *inherently* sinful, receive a negative coloring by virtue of the fact that they are placed within the downward spiral of the human race.

Finally, mention must be made of the enigmatic account preserved in Gen 6:1–4. These four brief verses recount the mating of divine beings (בני האלהים) with human women (בנות האדם) and the birth of children who are reckoned as mighty warriors of antiquity (הגברים אשר מעולם). While Gen 6:1–4 says nothing of the rise of human civilization, later expansions of this tradition in *1 En.* 6–11 and *Jub.* 4:15, 21–23; 8:1–4 do include the revelation of some of the arts of civilization by the Heavenly Watchers (= בני אלהים). Much of this material finds parallels in Mesopotamian traditions, raising the possibility that Gen 6:1–4, or perhaps the myth which lies behind the text in its present form, included the divine instruction motif.³⁴ Considering that Gen 6:1–4, along with Gen 4:17–22, is

the gods led to the flood in *Atrahasis* is puzzling. Although it is true that the Igigi gods protest against their subjection to labor prior to the creation of humans, there is no hint of such refusal on the part of humanity in the text, and the reason for the flood is not the attempt of humans to obtain divinity, but rather their noisiness (see *Atrahasis*, I.352–59). There is also no indication that humans sought to obtain divinity, not even Atrahasis, to whom the *gods* decide to grant immortality after the flood.

³³ Batto notes the transformation of Enkidu from his earlier wild, animal-like status as an analog to the civilization of humans. Enkidu’s reception of wisdom results in both the loss of his relationship with the animals and Shamhat’s observation that “you have become like a god” (“Creation Theology, 20–21).

³⁴ See especially Kvanvig’s comparison of Gen 6:1–4 and *1 En.* 6–11 to the *apkallū* tradition, *Atrahasis*, and the *Adapa* myth (*Roots of Apocalyptic*, 270–342, esp. 313–18). Paul D. Hanson also sees evidence of the appropriation of ancient Near Eastern traditions concerning euhemeristic culture heroes, such as Gilgamesh, in *1 En.* 6–11 (“Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11,” *JBL* 96 [1977], 226–33; see also David P. Melvin, “The Gilgamesh Traditions and the Pre-History of Genesis 6:1–4,” *PRSt* [forthcoming]). A number of scholars have noted that Gen 6:1–4 appears to be an abridgment of a fuller myth

the place where one would most expect to find evidence of divine mediation of civilization, the absence of such mediation is all the more striking. If the author of Gen 6:1–4 drew upon an early (Mesopotamian?) myth which included something akin to the instruction motif which appears in *1 En.* 6–11, yet did not include this element, there must have been a reason for this omission.³⁵ While one must remain open to the possibility that Gen 6:1–4 alludes to a larger tradition which included divine instruction, the absence of this motif from the final form of Gen 6:1–4, especially in light of its (re)appearance in *1 En.* 6–11, actually underscores the total shift away from divine mediation of culture in Genesis 1–11.

THE EDEN STORY AND THE DEMYTHOLOGIZATION OF THE RISE OF CIVILIZATION

I would now like to propose that the conspicuous absence of divine mediation of civilization from Genesis 1–11, in light of its prominence in Mesopotamian literature, may be explained with reference to the tradition of the origin of evil found in Genesis 3. Here the reception of forbidden knowledge by the first human couple leads not only to their becoming “god-like” but also to their fall into a corrupt, sinful state and expulsion from paradise. Genesis 4–11 then portrays the long-term consequences of the at least partially-successful attempt by Adam and Eve to obtain divinity by procuring this knowledge. Included among these consequences are not only obvious examples of sin (murder, violence, etc.) but also the rise of civilization. The implication is that civilization too is an outgrowth of the forbidden knowledge obtained by Adam and Eve in Genesis 3.

The dialogue between the woman and the serpent, her eating of the fruit, and her giving of the fruit to her husband turn upon two primary points. First, the fruit of the tree is associated with knowledge of some sort. Second, the serpent responds to the woman’s statement that Yahweh has forbidden them to eat from

(e.g., Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 317; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 59). Yet even here, caution is due, as David L. Petersen points out that there is nothing incomprehensible about the text as it stands and that “these verses do contain a complete plot,” (“Genesis 6:1–4, Yahweh and the Organization of the Cosmos,” *JSTOT* 13 [1979], 47–64; citation from p. 48).

³⁵ Ronald Hendel notes that “The Yahwist retained the story in his composition, yet declined to present it in a full narrative form,” (“Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4,” *JBL* 106 [1987], 14). It is, of course, possible that Gen 6:1–4, perhaps as part of a larger “Yahwist” composition, did originally include the instruction motif, and that the seeming awkwardness and incompleteness of the present text to many scholars is the result of its removal during later editing or transmission. Yet without textual evidence, it is impossible to conclusively arrive at a reconstruction of a fuller original text.

the tree in the center of the garden by saying that if she eats of the fruit of this tree, she will become like a god, which the woman presumably desires since she decides to eat the fruit. Thus, there is an implicit connection between knowledge and divinity in Genesis 3.

A number of possible understandings of the “knowledge” (השכיל) which results from eating the fruit present themselves.³⁶ Gunkel understands the “knowledge” to be primarily, though not exclusively, sexual awareness. Thus, before eating the fruit, the primeval couple is not aware of their nakedness, suggesting that they likewise did not engage in sexual intercourse prior to this moment, and may possibly have been unaware of the difference between their sexes.³⁷ The significance of such a motif in the Paradise episode would suggest that humanity’s attainment of this “knowledge” forms a necessary step in their becoming fully human (cf. the “humanizing” of Enkidu in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*).³⁸

While the awareness of nudity, making of clothing, and sexual activity which follow the eating of the fruit do support this interpretation, a number of other elements weigh against it. The objects טוב and רע in Gen 3:5 make little sense in relation to sexual awareness, even if one understands them (correctly) not as moral terms but as referring to that which is helpful or harmful for humanity. There is nothing else which suggests that human reproduction is inherently negative in Genesis 1–11, and indeed, it is explicitly commanded in Gen 1:28 and 9:1, 7.³⁹

Wellhausen understands “good and evil” as a comprehensive term indicating that it is knowledge without bounds. Thus, “knowledge of good and evil” refers to knowledge in general, and the secret knowledge of the workings of nature, the possession of which leads to the development of civilization, in particular.⁴⁰ “Knowledge” in Gen 3:1–7 would correspond roughly to the “instruction” in the arts of civilization in the Mesopotamian *apkā-*

³⁶ For a survey of the various interpretations, see Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 242–45.

³⁷ Gunkel, *Genesis*, 14–15. So also Speiser, *Genesis*, 26–27; Jarich Oosten, “The Origins of Society in the Creation Myths of Genesis: An Anthropological Perspective,” *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 52 (1998), 116–17.

³⁸ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, SBV I.197–202 (George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 8).

³⁹ While Gen 1 and 9:1–17 are both P texts, Genesis 2–3 belongs to JE according to the classical Documentary hypothesis, and thus it is possible that they had different views on sexuality and reproduction, the positive view of human fruitfulness in the final form of Genesis 1–11 rules out Gunkel’s interpretation for the present form of the Paradise episode in its literary context.

⁴⁰ *Prolegomena*, 302. A number of scholars have followed Wellhausen’s interpretation, with minor variations (e.g., Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 241–48; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 63–64).

lu/culture hero traditions. Wellhausen also notes that progression in civilization correlates with regression in the fear of God in Gen 1–11, especially in the JE material, giving the entire primeval history a “distinctive gloomy colouring.”⁴¹

Wellhausen’s view is appealing, but not without significant difficulties. As Gunkel notes, Gen 3:1–7 says nothing explicit about civilization.⁴² Reading טוב ורע as a merism is probably correct,⁴³ but to go beyond understanding this “knowledge” as knowledge in general and connect it with “secret knowledge” of the arts of civilization in such a direct fashion reaches beyond the evidence of the text. Skinner attempts to synthesize the interpretations of Wellhausen and Gunkel by viewing primal humanity as existing in a state of “childlike innocence and purity,” so that the acquisition of “knowledge” corresponds to a maturing and loss of innocence, which would include both sexual awareness and civilizing knowledge.⁴⁴

What is key for understanding “knowledge” in Gen 3:1–7 is that it is explicitly connected with divinity, which leads to the second point regarding this passage. The result of obtaining the knowledge contained in the fruit is that one becomes “like a god.” Thus, the “knowledge” is “divine knowledge”, i.e., the knowledge that is naturally possessed only by gods. This “divine knowledge” would certainly include sexual awareness and the arts of civilization, but it ultimately transcends both. Thus, Wellhausen is correct in understanding “good and evil” as a comprehensive term. He is also correct in connecting it with civilization, although it would be more accurate to say that civilization arises as a *result* of possessing divine knowledge, rather than being the essence of divine knowledge itself.

Knowledge was often associated with divinity in the ancient Near East. I have already noted semi-divine transmitters of divine knowledge in Mesopotamia, the *apkallus*. The name of the Flood hero Atrahasis means “the most wise,” and he is the privileged human recipient of secret knowledge of the decisions of the divine council by revelation from Ea.⁴⁵ Moreover, the life-saving knowledge he receives ultimately leads to his being granted divinity and immortality after the Flood.⁴⁶ Similarly, when considering whether

⁴¹ *Prolegomena*, 302–03, 310.

⁴² *Genesis*, 14–15.

⁴³ See the use of טוב and רע in Gen 31:24, 29 and Isa 45:7.

⁴⁴ Skinner, *Genesis*, 96–97. One should note that Gunkel does not maintain that Gen 3:1–7 refers only to sexual awareness, but rather that sexual awareness is the explicit example given in the text of the *kind* of knowledge which results from eating the fruit.

⁴⁵ See Brian E. Colless, “Divine Education,” *Numen* 17 (1970), 124.

⁴⁶ See the version of the *Atrahasis* epic from Ugarit, which reads “I am Atrahasis, I was living in the temple of Ea, my lord, and I knew everything. I knew the counsel of the great gods, I knew of their oath, though they would not reveal it to me. He repeated their words to the wall, ‘Wall,

to grant immortality to Gilgamesh, Enlil notes his recovery of antediluvian knowledge, specifically such arts of civilization as the “rites of hand-washing and mouth-washing,” from his meeting with Ziusudra (= Atrahasis).⁴⁷ Although he does not receive immortality, Enlil affirms Gilgamesh’s divine status and assures him that he will become a chief deity of the Underworld.

Thus, there is a well-established background for the association of knowledge with divinity in Gen 3:1–7. The first humans, by eating the forbidden fruit, have attempted to become divine by appropriating divine knowledge. This is an act of defiance which results in their expulsion from paradise, but Yahweh’s confession to the divine council in Gen 3:22 that the humans “have become like one of us, knowing good and evil” indicates that their attempt has been to some extent successful.⁴⁸

By placing humanity’s reception of the divine knowledge which leads to civilization as humanity’s first act of sin in the Eden story, Genesis 1–11 has removed the need for divine mediators. Humanity has already accessed divine knowledge without the help of divine mediators (unless one considers the serpent a divine mediator), and there is no longer any role for them.

CONCLUSION

The elimination of divine beings by transferring their roles to other beings (i.e., convergence) has been noted as a key component in the development of monotheism. The transfer of the attributes and roles of other deities to Yahweh during the First Temple period set the stage for the elimination of those deities at the end of that period and into the exilic and post-exilic periods.⁴⁹ It would seem that in its final form Genesis 1–11 has performed a similar move with regard to divine mediators. They have been eliminated by the transfer of their roles, not to Yahweh, but to humans. The result is that the cultural achievements in Genesis 4–11 are *human* achievements, without divine intervention, although they are ultimately the result of humanity’s reception of divine knowledge. At the same time, by associating divine knowledge with the sin in Eden, Genesis 1–11 negatively portrays the civilization which arises as a result of that knowledge.

hear [...] Life like the gods [you will] indeed [possess]” (*obv.* 6–12, *rev.* 4 [Foster, *Before the Muses*, 1:185]).

⁴⁷ *The Death of Bilgames*, M 49–62 (George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 198–99). See also Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Texts* (2 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1:98.

⁴⁸ Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 248, 251–52.

⁴⁹ Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 145–60.