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Making a Case for a Diasporic Location for Qohelet through Persian Loanwords[1]

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INTRODUCTION

Language signifies various influences, and for the book of Ecclesiastes, certain words may also suggest diasporic, migrant, and foreign persuasions. In particular, Persian loanwords which were used in a particular time might suggest a *terminus ante quem* of approximately the fifth century BCE.[2]

In this essay, I will highlight the two widely recognized Persian loanwords in Ecclesiastes, פרדסים "parks" (2:5) and פתגם "decree" (8:11),[3] which have mostly been taken to indicate the likely dating of the book, to discuss instead the possible

The dating of the writing of many Old Testament books is a complicated endeavor, and it is difficult to know when, and where, the book of Ecclesiastes was written. But the evidence of certain Persian loanwords in the text of this book lends credence to its being written in Persia in the fifth century BCE.

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[1] This is a shortened and lightly edited version of a longer chapter in my forthcoming monograph titled *Maota Tau Ave: Towards an Australian-Samoan Diasporic Understanding of Wisdom in Ecclesiastes* (SBL, 2023/2024).

[2] Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18C (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 13–14.

[3] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 12, 20.

implications of diasporic social conditions. I will do so in discussion with other occurrences within the Hebrew Bible. To draw further implications for a diasporic location, the conversation will also lead to a hermeneutical inquiry using the Samoan concept of *Maota Tau Ave* ("the house that is carried") as a framework for discussing these terms, in order to discern how Qohelet's use of these foreign words implies the carrying of his own *maota* in the diaspora.

Dating and ***Sitz im Leben***

The existence of Persian loanwords is perhaps the most decisive factor for most scholars in dating Ecclesiastes to the postexilic period.[4] When considering the range of linguistic issues, there are examples such as Aramaisms as well as economic and legal terms used during the Persian Empire which point toward the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.[5] However, for this essay, I wish to focus on the two words פרדסים "parks" (2:5) and פתגם "decree" (8:11) because in addition to their late dating of "no earlier than the mid-fifth century B.C.E. . . . there are no clear examples of Persian loanwords in the Hebrew Bible prior to that time."[6]

A postexilic dating on the basis of language, however, has been met with opposition from other scholars, such as Daniel C. Fredericks, who believes that the book was the original work of King Solomon but perhaps revised by a later scribe.[7] As a result, Fredericks questions the use of linguistic arguments to establish a late date for Ecclesiastes.[8] Similarly, Tremper Longman argues that "we cannot rule out linguistic updating."[9] Ian Young has examined various linguistic factors usually considered indicative of a late date and finds that the bulk of Qohelet's language could plausibly be preexilic.[10] Further, Martin Shields believes dating based on language alone is insufficient and seeks other factors such as historical references to help determine dating and Qohelet's *sitz im leben*.[11]

Acknowledging the possibility of linguistic updating, my contribution to this discussion extends the view of Seow of a late dating of Ecclesiastes through the Persian loanwords. These words also occur in other Hebrew Bible texts, which I will engage in conversation. Ironically, this may conform to Shields's premise of seeking “historical” references in other parts of the Hebrew Bible as further indication of a diasporic setting.

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[4] Jimyung Kim, *Reanimating Qohelet's Contradictory Voices: Studies of Open-Ended Discourse on Wisdom in Ecclesiastes* (Boston: Brill, 2018), 51.

[5] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 20.

[6] Seow, 37.

[7] Daniel C. Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language: Re-evaluating Its Nature and Date* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1988), 32.

[8] Fredericks, 262.

[9] Tremper Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 10.

[10] Ian Young, *Diversity in Pre-exilic Hebrew* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 148–57; Ian Young, "Late Biblical Hebrew and Hebrew Inscriptions," in *Biblical Hebrew: Chronology and Typology*, ed. Ian Young. JSOTSup 369 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 276–311; Young, "Concluding Reflections," 312–17.

[11] Martin A. Shields, *The End of Wisdom: A Reppraisal of the Historical and Canonical Function of Ecclesiastes* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 23–24.

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פרדסים Parks

In the ensuing sections, the discussion will look at Song of Songs 4:13 and Nehemiah 2:8 and how פרדסים (פרדס) is used. References to gardens occur regularly throughout the Hebrew Bible, but these two texts, in addition to Ecclesiastes 2:5, use the Persian loanword to denote gardens and forests. The aim of this discussion, therefore, is to engage with other nuances which may enlighten our understanding of the term in Ecclesiastes.

i. Ecclesiastes 2:5

The word פרדסים appears in 2:5:

עשׂיתי לי גנות ופרדסים ונטעתי בהם עץ כל־פרי

I made for myself gardens and parks and planted in them trees of all fruits.[12]

The word פרדסים is often translated as “parks,” and Seow, among others, notes that “the term is used of an enclosed park or grove,”[13] which implies that Qohelet emulates a king who “acts in grand style, filling his days by acquiring houses, vineyards, gardens, parks, pools, slaves and cattle, silver and gold, servants of all kinds, and concubines (vv. 4–8).”[14] Further, James Crenshaw highlights the grand style of Qohelet’s self-made wealth, stating that “the word for parks (*pardēsîm*) is a Persian loanword; Xenophon uses the Greek form *paradeisos* with reference to gardens belonging to Persian kings and aristocracy.”[15] Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones asserts that

> royal parks were an Empire in miniature and flora and fauna from every area of the king’s dominion were resettled and replanted within their confines. This was a longstanding Near Eastern tradition and Egyptian

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[12] My translation.

[13] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 128. Also see: James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 79.

[14] W. Sibley Towner, “The Book of Ecclesiastes,” in *NIB 5*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 297.

[15] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 79.

> pharaohs and Mesopotamian kings had boasted of cultivating their gardens with foreign plants, wherein they flourished.[16]

Intriguingly, the Greek form of the word forms a bridge to the English "paradise," adding a connotation of splendor.[17] This sense of "paradise," as Graham Ogden and Lynell Zogbo suggest, "recalls the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2,"[18] although the Persian word is not used in Genesis. Hulisani Ramantswana also stresses this image, where there is "peaceful coexistence of humanity and animals" in Isaiah 11:6–9 and 65:25.[19] The vision resonates with the exclusive Garden of Eden, which imagines "a world outside the Persian Empire in which [people] would be free of the demands and dominance of the imperial power, both they and the animals."[20]

The word פרדסים clarifies the value of the garden in 2:5. Ogden and Zogbo state that "in many languages the word 'garden' requires some modifying word to indicate what type of garden it was," although they rely on their translation of the word as "orchard" or "garden of fruit trees" to overcome that problem.[21] However, the paradisiac undertones of the word are hard to ignore as Crenshaw argues that "these gardens were both aesthetic and practical, providing pleasant shade and delicious food. The parks often were a refuge in which to find a convenient source of wild meat, and they were valued for royal sport."[22] Thus, פרדסים underscores Qohelet's wealth but also his private and enclosed way of living, in accordance with the extravagant lifestyle of the Persian kings and aristocracy. Llewellyn-Jones comments:

> Building and planting projects, the accumulation of animals, slaves, and women, and the display of conspicuous leisure through hunting, feasting, drinking, and celebrating had a major part to play in defining and consolidating royal identity.[23]

The allusion to the Persian royal garden resonates well with this idea of Qohelet playing the role of king, secluding himself from the rest of society, within his gardens (2:4) and parks (2:5).

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[16] Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *King and Court in Ancient Persia 559 to 331 BCE* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 93.

[17] Christopher Tuplin, *Achaemenid Studies*, Historia Einzelschriften 99 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996), 81. Also see Towner, "Ecclesiastes," 297, fn. 47.

[18] Graham S. Ogden and Lynell Zogbo, *A Handbook on Ecclesiastes* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), 56.

[19] Hulisani Ramantswana, "Not Free While Nature Remains Colonised: A Decolonial Reading of Isaiah 11:6–9," *OTE* 28, no. 3 (2015): 820.

[20] Ramantswana argues that the royal parks were a colonial space imposed over human bodies, but also over wild animals who were killed for the enjoyment of the royals. "Not Free," 822.

[21] Ogden and Zogbo, *A Handbook on Ecclesiastes*, 56.

[22] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 79. Also see an extensive discussion by Christopher Tuplin on the purpose and use of parks and gardens in the Achaemenid Empire in Tuplin, *Achaemenid Studies*, 80–131.

[23] Llewellyn-Jones, *King and Court*, 124.

ii. Song of Songs 4:13

The blissful connotations alluded to in Ecclesiastes are clear in the Song of Songs 4:13, where the word פרדס is associated with the theme of pleasure in the book.[24] J. Cheryl Exum argues that "the private garden becomes a private pleasure garden (*pardēs*)."[25] The pleasure associated with the garden is made even more evident by the fact that it is a פרדס of רמונים "pomegranates." The pomegranate is a regular carnal metaphor in the Song of Songs, associated with sexuality and fertility.[26]

The image of the פרדס thus implies a different nuance to that of Ecclesiastes. Indeed, the language of love and pleasure could not have been far from the minds of the readers of Qohelet:

> Kings and nobles were united by the refinements of court arts, the thrill of the chase, and the delights of the banqueting table, while codes of hierarchy and the demands of self-worth simultaneously pressurised courtiers to demand of one another recognition of the intimate favour they enjoyed with the king as individuals. At the Achaemenid court pleasure had a political significance.[27]

Song of Songs may not be a political book, but the implications for a political understanding can be drawn out here. The planting of a פרדס of pomegranates is not only a sexual metaphor, but it could also be encoded with political symbolism when an exotic garden symbolized a ruler's dominion over a huge territory.[28] For the Song of Songs, the luxury and sexual pleasure are contained within the contours of its political atmosphere.

iii. Nehemiah 2:8

The political nature of the פרדס "forest" is clear in Nehemiah 2:8, which is set in the Persian context, before Nehemiah returns to the land. In contrast to Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, the פרדס in Nehemiah has official status, with an individual with the Jewish name "Asaph" named as its keeper. The purpose of the פרדס is evidently different to what is found in Song of Songs, however, and the formal capacity indicated in Nehemiah may underline a similar understanding of the פרדסים in Ecclesiastes. Not only were the פרדסים a symbol of political power, but as officially managed resources, they also provided the material backbone to political and religious building projects.

Ramantswana notes that "the expansion of the [Persian] empire over other territories meant that those territories had to pay tribute and offer the natural riches of their lands to the empire."[29] As a result, Persian kings would establish royal parks, and in the biblical text, "two Persian kings are displayed as having owned royal gardens, Xerxes (Esth 1:5; 7:7) and Artaxerxes (Neh 2:8)."[30]

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[24] Ogden and Zogbo, *A Handbook on the Song of Songs* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), 132.

[25] J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 176.

[26] Exum, 177.

[27] Llewellyn-Jones, *King and Court*, 124.

[28] Llewellyn-Jones, 93.

In Nehemiah 2:8, the king's forest was utilized for its timber. Intriguingly, in addition to the exploitation of trees for timber, the king's forest also sees other forms of exploitation.[31] We see this reflected in the complaint in Nehemiah 9:36–37, where "they rule over our bodies and our cattle (בהמה) as they please."[32] Accordingly, Isaiah 65:17–25 "envisions a future in which human liberty is intertwined with animal liberty."[33]

The location of the king's forest is uncertain, and it would be easy to assume a location such as Lebanon, known for its timber (see, e.g., Ezra 3:7).[34] Parks and forests of the like were "an essential part of Achaemenid cultural expression and throughout the Empire these carefully cultivated gardens, forests, and estates were living symbols of Persian dominance."[35] One could therefore make a case for the timber to have been brought from any one of the forests from around the Persian Empire. In addition to the textual allusion to a diasporic location for these forests, archaeological evidence strongly supports a diasporic setting, as evidence has been uncovered of Achaemenid gardens at Pasargade, Persepolis, Susa, and other locations throughout the Persian Empire.[36] We could argue that Qohelet, as a king-like figure, planted his פרדסים according to the Persian imperial framework, far from the land of Israel.

iv. Summary

The Persian term פרדסים in Ecclesiastes, when considered in light of other uses of the term in the Hebrew Bible, denotes wealth and political connotations. From the outset, it seems that Qohelet is frustrated with his park, and in 2:18–23 he comes to lament the הבל "vanity" or "futility" of his toil. He does not want his "park" or "garden" to be wasted in the hands of those who come after him (2:18). Significantly, he does not have confidence that his wealth will be passed down to royal successors. This is surely one indicator that he is not actually a king in his own homeland.

As already suggested, the royal and political connotations of פרדס as highlighted in Nehemiah may be indicative of high office in a diasporic context. Llewellyn-Jones argues that

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[29] Ramantswana, "Not Free," 820.

[30] Ramantswana, 820.

[31] Ramantswana, 820.

[32] Ramantswana, 820. Ramantswana quotes from the NIV. Italics are his for emphasis.

[33] Ramantswana, 820.

[34] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary*, First ed., OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 216.

[35] Llewellyn-Jones, *King and Court*, 92.

[36] Llewellyn-Jones, 93.

> an effective ruler was not just a warrior and sportsman but a gardener king too, a cultivator who personally tended to agricultural matters to ensure the prosperity of his realm and in this light the Great King ordered his satraps to create and maintain *paradeisoi* in their provinces (Xenophon, Cyropaedia 8.6.12).[37]

The park hence becomes a crucial element in Qohelet's role-playing as the king, as he mimics a royal lifestyle in line with the Solomonic persona he adopts in the book.[38]

On the other hand, establishing his *paradeisoi* did not lead to pleasure (2:1). He considers his toiling (2:10–11) as vanity, but the details as to why exactly remain ambiguous. Ramantswana's reflections on the colonial character of royal parks פרדסים offer a promising line of interpretation. Perhaps the reason why Qohelet finds pleasure to be useless lies in the idea that the royal parks are glaring signs of oppression and violence. It could well be that Qohelet's disgruntlement is a rejection of the imperial violence that threatens his own פרדסים.

פתגם Decree

Continuing on from the previous section, we turn our discussion to the second Persian loanword: פתגם "decree." Following the same format, I will compare the usage of the word in Ecclesiastes 8:11 with other late texts that use the same word—in Esther, Daniel, and Ezra—in order to shed further light on Qohelet. Similar to the previous section, this discussion will also consider implications for viewing Qohelet from a diasporic perspective through his use of Persian loanwords.

Following the same format, I will compare the usage of the word in Ecclesiastes 8:11 with other late texts that use the same word—in Esther, Daniel, and Ezra—in order to shed further light on Qohelet. Similar to the previous section, this discussion will also consider implications for viewing Qohelet from a diasporic perspective through his use of Persian loanwords.

i. Ecclesiastes 8:11

There appears another Persian loanword in 8:11. Let us consider this verse:

אשר אין־נעשׂה פתגם מעשׂה הרעה מהרה על־כן מלא לב בני־האדם בהם לעשׂוֹת רע

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[37] Llewellyn-Jones, 94.

[38] Cf. Peter Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 44.

> Because sentence for the evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are fully set to do evil.

In Ecclesiastes the word פתגם is often implied to be divine judgment whereas its other appearances in other late texts, such as Ezra 4:19 and Esther 1:20, refer to royal decrees.[39] This is intriguing because the Hebrew equivalent משׁפים also appears in late texts, such as Ezekiel (23:45) and Jeremiah (26:11, 16; 39:5; 52:9). This raises the question of whether there was an agenda in choosing a Persian loanword in favor of a native word.

Qohelet's frustration in this verse seems to be aligned with the Persian פתגם as opposed to the Jewish משׁפים. Interestingly, in the decree by Cyrus to return to the land in Ezra 1:1, the word used for "decree" (NRSV) is מכתב, yet when the penalty clause is introduced for those who fail to abide by the edict in 6:11, the word פתגם is used. It seems that פתגם is nuanced with undertones of punishment in Ezra. By implication, one could claim that Qohelet's critique of the delay in punishment is directed toward Persian authorities. Indeed, Qohelet complains that the פתגם is not executed quickly against the wicked. The use of פתגם reflects a context where Persian modes of judgment are at play. Such speculation may be supported by considering other texts where the term appears.

ii. Esther 1:20

In the book of Esther, the word פתגם refers to the decree made by King Ahasuerus concerning the banishment of Queen Vashti. In the decree, Vashti is ordered never to appear before the king and that a suitable replacement is to be found from within the rest of the kingdom. There are at least two interesting things about this decree; first, the פתגם is to be written and then made public to the kingdom as an example to the men but also a caution to their wives. Second, the פתגם "introduces a concept that will prove important later in the story: the irrevocability of Persian law."[40]

The gravity of the decree reflects a kind of patriarchal hysteria:

> The response of Memucan, one of the advisers, seems out of proportion to the crime. What has been a matter of personal disobedience suddenly becomes an affair of state, affecting all husbands and wives and threatening the stability of the kingdom.[41]

For such a small matter, intriguingly, there is no delay in judgment; rather, there is affirmation by the king and immediate action by the king's official Memucan to enact the decree. There may be implications for reading Qohelet's frustration in Ecclesiastes 8:11. While small matters are receiving swift judgments, graver matters of injustice that require immediate action are being delayed.

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[39] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 286; Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 18 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1983), 139.

[40] Sidnie White Crawford, "The Book of Esther," in *NIB* 3, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 883.

[41] Crawford, 882.

Ironically, the way Qohelet looks for punishment in 8:11 casts him as a hopeless figure in contrast to the scheming Memucan. In his role as the king's adviser, Memucan is seen as a manipulator who convinces the king to create a new law in response to Vashti's rebellion. Indeed, "without the king's realizing it, a new lawmaker has been introduced to the kingdom: the adviser has become the lawmaker!"[42] At the same time, Memucan is seen "as typical of those who delight to get other people into trouble, and bring destruction upon innocent lives."[43] Qohelet, on the other hand, hopes for a similar פתגם to be served against his antagonists, but is left disappointed. He cannot convince those in power, and while he hopes for punishment against the wicked, he is left in despair. For Qohelet, the פתגם presents a cruel irony. It is not a decree which brings the expected haste of chastisement and thus restoring of order to the court of Ahasuerus, but instead becomes an ironic rejection of Qohelet's moral calculation.

iii. Daniel 3:16

The use of פתגם in Daniel is different to Ecclesiastes and Esther in that the loanword arises in an Aramaic text. Such an appearance is not unusual, as Seow notes that "it is attested in Aramaic documents from Elephantine . . . as well as from North Saqqara."[44] The word פתגם appears in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's response to Nebuchadnezzar's perceived offer of reprieve:

נבוכדנצר לא־חשחין אנחנה על־דנה פתגם להתבותך

Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present an answer concerning this matter.[45]

In Daniel 3:16, the פתגם relates to a serious matter: the three young Israelite men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, resist worshipping Nebuchadnezzar. The issue at hand is treason, yet the sentence still seems disproportionate when the furnace is to be heated seven times its usual rate (3:19).

In all these texts, the measure of judgment seems inappropriate. There is also an ironic similarity to Qohelet in that the פתגם leads to the righteous receiving the sentence of the wicked (cf. Eccl 8:14). Perhaps the term פתגם reminds Qohelet of this very fact, that what is supposed to provide justice for the righteous actually proves fatal. Where he sees the wicked not receiving their just deserts, he also witnesses the righteous receiving the same פתגם as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

It is interesting to note that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have perceived the futility in trying to seek a reprieve, and instead declare no need for an answer. Instead, they show faith in God's deliverance. Ironically, Qohelet shows a similar skepticism toward the פתגם, but does not express the same faith in deliverance as that of the three Jewish youths. While the three youths show no interest in a pardon from their sentence, Qohelet is vexed by the lack of justice.

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[42] Jonathan Grossman, *Esther: The Outer Narrative and the Hidden Reading*, Siphrut 6: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 52.

[43] Joyce G. Baldwin, *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 12 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), 62.

[44] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 286.

[45] My translation.

iv. Ezra 6:11

The use of פתגם in Ezra refers to official statements by the king and official documents (4:17; 5:7, 11; 6:11). Like the פתגם in Daniel, there are also significant consequences to those who fail to adhere, here including the punishment of impalement. In Ezra 6:11, Joseph Blenkinsopp notes that "the affixing of penalties or curses to be incurred by anyone tampering with an official document (decree, law, treaty) was routine in the ancient Near East," and that "impaling was a Persian practice . . . inherited from the Assyrians . . . generally reserved for the most serious crimes, especially sedition and the violation of treaty oaths."[46] With the horror of this sentencing appearing in Ezra, it would be difficult for ancient readers of Ecclesiastes not to imagine such trepidation when coming across the word פתגם.

Significantly, the extremity of sentencing associated with פתגם is clearly linked with offenses that jeopardize treaty oaths which could also be viewed as treasonous from Ezra's point of view. One may ask the question as to whose interests the decree serves. Lester Grabbe writes:

> Ezra 6:11–12 surprising[ly] states a harsh penalty for anyone who attempts to set aside the royal order. Why would the Persian emperor feel the need to make such a statement? How likely is it that his order would be challenged in the first place? Furthermore, how likely would it be that the king would be so solicitous on behalf of the Jews to set such a fierce threat to any possible opposition? It is suspiciously like what the Jews would want the king to say.[47]

Grabbe's line of query is important as it points to agendas in "scribal updating" which produce documents that are "filled with elements that look as if they come not from the Persian chancellory but from a Jewish propagandist."[48]

However, Qohelet is not so confident that Jewish interests can be served by manipulating the king's decrees. He witnesses extreme offenses left unpunished. Qohelet witnesses a situation where the sentence is delayed and points to a failed aspiration for the Jews: the punishment of the wicked. The harsh penalty implied by the Persian פתגם in Ezra fails to take place. As a result, the wicked are not fazed by imperial threats and continue in their wicked ways, as "the human heart is fully set to do evil" (Eccl 8:11 NRSV). Accordingly, the righteous continue to suffer.

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[46] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 127–28.

[47] Lester L. Grabbe, "The 'Persian Documents' in the Book of Ezra: Are They Authentic?" in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 549–50.

[48] Grabbe, 551.

v. Summary

In sum, there is obviously some ambiguity in the use of פתגם by Qohelet. By bringing a linguistic focus to this discussion, we could perceive different ideas of judgment through the word פתגם, particularly notions that betray political motifs which seek to uphold imperial interests. As a result, the sentences that stem from the issuing of such decrees seem to be discordant.

By considering these nuances of פתגם, the word choice in Ecclesiastes 8:14 allows us to envisage Qohelet's mindset in this context. Much to Qohelet's exasperation, the expected outcome of פתגם does not follow, and he is left to lament the הבל of his predicament. Qohelet's dilemma is best read in the context of diaspora, where he is an outsider.

Conclusion

Seow's argument that the Persian loanwords point to a dating of the Persian period is convincing, "for there are no clear examples of Persian loanwords in the Hebrew Bible prior to that time."[49] The other texts in the Hebrew Bible in conversation with Ecclesiastes attest to this later dating. For the purposes of this essay, however, the conversation takes greater interest in the social conditions as alluded to by the language. As argued above, I find that these Persian loanwords articulate a diasporic setting.

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Intriguingly, the two Persian loanwords which have framed this discussion might appear to be a little more than "scribal updating." For Ezra, as Grabbe suggests, the scribe's hand may prove to be influential in some texts, where even minor changes would lead to the document saying something different than the original.[50] One might imagine the same for Qohelet: What could be Qohelet's agenda in the use of these Persian loanwords?

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[49] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 37.

[50] Grabbe, "The 'Persian Documents'," 561–63.

Here, some further dialogue with Ian Young's argument about the language of Qohelet will be helpful. He argues that Qohelet had consciously written in a nonstandard dialect in order to express his nontraditional message.[51] Intriguingly, Young poses the question, "If preexilic authors could occasionally choose to use LBH forms, why could a preexilic author not choose to write in a style with a heavier than normal concentration of LBH features?"[52] After these deliberations, Young suggests a preexilic setting for Qohelet and contends that the language of biblical texts was updated through scribal transmission.[53]

However, I propose an alternative suggestion to Young's conclusion concerning dating and setting. Rather than old material being updated later by scribes, it seems more likely that scribes were archaizing to preserve sacred language. One might think analogously to how the archaic language of worship is preserved to maintain sanctity. If Young believes the language reflects classical Hebrew used in preexilic times, we can agree that archaizing scribes get the classical Hebrew right, at least for the most part! But then in the use of Persian loanwords, they betray their social and historical setting to particular effect—while reflecting on a "successful" migrant within the Persian Empire.

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[51] Ian Young, *Diversity in Pre-exilic Hebrew* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 155.

[52] Ian Young, Robert Rezetko, and Martin Ehrensvärd, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts*, vol. 1: *An Introduction to Approaches and Problems* (London: Routledge, 2014), 168; Young, *Diversity*, 140–57.

[53] Also, the idea that Persian words entering Hebrew linguistics could only have occurred during the Persian era or later is doubtful; rather, it could be explained by interactions with Iranians in the late eighth century BCE.