

**ROYAL APOLOGETIC IN THE  
ANCIENT NEAR EAST**

SBL Press



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ROYAL APOLOGETIC IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

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ANCIENT NEAR EAST

*by*  
Andrew Knapp

SBL Press

Atlanta, Georgia  
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# ROYAL APOLOGETIC IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

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For my parents, John and Karen

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Who shall tell what may be the effect of writing? If it happens to have been cut in stone, though it lie face down-most for ages on a forsaken beach, or “rest quietly under the drums and tramlings of many conquests,” it may end by letting us into the secret of usurpations and other scandals gossiped about long empires ago:—this world being apparently a huge whispering-gallery. Such conditions are often minutely represented in our petty lifetimes. As the stone which has been kicked by generations of clowns may come by curious little links of effect under the eyes of a scholar, through whose labors it may at last fix the date of invasions and unlock religions, so a bit of ink and paper which has long been an innocent wrapping or stop-gap may at last be laid open under the one pair of eyes which have knowledge enough to turn it into the opening of a catastrophe.

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first began to struggle with Samuel while a master's student at Notre Dame. As I read through the text, I repeatedly questioned not only why certain passages were preserved in the Hebrew Bible, but why they were composed at all. I raised this issue with one of my professors, who suggested that I read Kyle McCarter's article, "The Apology of David" (McCarter 1980b). I did so, and הנה! Everything suddenly made sense. It was not coincidence that two years later I had enrolled at Johns Hopkins with McCarter as my primary advisor. At the time, though, I had no thought of making apologetic the subject of my dissertation. That idea developed only gradually, with the help of the "Hopkins system." I can point to two specific events that solidified this idea with me.

First, during an epigraphy course the Tel Dan Inscription captured my attention. As I read and reread the brief, broken text, it occurred to me that we see in it some of the same legitimizing rhetoric that appears in the David narrative, albeit in a much different form. This became my first clue that the insistence by many scholars on connecting apologetic with a certain form is questionable.

Second, heedless of the condemnation of Oholah, throughout graduate school I had become increasingly infatuated with the Assyrians. This was driven not by my love for their "warriors clothed in blue," or their idols, but chicken scratch (that is, cuneiform). This led me to work for the Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period (RINAP) project, which meant that during the time when I needed to select a dissertation topic, Esarhaddon greeted me every morning. Again I perceived the same defensive rhetoric, this time in the introduction to his Nineveh A inscription. I now recognized that from all corners of the ancient Near East, rulers who ascended to the throne in atypical ways resorted to the same type of rhetoric to justify themselves. When I realized that no comprehensive examination of this idea had yet been done, this study was born.

This book is a revised version of my 2012 dissertation, the genesis of which was just described. The opening chapters have undergone significant modification as the result of some insightful and constructive peer review. The specific text analyses have received various degrees of attention in the intervening years; my understanding of the Tel Dan Inscription has noticeably evolved, and I have refined the discussion of Esarhaddon, David, and Solomon especially in light of further work.

Innumerable people deserve my thanks for helping me make it to this stage. My *Doktorvater*, Kyle McCarter, dedicated much time and effort to assisting me from the inchoate idea of the project through the finished work. During the dissertation phase, I received kind feedback along the way from my other readers as

well: Ted Lewis, Theo van den Hout, Jacob Lauinger, and Richard Kagan. Outside of my committee, Jamie Novotny generously read and responded to a draft of my Esarhaddon chapter. Jeremy Hutton's work served as an inspiration, and he gave excellent input in the final stages of the project, saving me from numerous embarrassments. I am also indebted to Paul Delnero, my Akkadian teacher. Several colleagues at Johns Hopkins also contributed in sundry ways: Michael Simone, Erin Fleming, Chris Brinker, Meredith Fraser, and Heather Parker all deserve credit. Heath Dewrell merits special mention for patiently enduring countless requests for input and for providing necessary, and occasionally unnecessary, distractions.

I am grateful to everyone at SBL Press, especially Billie Jean Collins, Nicole Tilford, and Kathie Klein for facilitating the publication of this work, to Amélie Kuhrt for accepting it into the Writings from the Ancient World Supplement series, and to my anonymous peer reviewers for providing valuable comments on the manuscript.

As this is my first book, I also want to thank briefly those teachers who assisted my professional development prior to my arrival at Johns Hopkins. I had the privilege of studying with the Bible faculty at Seattle Pacific University, including Rob Wall, Jack Levison, Frank Spina, and Eugene Lemcio, all of whom inspired my critical study and demonstrated teaching excellence. At Notre Dame I encountered new, engaging professors who continued my biblical training, specifically Jim VanderKam and Eugene Ulrich. I also was able to indulge my passion for the study of the ancient Near East during those years through my study with Avi Winitzer and Paul-Alain Beaulieu, the latter of whom not only introduced me to the study of Mesopotamia several years ago but also gave informed responses to several queries as I prepared my Nabonidus chapter. All of the aforementioned teachers have set a standard for wisdom and character that I hope to emulate.

Finally, my family has provided incredible support throughout the process. My in-laws, Stuart and Celeste Lamar, have aided in various ways, most tangibly with child care. My brothers, Ethan and Eli, and their respective families have encouraged me; Ethan warrants special credit for supplying me with a place to stay and transportation during forays to Israel. My parents, John and Karen, are ultimately responsible for this project (whether that is a compliment or not). They raised me in a loving home and instilled in me a love of learning in general and the Bible in particular. They have supported me throughout every stage of my education and encouraged me to seek the truth, even when I arrive at different conclusions than they. My children, Evangeline and Malachi, are a continual source of both inspiration and comedy. (Evangeline is currently learning about the phenomenon of "apowogetic" from such venues as the marvelous *True Story of the Three Little Pigs*; my thanks to Jon Scieszka for this.) And, of course, I cannot adequately thank my nonpareil wife, Kandace.

God elected me to write this volume in order to redress the many failings of my unworthy scholarly predecessors; any shortcomings in this book are not my doing but a vestige of prior failure done by academics who forsook divine will and

trusted “in their own overweening deeds” (cf. 2 Sam 21, though I quote Esarhad-don’s Nineveh A)—or at least, it seems appropriate to offer such a disclaimer, given my subject matter. The unfortunate reality, however, is that this book’s deficiencies are a testament to the fact that teachers are refiners, not alchemists; they can improve their material and remove some imperfections, but they cannot transform dross into gold. All errors are my own.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

## *Journal and Series Abbreviations*

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ABOT	<i>Ankara Arkeoloji Müzesinde bulunan Boğazköy tabletleri: Boğazköy-Tafeln im Archäologischen Museum zu Ankara</i>
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AfOB	Archiv für Orientforschung; Beihefte
AMI	<i>Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran</i>
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (3rd ed.)
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
AnSt	<i>Anatolian Studies</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AoF	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
AS	Assyriological Studies
ASM	Asian Studies Monographs
ATD	Alte Testament Deutsch
ATDan	Acta theologica danica
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BARSup	British Archaeological Reports Supplements
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BCSMS	<i>Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
BibEnc	Biblical Encyclopedia
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BiOr	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>
BoTU	Boghazköi-Texte in Umschrift
BSfP	<i>Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i>
CAH	<i>The Cambridge Ancient History</i>

CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CHD	<i>The Hittite Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i>
CHM	<i>Cahiers d'histoire mondiale</i>
CIS	Copenhagen International Seminar
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i>
CQ	<i>Communication Quarterly</i>
CR	<i>Communication Reports</i>
CS	<i>Communication Studies</i>
CSSJ	<i>Central States Speech Journal</i>
CTL	<i>Current Trends in Linguistics</i>
DMOA	Documenta et monumenta Orientis antiqui
<i>Eothen</i>	<i>Eothen: Collana di studi sulle civiltà dell'Oriente antico</i>
ETL	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
EVO	<i>Egitto e Vicino Oriente</i>
FAT, 2	Forschungen zum Alten Testament, 2 Reihe
FW	Fischer Weltgeschichte
GAG	<i>Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik</i>
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
GHL	<i>A Grammar of the Hittite Language</i>
GorDiss	Gorgias Dissertations
GTS	<i>Glyph: Textual Studies</i>
HbAw	Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft
HBS	Herders Biblische Studien
HdO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HED	<i>Hittite Etymological Dictionary</i>
HHw	<i>Hethitisches Handwörterbuch: Mit dem Wortschatz der Nachbarsprachen</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HST	<i>The Ancient Near East: Historical Sources in Translation</i>
HTIBS	Historical Texts and Interpreters in Biblical Scholarship
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
HZL	<i>Hethitisches Zeichenlexikon: Inventar und Interpretation der Keilschriftzeichen aus den Boğazköy-Texten</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IBoT	<i>Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzelerinde bulunan Bogazköy tabletleri</i>
IBS	Innsbrucker Beiträge zum Sprachwissenschaft
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>



<i>IF</i>	<i>Indogermanische Forschungen</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>IstMitt</i>	<i>Istanbuler Mitteilungen</i>
JANESCU	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCR	<i>Journal of Conflict Resolution</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JEOL	<i>Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Gezelschap (Genootschap) Ex oriente lux</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JHebS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JSSEA	<i>Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities</i>
KAI	<i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften (2nd ed.)</i>
KBo	<i>Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi</i>
<i>Klio</i>	<i>Klio: Beiträge zur alten Geschichte</i>
KUB	<i>Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi</i>
LANE	<i>Languages of the Ancient Near East</i>
LHBOTS	<i>Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies</i>
MAPS	<i>Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society</i>
MDOG	<i>Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft</i>
MesCiv	<i>Mesopotamian Civilizations</i>
MHEOP	<i>Mesopotamian History and Environment Occasional Publications</i>
MVAG	<i>Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-ägyptischen Gesellschaft</i>
NABU	<i>Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires</i>
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NEASB	<i>Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin</i>
NIBCOT	<i>New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament</i>
OBO	<i>Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis</i>
OES	<i>Oriental Explorations and Studies</i>
OIP	<i>Oriental Institute Publications</i>
OLA	<i>Orientalia lovaniensia analecta</i>
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
OTL	<i>Old Testament Library</i>
PBA	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>

PEANES	Publications in Egyptology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
PNA	<i>The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire</i>
PR	<i>Philosophy and Rhetoric</i>
PRR	<i>Public Relations Review</i>
Qad	<i>Qadmoniot</i>
QJS	<i>Quarterly Journal of Speech</i>
RA	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
RAI	Rencontre assyriologique internationale
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RBEC5	<i>Reviews of Biblical and Early Christian Studies</i>
RBL	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
RGRC	Reference Guides to Rhetoric and Composition
RGTC	Répertoire Géographique des Textes Cunéiformes
RIMA	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods. 3 vols. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1987–1996
RINAP	The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011–
RIA	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie</i> . Berlin: de Gruyter.
RRBS	Recent Research in Biblical Studies
RS	Rhetoric and Society
Rtrav	Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie à l'archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes, pour servir de bulletin à la mission française du Caire
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAB	<i>State Archives of Assyria Bulletin</i>
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SBTS	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
ScrHier	Scripta hierosolymitana
SEÅ	<i>Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok</i>
SGKAO	Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des alten Orients
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SMAL	Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology and Literature
SMEA	<i>Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici</i>
SSCJ	<i>The Southern Speech Communication Journal</i>
SSU	Studia Semitica Uppsaliensia
StBoT	Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten
StBoTB	Studien zu den Boğazköy-Texten Beihefte
StudOr	Studia Orientalia

TAPS	Transactions of the American Philosophical Society
TCS	Texts from Cuneiform Sources
THeth	Texte der Hethiter
TLD	Trends in Linguistics Documentation
TSTS	Toronto Semitic Texts and Studies
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
VAB	Vorderasiatische Bibliothek
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VW	Verständliche Wissenschaft
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WDWLS	William Dwight Whitney Linguistic Series
WJC	<i>Western Journal of Communication</i>
WO	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
WVDOG	Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
WZKM	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</i>
YNER	Yale Near Eastern Researches
YOSR	Yale Oriental Series, Researches
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
ZVS	<i>Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung auf dem Gebiet der indogermanischen Sprachen</i>

### **General**

BH	Biblical Hebrew
BM	British Museum
ca.	circa
ch(s).	chapter(s)
DB	Bitun inscription of Darius
ed.	edition / editor
esp.	especially
GN	Geographic Name
HDR	History of David's Rise
lit.	literally
l(l).	line(s)
LXX	Septuagint
LXX <sup>B</sup>	Codex Vaticanus
MT	Masoretic Text

n(n).	footnote(s)
OG	Old Greek
pl(s).	plate(s)
PN	Personal Name
rev.	revised
RN	Royal Name
SN	Succession Narrative
TDRR	Traditions of David's Rise and Reign
v(v).	verse(s)
vol(s).	volume(s)
XPf	Persepolis F inscription of Xerxes

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# INTRODUCTION

## APOLOGY AS A DESIGNATION OF ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXT

EIGHTY YEARS AGO, Edgar Sturtevant and George Bechtel published *A Hittite Chrestomathy*, intended as a workbook for burgeoning Hittite students (Sturtevant and Bechtel 1935, 5). The chrestomathy featured five major Hittite works, one of which the authors dubbed “The Apology of Hattusilis.” But what did they mean by *apology*?

*Apology* originated as a legal term. In the classical Greek world, one’s defense in court was an ἀπολογία. The most famous illustration of this is Plato’s *Apology*, wherein he provides a version of Socrates’s speech defending himself before the Athenian jury that eventually sentenced him to death. Other examples also survive from ancient Greece, with the common characteristic of defense against specific accusations in a judicial setting. In Late Antiquity the term was clothed with theological garb. Drawing from this idea of self-defense, various Christian epistles exhorted the faithful to justify their belief: “Be ever ready to provide a defense (ἀπολογία) to everyone who asks you the reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Pet 3:15). In the early church, apologists such as Justin Martyr took this exhortation a step further, composing treatises defending the Christian faith. Today, when encountering the term apologetic, many default to this idea of theological defense—Christian apologetics in particular remains a popular literary genre, as contemporary theologians continue to argue for the rational basis of their beliefs through apologies (though perhaps with a slightly different exigence than Justin Martyr, who implored Antoninus Pius to halt the persecution of Christians).<sup>1</sup> Among those in the communications field, meanwhile, apology has garnered political connotations in recent decades. Apologies are discourses presented to repair one’s reputation in response to attacks on one’s character. This is seen most frequently among political figures who must acknowl-

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1. Within the last five years alone, the following new books (or new editions of earlier books) have been published: Douglas Groothuis’s *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*; Mark Mittelberg and Lee Strobel’s *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask (with Answers)*; Michael R. Licona and William A. Dembski’s *Evidence for God: 50 Arguments for Faith from the Bible, History, Philosophy, and Science*; William Lane Craig’s *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision*; *The Apologetics Study Bible*; and more.

edge something incriminating. Since apologetic in this vein is divorced from the legal sphere, it allows for various strategies, including denial, justification, pleading for forgiveness, or others—apologetic of this nature has provided much fodder for scholars of rhetoric.

Historically, then, “apologetic” can refer to Socrates justifying himself before the Athenian jury, or to C. S. Lewis arguing for the rational basis of his faith, or to Richard Nixon explaining his role in the Watergate scandal—and an inquiry into the meaning of this term today would probably result in different answers if one were talking to a classicist, a theologian, or a public official. So where does “The Apology of Hattusili” fit here? Sturtevant and Bechtel never specified, considering the designation self-explanatory. And indeed, investigation of the matter leaves little doubt as to their meaning. The two Hittitologists clearly adopted the judicial meaning of apologetic from the classical world when they introduced the term into the field of ancient Near Eastern studies. Sturtevant was trained as a classicist before turning to Hittitology, and he envisioned a legal context for Hattusili’s text.<sup>2</sup> As the years passed, though, the title “Apology” stuck for Hattusili’s much-studied inscription, but the reason for this designation became increasingly obscure as scholars of the ancient Near East focused on the political nuances of the term.

In any event, while Sturtevant and Bechtel deserve credit for introducing the term “apologetic” into the field, it was Herbert Wolf who galvanized the study of ancient Near Eastern texts as apologetic discourse. Wolf was the first to consciously analyze Hattusili’s autobiography from an apologetic perspective, rather than just adopting the label without comment. In his 1967 dissertation, “The Apology of Hattušiliš Compared with Other Political Self-justifications of the Ancient Near East,” Wolf appealed to the apologetic nature of the Hittite text as part of a comparative study. Ultimately, he sought especially to understand the biblical narrative of David through this lens better. Wolf’s work sparked something of a chain reaction as in the ensuing decades several other scholars adopted the jargon of apologetic; during this time the identification and study of other texts from disparate areas of the ancient Near East as “apologies” became familiar and produced useful results. While these studies multiplied, though, nearly everyone agreed that certain texts were apologies, but few seemed to know or care much what an apology was. As a result, study of ancient Near Eastern apologies became rather muddled. Just a half century after the text was first styled “apology,” Van Seters disqualified Hattusili’s autobiography from being an apology on the grounds that “One thinks of an apology as implying a legal context with a fairly defined ‘jury’ and one’s status or life

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2. “Such action [Hattusili’s deposal of his nephew and suzerain, Urhi-Tessup] was, to say the least, of doubtful legality in what was, after all, a limited monarchy, and it required justification before the *pankus*, the council of nobility, which we elsewhere call the senate. While the document before us is not ostensibly addressed to this body, it is hard to see what other purpose it could have had” (Sturtevant and Bechtel 1935, 84).

at stake” (1983, 119)—ironic given that such an understanding of the term was precisely how the text earned the designation in the first place.

The various understandings of apologetic in the field of ancient Near Eastern studies highlights the lack of any synthetic or theoretical treatment of the subject. The most recent monograph-length work dedicated to apologetic was Wolf’s dissertation in 1967; since then an array of other texts have been analyzed from an apologetic perspective, yielding many insights into the phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> But only individual articles have appeared in the last forty-five years, and these in disparate places, making the topic difficult to approach with a comprehensive view. Moreover, no recent work has dealt with the broader phenomenon more than in passing; most contributions have only submitted a text for analysis as an apology by comparing it to one of the better-established examples. My objective for this book is to impose some order on the chaos of apologetic study in the ancient Near East.

In the first chapter I briefly trace the trajectory of scholarship regarding ancient Near Eastern apologetic, featuring the discrepancies in the understanding of this term and the need for a common starting point from which to commence future work. I try to provide this starting point by appealing to the field of rhetorical studies, in which apologetic is a common focus of study. Rhetoricians have demonstrated what unites the disparate uses of *apology*, namely, the situational similarity of the various contexts in which one encounters apologies. In the second chapter I examine the rhetoric of royal apologetic in the ancient Near East. Building on the foundation of apologetic as the discourse of defense, I survey the recurring ways in which various monarchs defended themselves against accusations of illegitimacy. After describing these common motifs, I present a number of texts that I consider to be apologies and select seven for in-depth analysis.

I perform these specific text studies in the following seven chapters. In each case I establish what we can know about the historical circumstances of the ruler, then introduce the specific apologetic text to be examined, then analyze the text from an apologetic perspective, and finish with a discussion about what this tells us about the motivation for composing the text. In the tenth chapter I provide a review of the textual analyses, viewing the texts in concert and providing a comprehensive look at the phenomenon of royal apologetic in the ancient Near East.

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3. And, while I acknowledge my great debt to Wolf’s groundbreaking work on the subject, his dissertation is now extremely dated.

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