At the end of his book *Kings without Privilege*, in a short section headed ‘The “Real” and the “Ideal”’, Graeme Auld expressed the hope that ‘One of the results of this study may be to encourage fresh scrutiny of the inter-relationships between more realistic and more idealised materials in the Hebrew Bible’.¹ This paper seeks to apply that scrutiny not primarily to the Hebrew Bible but to the presentation of the king in some of the texts from Ugarit. But it does so in a context—that of the king’s judicial function—where parallels can be drawn and which can perhaps legitimately be illuminated with reference to the Hebrew Bible and other important ancient Near Eastern texts such as the Law Code of Hammurabi. The underlying issue is the extent to which epic or legendary material in particular can be useful in reconstructing a picture of the society from which it emerged.

The stimulus behind this consideration of the Ugaritic material was provided by the reading of some comments, not directly related to its main theme, in a book entitled *The Royal God: Enthronement Festivals in Ancient Israel and Ugarit?* The book offers a re-examination of Mowinckel’s Enthronement Festival hypothesis and the extent to which there is evidence from Ugarit which might support the theory. The author, A. R. Petersen, claims: ‘We cannot assume . . . that correspondence between ideology and conduct was part and parcel of life in antiquity’.² He goes on to suggest that the Ugaritic Keret and Aqhat texts (which he describes as epics) may offer examples, and comments: ‘The ideal of the king as the righteous judge who sits in the gate and listens to the cause of the orphans has little to do with the complicated bureaucracy attested through a wealth of Ugaritic administrative texts’.³ A little later, after a brief discussion of the

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³ Petersen, *The Royal God*, p. 98.
views of Gray,⁴ who based an argument for a form of sacral kingship at Ugarit on the Keret and Aqhat texts, and de Tarragon,⁵ who challenged Gray’s views but who argued that what separated the literary texts describing the kings from other texts⁶ which reflected royal activity was primarily a matter of chronology, Petersen went so far as to say: ‘I believe it is far better to follow Liverani and let aqht and krt belong to the world of the fairy tale’.⁷ He would presumably consign Danel to the world of the fairy tale along with his son! The implication is not just that he believes Keret, Danel and Aqhat to have been fictional rather than historical characters, a judgement which seems likely to be entirely justified. It is rather being suggested that the presentation of the king as a righteous ruler is not merely idealistic but fantastic.

This prompted a revisiting of the Keret and Danel stories with a series of questions in mind:

(1) Are Keret and Danel presented as kings?
(2) Are they presented as engaging in judicial activity?
(3) Is the presentation idealistic?
(4) To what extent is the presentation different from what is found in the legal texts?

Insofar as there is such a thing as a consensus about aspects of the contents of the texts from Ugarit, it seems generally agreed that Keret and Danel were depicted as kings, and that one of their functions was that of dispenser of justice. That Keret was a king is made clear in the texts and, in his translation of the texts into English, Wyatt heads the Keret texts as ‘The Story of King Keret’.⁸ The verbal evidence is as follows:

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⁵ J.-M. de Tarragon, Le culte à Ugarit: d’après les textes de la pratique en cunéiformes alphabétiques (CahRB, 19; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1980).
⁶ De Tarragon was referring primarily to ritual and offering texts.