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VOLUME LV



THE UGARITIC BAAL CYCLE

VOLUME I

INTRODUCTION WITH TEXT, TRANSLATION AND
COMMENTARY OF KTU 1.1-1.2

Wasilewska
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BY

MARK S. SMITH



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For Marvin H. Pope

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“Thou art great, O El, thou art wise”

KTU 1.4 V 3 (EUT 34)

THE STORY OF THE BAAL CYCLE

Greatest Astarte and Zeus, called both Demarous and Adodos, king of gods, were ruling over the land with the consent of Kronos.

With these words the late classical work, *The Phoenician History* attributed to Philo of Byblos¹ characterizes the political harmony in the West Semitic pantheon. Astarte and Baal, here called Zeus, jointly exercised power over the universe under the ægis of El identified in this text as Kronos. With the consent of El, the revered executive over the pantheon, Astarte and Baal ruled, the latter in the words of Philo, as "king of the gods." Philo of Byblos describes a peaceful rule which followed a divine struggle for kingship over the pantheon and the cosmos. The one extant indigenous source that details this struggle for kingship among the West Semitic gods is the Ugaritic Baal Cycle. This myth comes from the city of Ugarit, modern Ras Shamra, which lies near Latakia on the Syrian coast, approximately a hundred miles north of Beirut. It was during the first half of the fourteenth century that the extant form of the Baal Cycle, one of the classics of ancient literature, was committed to writing.

The six tablets² of the Baal Cycle³ present a vivid story of conflict and kingship, love and death. The first two tablets present the battle of the storm-god Baal with his enemy, Yamm, whose name literally means "Sea." The next two tablets recount how Baal's palace, the mark of his kingship, came to be built. The last two tablets describe Baal's struggle against Mot, whose name means "Death." The god Athtar is also mentioned in two interludes as a possible rival to Baal. These four deities are warrior-gods who rule different realms of the universe: Baal, the god of the storm; Athtar, the god of the stars who

¹ PE 1.10.31; Oden and Attridge 1981:55.

² See pp. 2-15. The enumeration of Ugaritic texts in this volume follows KTU which employs four numbers for any given textual citation: first, according to the type of text; second, according to the number of the tablet in that classification; third, according to the column of that tablet; and finally, according to the line number in that column. The Baal Cycle belongs to the first group of texts in KTU, specifically the mythological or literary texts; it constitutes the first text of this group, and it comprises six tablets. Its number in KTU is therefore KTU 1.1 through 1.6, and its columns are cited in Roman numerals followed by line numbers.

³ The ancient name of this work is unknown except in the form of the superscription to 1.6 I 1, *lbt*, "concerning Baal," hence the modern name "the Baal Cycle."

is perhaps considered a natural irrigator⁴; Yamm, the god of the sea; and Mot, the god of the underworld (Gaster 1950:121-30; Smith 1985:115). Other deities take part in various parts of the narrative. El, the older king and executive over the pantheon, and Athirat, his wife and mother of the pantheon or "queen-mother" in Handy's formulation (1990:20), rule their divine family which is represented in narrow terms as "the seventy sons of Athirat" or in wider terms as the divine assembly patterned after the human royal council.⁵ This older divine couple is generally construed as the parents of the pantheon who mediate the struggle among their sons making rival claims to the divine throne. The other characters in the cycle manifest other aspects of nature and society: Kothar, the middle-level specialist who serves other deities with his craftsmanship which includes spells (Smith 1985:464); Shapshu, the divine messenger who mediates among the rival claimants and travels between the realms of life and death; and Astarte and Anat, Baal's warrior allies.⁶ The names of two of Baal's three women (*ʿatlm*) and "brides" (*kl*), Tallay ("Dewy") and Pidray ("Flashy"?) reflect their meteorological kinship with Baal, while the name of Arsay ("Earthy" or "Netherworldly"?) may evidence her chthonic relationship to him. The unnamed messengers of Yamm as well as Baal's messengers named Gpn w-Ugr, and Athirat's messengers, Qdš w-Amrr, occupy the lowest level of divine society (Smith 1984b). Based largely but not exclusively on the Baal Cycle, Handy (1990) sees four levels of rank among these deities: (i) highest

⁴ For a survey of the evidence, see Excursus 3 (pp. 240-50) below.

⁵ It is under the wider definition that Baal refers to El as "my father," although Baal bears the title *bn dgn*, "son of Dagan." For the issue of Baal's paternity, see pp. 91-94 below. For further definition of the family of El and Athirat, see pp. 92-93 below.

⁶ Anat is also called Baal's sister. For discussion of Anat, see pp. 195-96 n. 147, 205, 311. For Astarte, see pp. 278-79, 311. It is often assumed that Anat and Astarte are also consorts of Baal, but this view of Anat has been disputed by P. L. Day (1991: 141-46; 1992:181-90) and Walls (1992:145-46). While both scholars note the absence of explicit sexual relations between Baal and Anat in clearly understood Ugaritic texts, Anat and Astarte are viewed as Seth's wives (ANET 15). This relationship may reflect a West Semitic association of these goddesses with Baal and may complicate the view of Day and Walls. The relevance of this evidence has been accordingly challenged by both Day and Walls following Te Velde (1977:29-30) since otherwise Anat is not called the consort of Seth. The very uniqueness of the rendering may militate in favor of its authenticity, however.

⁷ See p. 72 for the evidence.

authority (El and Athirat); (ii) major active gods which form what Handy calls the managerial stratum of the cosmos (Baal, Yamm, Mot); (iii) craft-gods who have a "specialist responsibility" acknowledged and used by superiors in the divine organization (Kothar); and (iv) messenger deities. While the Ugaritic pantheon included a large host of other deities, the Baal Cycle shows a limited cast of characters in rendering its story of divine struggle.

The construction of the cosmos as represented by the divine abodes reflects aspect of their inhabitants. El's abode is cast in cosmic terms without explicit terrestrial referent.⁸ As the wife of El, Athirat is not accorded a separate abode. Baal's abode is located on the mountain that receives the greatest rainfall in Syria.⁹ His three "women" presumably live with him, although prior to receiving his own "palace," Baal and his three women apparently dwell with El and Athirat (KTU 1.3 IV 48-53, V 38-44, 1.4 I 9-18, IV 52-57). Mot dwells in the Underworld. Perhaps in accordance with his function as natural irrigator Athtar may live on earth.¹⁰ Yamm presumably lives in the sea, although this fact is never made explicit. Anat's home is described in terrestrial terms in 1.3 II, although the text does not explicitly locate this palace at Inbb, the name of her mountain given elsewhere. Kothar's abodes at Memphis and Kaph-tor may reflect trade in materials for crafts such as metals or trade in materials produced by crafts.¹¹ In sum, the Baal Cycle presents a royal society, with different deities and their abodes showing various aspects of the world known to the culture of ancient Ugarit.

For decades scholars have rightly emphasized the kingship of Baal as the main theme of the cycle. This volume modifies the general scholarly view of the cycle in three major ways. The first is to extend the political understanding of the text. It is well-known that political language dominates the Baal Cycle, but it should be recognized that the Baal Cycle presents the universe as a single political reality connecting different levels. This political reality of Baal's rule integrates three levels, cosmic, human and natural. First, the Baal Cycle concentrates on the interaction of the deities in the larger cosmos. Ritual texts and other mythological works involve deities, but no other text

focuses so strongly on the Ugaritic deities and the larger cosmos as the Baal Cycle. Second, the political events in the Baal Cycle reflect a concern for human society. The ramifications of Baal's struggles on humanity are occasionally expressed in the text. Indeed, the divine struggles represent life and death for Ugarit's society.¹² According to Mosca (1986:506-07), the Baal Cycle recapitulates the story of human life itself: "Even the individual life-cycle mirrors the myth's movement: before life, chaos; after life, death. This pattern, too, is built into the myth."¹³ The struggles of Baal mirror the struggles of humanity against the vicissitudes of a dangerous world, but his victories re-invigorate not only the world of the divine pantheon but also human society. The dangers and defeats, the victories and the glories described on the divine level serve to give a religio-political interpretation of human experience. Third, the Baal Cycle uses natural phenomena, especially lightning, thunder and rains to underscore the political power of Baal the Storm-god. Through Baal's struggles for power, the Baal Cycle interrelates humanity, nature and divinity, and thereby yields an integrated political vision of chaos, life and death. As Kinet (1978:238) remarks, "Der Ba'al-Zyklus birgt eine mythologische Deutung der Wirklichkeit, in der der Ugariter lebt." Finally, it is to be observed that given the extent and depth of martial language attributed to the West Semitic storm-god in human political texts outside of Ugarit, it seems quite plausible to stress the Baal Cycle's political importance and perhaps to suggest a political setting for the background of the Baal Cycle and its transmission.

The second modification concerns the general view of Baal in the cycle. Baal has often been compared with the powerful figures of Marduk in *Enuma Elish* and Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible, but the differences among these three deities are as significant as their similarities. Indeed, the Baal Cycle does not render the West Semitic storm-god in the exalted terms reserved for Marduk or Yah-

¹² Cf. Buckert's remarks (1979:98): "...civilized man, and monarchy, and warfare are not self-sufficient, as man is not the only representative of life; if he has managed to achieve dominance, this is by a violent tour de force, hope transcending the desperate borders of factuality."

¹³ In this connection it may be noted Erich Neumann, a disciple of Carl G. Jung, interpreted some features in the Baal Cycle in terms of psychological development. See Neumann 1970:74, 97, 160, 179; and p. 75 below.

⁸ See below pp. 230-31.

⁹ See below pp. 122-23.

¹⁰ See below pp. 240-50.

¹¹ See below p. 167.

weh. Nor does the Baal Cycle construe Baal as a champion who vanquishes his enemies for all time. Rather, Baal acquires a limited kingship and not primarily through his own exploits, but mostly thanks to the aid of other deities. His foes loom large not only in a single combat, but in repeated engagements, and without definitive outcomes. The threat of their return is never overcome entirely, at least in the case of Mot, and perhaps their return was as expected as the annual return of Baal's rains. Baal's kingship is indeed finite, won despite his own limitations and perhaps the limitations of the great deities as well. The cosmos of Baal's kingship is a universe nurturing life wondrously, but precariously. This universe is frequently, if not usually, overshadowed by chaos, the transient character of life and finally death. In its powerful vision of reality and its aesthetic accomplishment, the Baal Cycle is the greatest example of West Semitic myth.

The third scholarly view which requires correction involves the relationship between the Baal Cycle and the Hebrew Bible. Apart from its own importance, the Baal Cycle is central to the study of Syro-Palestinian religious literature in the Bronze and Iron Ages (2200-587 B. C. E.). The Baal Cycle manifests many of the religious ideas contained in the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, it may be said that the Baal Cycle expresses the heart of the West Semitic religion from which Israelite religion largely developed (Smith 1990:xxii-xxiv, 1-7). The original god of Israel was probably El (Smith 1990:7). Two deities, Baal and Athirat, who play major roles in the Baal Cycle, were worshipped and condemned in ancient Israel, according to 1 Kings 18 and other biblical passages. The depictions of Yahweh as enthroned king in Isaiah 6 and Daniel 7, or stormy warrior-god in Psalm 18 = 2 Samuel 22, resemble depictions of El and Baal respectively in the Baal Cycle (*CMHE* 13-75, 145-94). Many of the type-scenes and literary formulas in the Bible are found in the Baal Cycle (*BOS* 16-109). Several renderings of deities and literary features of the West Semitic milieu reflected in the Baal Cycle passed into ancient Israelite culture described by the Hebrew Bible and then into the New Testament and other Jewish works of the Second Temple period (6th century B. C. E. to 1st century C. E.). Numerous features of western civilization have their roots in West Semitic literature, best represented in its premier exemplar, the Baal Cycle. The message of peace of Christmas night, the heavenly banquet of the Last Supper, the depiction of God as "my heavenly

father," the beast of Revelation and many other features familiar from the New Testament and rabbinic literature stem from a long history which includes the Baal Cycle.

The closing chapters of Revelation provide a glimpse of the future which recalls the three major themes of Baal's defeat of Yamm, the building of the heavenly palace for Baal, and his conflict with Mot. In the words of Rev 21:1-4,

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with people. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

This passage includes the death of Sea, the descent of the heavenly city and the final destruction of Death. The Baal Cycle describe a similar sequence, specifically Baal's defeat of Yamm, Baal's enthronement in his heavenly palace, and his battle against Mot. In both Rev 21:1-4 and the Baal Cycle these events issue in the rejuvenation of the earth and the proximity of divine presence. Baal assumes residence in his temple producing the rains which refructify the world. In Revelation 21 divine proximity is represented by the divine presence dwelling in the temple-city which signals the transformation of the world. It is no exaggeration to suggest that early forms of many, if not most, formative religious concepts of the western civilization may be found in the Baal Cycle.

Despite the importance of the Baal Cycle for biblical studies, this work and other Ugaritic texts have suffered in the assessment of at least a few biblical scholars, largely because of their personal convictions. The religious sentiments of U. Oldenburg (*CEBCR* xi) perhaps prevented him from appreciating the greatness of a Ugaritic work such as the Baal Cycle:

That which impelled me to begin the study of Canaanite religion was my desire to investigate its relationship to Hebrew religion, to see whether the faith of Yahweh was a product of the soil of the Canaanite religion. The more I studied pre-Israelite religion, the more I was amazed with its utter depravity and wickedness. Indeed there was nothing in it to inspire the sublime faith of Yahweh. His coming is like the rising sun dispelling the darkness of Canaanite superstition. (Oldenburg's italics)

As this quotation indicates, the Baal Cycle and other Ugaritic texts have served in the imagination of some biblical scholars as a foil to the advent of "true" Israelite monotheism. Indeed, this approach to Ugaritic literature replicates an older "scholarly" denigration of post-exilic Israelite religion. Mendenhall's work, *The Tenth Generation* (1973:226) impugns both post-exilic Judaism and the West Semitic religion of the Late Bronze Age in exalting both biblical prophecy and Christianity.¹⁴ This attitude is unwarranted in the work of religious historians, especially as it may be argued that the Baal Cycle presents as deep and rich a religious vision of human existence as any biblical book.

This study represents the first volume of a commentary on the Baal Cycle, and it is my hope that it will contribute to a deeper appreciation of this work both on its own terms and in its relations to the Bible. A further goal of this work is to overcome the largely atomistic fashion of studying the Baal Cycle. Study of the Baal Cycle has long focused primarily on philological concerns, an understandable emphasis given the enormous etymological difficulties which Ugaritic literature presents. Apart from notable exceptions such as de Moor's *SPUMB* and van Zijl's *Baal*, longer works treating the whole of the Baal Cycle have been generally lacking. Studies dealing with the literary themes or structures of the Baal Cycle are conspicuous for their absence, except for del Olmo Lete's comments on the Baal Cycle (*MLC*). This first volume of this commentary contains the introduction and treatment of the first two tablets (KTU 1.1-1.2). A further volume(s) will address the other four tablets (KTU 1.3-1.6).

THE FORMAT OF THIS VOLUME

This study follows the format of biblical commentaries in a number of ways. These are main features of this volume:

1. Introduction

Addressed in this section are general matters including the date of the tablets, their order, the development of the cycle, its literary classification, and the history of its interpretation with a critical assessment.

¹⁴ I wish to thank Professor David Owen for bringing this passage to my attention.

2. Bibliography for each column

The study of each column begins with a bibliography of text editions, studies and translations.

3. Text

The readings of the text are based on a comparison of several sources: Virolleaud's *editio princeps* (cited as V); CTA and KTU; previously unpublished photographs of KTU 1.1 and 1.2 produced by Professor Bruce Zuckerman of the University of Southern California, director of the West Semitic Research Project (WSRP); and 20.5 hours spent on examining the originals (with two magnifying lenses) housed in the Département des Antiquités Orientales of the Louvre.

The siglum ° over a letter indicates a damaged but visible wedge. Damage consists generally of two sorts, either the loss of part of the sign in a lacuna or damage to the surface of the tablet. The siglum ° with no sign beneath it indicates the attestation of a wedge of a letter which cannot be identified. In contrast to the format of Virolleaud, CTA and KTU, spaces have not been placed between words (including those with proclitics or enclitics). Emendations are not made in the text, but are recorded in the textual notes and reflected in the vocalized texts. Reconstructions have been held to a relative minimum and have been based on generally accepted parallels.

4. The Textual Notes

It is my goal to present a minimal text which may serve as the reliable basis for interpretation and to inform readers as to the relative reliability or unreliability of different readings. The brief descriptions of the epigraphical views concerning the readings of signs may enable readers to appreciate the complexities involved. The textual notes survey the opinions of Virolleaud's *editio princeps* of each text, CTA, KTU, and less frequently the views of other scholars (e.g., *UT*, *SPUMB*, *CML*² and *MLC*). Further observations are made on the basis of comparison of the WSRP photographs with the originals in the Louvre. The remarks frequently refer to these photographs