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# The Temple in The Ugaritic Myth of Baal

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The temple in the ancient Near East is not merely a building which archeology can excavate. Inseparably woven into the fabric of public and private life of antiquity, it performed functions in society which modern students would analyze as economic, cultural, religious, and political. It was at once a municipal or national vault, a seat of learning and repository of sacred traditions, a place of worship and theophany, a platform where the king and his role in the divine governance of the world might be displayed and given legitimacy.

It is the last-named function of the temple, an instrument in divine-human governance, that is the special concern of this paper. Fortunately there exists a body of texts from the 14th-13th centuries B.C.E., written in alphabetic cuneiform, that illustrate the temple's importance in creation and kingship. The texts are in the Ugaritic language, and in language, prosody, and to some extent in subject matter show remarkable affinities to the earliest Hebrew poetry. That Ugaritic literature provides evidence for the beliefs of peoples well beyond the environs of the city of Ugarit is clear from the range of place-names and from the agreements with biblical poetry of southern provenance.

Within the Ugaritic corpus, there are six major tablets all concerned with the rise to kingship of the storm god Baal through his victory over *Yammu* "Sea" and *Môtu* "Death." These supply a somewhat unified corpus for analysis of the meaning of the temple in Late (and perhaps Middle) Bronze Age in Canaan. Andrée Herdner, the editor of the critical edition of the texts, has numbered them in tentative sequence 1-6<sup>1</sup> and has characterized them as "Cycle de Ba'al et 'Anat." Though Herdner's sequence of tablets reflects the opinion of many scholars, no genuine consensus has so far emerged on how the six tablets are to be related to each other. Only two of the six are in undoubted sequence. Tablet 6 continues immediately the goddess Anat's mourning for Baal described in the last column of tablet 5. It has often been assumed that tablet 5 follows tablet 4 immediately. Difficulties stand in the way of the assumed continuity

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<sup>1</sup>Abbreviations used in the paper: *CTCA*, Andrée Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques* (Mission de Ras Shamra 10; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1963); *PRU II*, *Le palais royal d'Ugarit* (Mission de Ras Shamra 7; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1957). Another widely used system of designating the tablets is that of Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (*Analecta Orientalia* 38; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965). *CTCA* 1 = *UT* 'nt: pl. 9, pl. 10; 2 = 137, 129, 68; 3 = 'nt; 4 = 51; 5 = 67; 6 = 49 + 62.

both from the context and from the number of lines that would have to be posited in the last column of tablet 4.

It is assumed in this paper that *CTCA* 1-6 contain two variants of the same basic myth of the victory of the storm god rather than, as is often assumed, of a single connected story of a conflict with *Sea* followed by a conflict with *Death*. One finds instead a combat with *Sea*, intercession of a goddess (either *Anat* or *Asherah*) with *El*, construction and consecration of a temple alongside a variant of a conflict with *Death*, intercession of a goddess, construction of a temple. The language and logic of the two variants are of course similar. Nonetheless, there are differences. Tablets 1 and especially 2, which describe the conflict of *Baal* and *Yam*, show clear parallels to the Akkadian creation epic *Enūma eliš* which are not found in the *Baal-Mot* story: *Yam* "Sea" and *Tiamat* "Sea," the prominence of the assembly of the gods (Akkadian *puhrum* = Ugaritic *phr*) and the bold threat to that body by *Sea* (in the *Baal-Mot* story *El* acts rather than the assembly).<sup>2</sup> Tablets 4-6 describe the *Baal-Mot* struggle. Tablets 3 and 4 appear to be variants at least in the long accounts of the goddess' intercessory journeys to *El*.

However one resolves the problem of the sequence of the tablets, it is only necessary for the present paper to establish a sequence of states or actions in *Baal's* accession to kingship. The admittedly artificial isolating of stages clarifies the function of the temple in divine-human governance at Ugarit. Four separate stages in *Baal's* rise to royal power can be discerned in the texts.

- Stage One.* *Baal* lacks political power before his victory over *Yam* and *Mot* which is symbolized by his not having a temple/palace.
- Stage Two.* Even after his victory *Baal* is without the kind of royal power a temple would provide. He must ask a goddess to obtain from *El* and the assembly a decree authorizing construction of a temple.
- Stage Three.* *El* and the assembly decree a temple. A temple is built.
- Stage Four.* The festive consecration of the temple and the manifestation of *Baal's* kingly power.

In stage one *Baal's* powerlessness is shown most dramatically in the assembly scene from the *Baal-Yam* story, in *CTCA* 2.1. Even before the arrogant messengers of *Yam* coerce the assembly into giving up *Baal* into the hands of their master, *Baal* has a subordinate role in the assembly, *ba<sup>c</sup>lu qama 'alē 'ili* "Baal stands before *El*." How precarious *Baal's* position actually is appears from the readiness of *El* and the assembly to surrender him.

<sup>2</sup>Thorkild Jacobsen has suggested that the Akkadian story of the combat between the storm god and *Tiamat* originated among the West Semites where the sea would play a dominant role in the religious imagination, "The Battle between *Marduk* and *Tiamat*," *JAO* 88 (1968) 419-26. He has recently returned to the theme in "Religious Drama in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (eds. H. Goedicke and J. M. Boardman, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1975) 65-97.

The appearance in the distance of the two messengers of Sea sets the following scene in motion.

Then they (two messengers) set face  
Toward the Mount of El (text: //)  
Toward the meeting of the council.  
The gods were sitting to eat,  
The holy ones, to dine.  
Baal was standing before El.  
As soon as the gods saw them,  
Saw the messengers of Yam,  
The envoys of Judge River,  
The gods dropped their heads  
Onto their knees,  
Down on their princely thrones.  
Baal rebuked them,  
"Why have you lowered, O gods,  
Your heads upon your knees  
And on your princely thrones?  
I see, O gods, you are terrified  
From fear of the messengers of Yam,  
The envoys of Judge River.  
Lift up, O gods, your heads  
From upon your knees  
From your princely thrones.  
And I will answer the messengers of Sea  
The envoys of Judge River.  
The gods lifted up their heads  
From upon their knees  
From their princely thrones. (CTCA 2.1.19-29)

The messengers arrive and present their demand.

"Give up the god whom you harbor,  
Him whom the assembly harbors.  
Give up Baal and his followers,  
The son of Dagan that I might take his gold(?)"  
And answered Bull, his father El,  
"Your servant is Baal, O Yam,  
Your prisoner is Baal, O River,  
The son of Dagan is your captive.  
He will be borne as your tribute.  
Yes, El will bring tribute,  
And the holy ones, your gift. (CTCA 2.1.34-38)

Baal's attack on the messengers comes to nothing and is even restrained by Ashtart, a member of the assembly. Three columns later — the intervening two

re unfortunately not preserved and a fragment (CTCA 2.3[?]) cannot be placed within the action — Baal defeats Yam, "Yam is dead. Baal reigns." (CTCA 4.32).

What happens between the assembly's capitulation in column one and Baal's victory over Yam in column four is not known because of the destroyed intervening two columns. One can, however, conjecture concerning events consequent upon the defeat of Yam in column four by exploiting the general similarity of the Akkadian epic *Enūma eliš*, noted above, and two possible biblical parallels, Psalms 24 and 29.

In the Akkadian epic, after the story of the creation and the successful handling of the first threat to cosmic order by Apsu through the wisdom of Ea, a new threat arises. Tiamat, "Sea" threatens the assembly. No one is strong enough to lead an army against her and her entourage. After the assembly cowers from their terror, the gods choose a young god, Marduk, he of the storm, evidently not yet a powerful member of the assembly. Marduk insists that the assembly grant royal authority to him before he fights in their name. He successfully defeats Tiamat, forming the cosmos out of her carcass and then creating man. The gods construct a temple, Esagila, for the victorious god and use it as a gathering place for themselves. A banquet is then celebrated. With the Akkadian parallel in mind, one can assume that El and the assembly hail Baal for his victory over Sea, grant him the power appropriate to his victory, and build him a temple.

Two biblical parallels may cautiously be adduced. Baal's call to the gods to lift up their heads, quoted above, appears to be reflected in Ps 24:7-9.

Lift up, O gates, your heads.  
Lift yourselves up, O ancient doors.  
The king of glory shall enter.  
Who is this king of glory?  
Yahweh, mighty and valiant,  
Yahweh the warrior.

The words of the psalm, now of course in a different context, may well have had their origin in cries of processionists in the victorious god's train as they approached the temple where the divine assembly was thought to reside. In the acolyte perspective the members of the assembly have been changed to architectural features of the temple. But it appears that the victorious god takes and reverses a statement made earlier in the assembly in a kind of inclusio.<sup>3</sup>

Psalm 29, acknowledged by many scholars as an adapted Canaanite hymn to Baal, seems also to portray the welcoming of the warrior god to the assembly

<sup>3</sup>For further discussion, see F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973) 91-93.

and the grant to him of the authority rightfully his by the victory over chaos. With no change in the consonantal Hebrew text and by reading enclitic *mem* instead of the plural, one can read

Ascribe to Yahweh, sons of El.  
Ascribe to Yahweh glory and strength,  
Ascribe to Yahweh his glorious name.

After his entry into the temple, Yahweh seats himself on Flood (another name for Sea), presumably the remnant of the slain monster from which he has created the cosmos.<sup>4</sup>

These conjectures have taken us into later stages. Analysis of *CTCA* 2 has shown, however, that before his victory over Yam, Baal was out of power in the assembly.

What distinguishes the second stage is that Baal is still without independent royal power despite his victory and needs to go to El and the assembly for a temple-granting decree. Important evidence is found in *CTCA* 4.1.4-19. The identity of the speaker is not certain but is probably Anat or Baal.

He cries out to Bull El his father  
The king who created him.  
He cries out to Asherah and her sons,  
The goddess and her brood of lions(?).  
Look, Baal has no house (*br*) like the gods,  
No court like the sons of Asherah.  
The dwelling of El is the shelter of his son,  
The dwelling of Lady Asherah of the Sea,  
The dwelling of the perfect brides,  
The dwelling of Pidrayya, daughter of Light,  
The shelter of Talliyya, daughter of Showers,  
The dwelling of Earthie, daughter of *y' bdr*.

(*CTCA* 4.1.4-19, 4.4.47-57, 3.5.43-52)

The logic is simple. Having his own temple would enable Baal to move out of El's household and to establish his harem independently.<sup>5</sup> It would also make him equal to "the gods/the sons of Asherah" providing a hall for divine banquets and a place to commemorate his victory and to proclaim his sovereignty.

The goddesses Asherah (*CTCA* 4.4.47-57) and Anat (*CTCA* 3.5.43-52) use the same words in their pleas before El on behalf of Baal, *after* the victory but

<sup>4</sup>For a recent treatment with bibliography, see A. Fitzgerald, "A Note on Psalm 29," *BASOR* 215 (1974) 61-63.

<sup>5</sup>Total dominion over a harem seems to be important in displaying independent royal power. Cf. the symbolism of Absalom's going into David's harem in 2 Sam 16:20-23.

before the temple is granted. They also add

Our king is Aliyan Baal  
 Our judge and there is none above him.  
 All of us carry his *q-f*.  
 All of us carry his *k-s*. (CTCA 4.4.43-46; 3.5.40-42)

Even though these two important members of the assembly call Baal their king, a decree is needed from El.

In discussing stage two it is appropriate to mention several features of the battle and victory of Baal. There is no single standard description of the storm god's battle in the Ugaritic texts but rather several, with a variety of motifs and a fluidity of actors. In CTCA 2.4, Baal alone defeats Yam with Koshar's magic weapons. In CTCA 3.3.34-4.48, Anat reveals that she was a participant in the battle and that there were many monsters in Yam's army.

Did I not smite the beloved of El, Yam?  
 Did I not destroy El's River, Rabbim?  
 Did I not muzzle the dragon? I muzzled him.  
 I crushed the crooked serpent,  
 Shilyat with the seven heads.  
 I smote the beloved of El, Ar(-).  
 I destroyed El's bullock, Atak.  
 I smote the divine bitch, Fire.  
 I destroyed the house of El Dbb.  
 I battled for the silver, I possessed the gold,  
 Of him who would thrust Baal from the heights of Zaphon

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 Of him who would chase him from his royal throne,  
 From the dais, the throne of his power.

A fragment, not from the Baal cycle, describes Anat's battle with the dragon as taking place not on Zaphon but on Lebanon.

In the land of *Mhnm* he (the dragon) swirled the sea,  
 His double-tongue licked the heavens;  
 His twin tails churned up (?) the sea.  
 She fixed the unmuzzled dragon.  
 She bound him to the heights of Leban(on). (PRU II 3.8-10)

On one occasion, Baal and Mot fight in single combat on Mt. Zaphon.

They shake one another like wild camels.  
 Mot is strong. Baal is strong.  
 They gore one another like buffaloes.  
 Mot is strong. Baal is strong.  
 -----  
 They butt like chargers.  
 Mot is exhausted. Baal is exhausted. (CTCA 6.6.16-22)



At this point the sun goddess Šapšu warns off Mot and Baal is seated as king.

A second feature of the battle is that it always takes place on a mountain. The texts just cited show that the battle is either at Zaphon, the mountain near the city of Ugarit, or at Lebanon. In the Hebrew Bible, motifs attached to Mt. Zaphon are attached to Mt. Zion. In Ps 48:3, Mt. Zion is even called Zaphon.

The third point has likewise been made in the texts already cited, that the battle on the mountain is for kingship. Those who attack want to drive Baal from the heights of Zaphon, from his royal seat. It is by the same token a battle for creation since Baal by his victory overcomes death and chaos.

In the third stage of the process of Baal becoming king, El issues a decree establishing the temple and Koshar wa-Hasis the divine craftsman sees to its construction. When Anat and Asherah ask El for permission for the temple, they celebrate El's decree.

Your decree, O El, is wise.

Your wisdom lasts forever.

A life of good fortune is your decree. (CTCA 4.4.41-43; 3.5.38-39)

The life-bestowing nature of El's decree is clearly seen in the Krt and Aqht epics where by its power a child is granted to a childless ruler. It is appropriate here as well since the storm god will direct his life-giving rains from his temple. El gives his decree in response to the goddesses' plea.

Let a temple be built for Baal like the gods,

A court like the sons of Asherah. (CTCA 4.4.62-5.63)

Asherah's hymn of response tells what Baal will do in his temple — continue the imposing of that order upon the cosmos initiated by the defeat of Yam or Mot.

And now let Baal appoint his rains,

Let him appoint the seasons of wetness(?) with snow(?).

And let him thunder in the clouds,

Let him flash his thunders in the earth. (CTCA 4.5.68-71)

When Koshar arrives to build the temple, the raw materials of gold, silver, and precious stones have already been gathered. At the completion of the structure, Baal rejoices,

My temple I have built of silver,

My palace indeed of gold. (CTCA 4.6.35-38)

The climactic couplet, repeated as an inclusio later in CTCA 4.8.32-36, frames the manifold proclamation of Baal's kingship in the heavens, on the earth, and in the underworld.

The fourth stage, the festive consecration of the temple by a banquet and the proclamation of sovereignty in the storm, is really an explication of Baal's

statement, "My house I have built of silver, my palace indeed of gold." He summons the members of the heavenly court, the seventy sons of Asherah — now he is their equal — for a banquet. The preserved text of over 41 lines does not tell us what went on at the banquet except for prodigious feats of eating.

One can conclude little from the broken first lines of column seven which follows the description of the banquet, certainly nothing about a conflict with Yam as some commentators have tried. The seizing of 66/77 and 80/90 cities and towns by Baal is not clear. Perhaps it is the manifestation of sovereignty in the localities around Mt. Zaphon where Baal's devotees live. Baal then manifests his kingship on earth while his enemies scatter.

He opened a window in the temple,  
 A casement in the midst of the palace.  
 Baal opened clefts in the clouds.  
 Baal uttered his holy voice.  
 Baal discharged the utterance of his lips.  
 His holy voice shook the earth.  
 - - - - - the mountains.  
 The distant - - - were quaking - - (?)  
 - - - - - the sea.  
 The high places of the earth tottered.  
 The enemies of Baal took to the wooded heights.  
 The haters of Haddu to the - - of the mountain.  
 And Aliyan Baal said,  
 "Enemies of Haddu, why are you quaking?  
 Why are you quaking, attackers of the Valiant One?"  
 The eye of Baal anticipated his hand,  
 When - - the cedar (club) in his right hand.  
 Indeed Baal is enthroned in his temple.  
 "No king or commoner,  
 A land of sovereignty shall establish.  
 Tribute I will not send to the son of El, Mot,  
 Gifts of homage(?) to the beloved of El, Ghazir." (CTCA 4.7.25-47)

There remains now the proclamation of his kingship to Mot in the underworld, who thinks that "he alone shall rule over the gods, yea, shall fatten gods and men, who shall satiate the multitudes of the earth" (CTCA 4.7.47-52). This Baal does by dispatching the messengers to the underworld to announce his rule in terms of the completion of his temple, "My temple I have built of silver, my palace indeed of gold."

These four stages illumine the significance of the temple in the Baal cycle. Without a decree of El (and the assembly) and a temple/palace, Baal is unable to be on a par with the other members of the assembly and has no place in which to continue the work of ordering and ruling the cosmos initiated in the defeat of his enemies. There are of course other texts in the six tablets which show that Baal falls into the power of Yam and Mot and suggest strongly that Baal's kingship is seasonal and must be ever won anew.

In deliberate contrast to the palace of Baal is the tent of El the high god. Within these six tablets El always dwells in a *'ahl/mškn* "tent"/"tabernacle." El's power does not seem to be seasonal but certainly is not always adequate for the governing of the universe. In one text, quoted above, El is coerced by the messengers of Yam. He is virtually seduced by his wife Asherah in her pursuit of his decree while Anat threatens the old god with physical violence for the same purpose. A frequently repeated description of El's dwelling reveals that it is the source of the cosmic waters which give life to the world.

Then they set face  
Toward El at the sources of the Two Rivers,  
In the midst of the pools of the Double Deep.  
They entered (i.e., rolled back the tent flaps) the tent of El and went into  
The tent shrine of the king, the father of years. (CTCA).

Beside being at the source of cosmic waters that fertilize the earth, El's tent is a place of decrees and the meeting place of the assembly of the gods.<sup>6</sup> It is not necessary to postulate, as many scholars have, that Baal and El are hostile to one another. There is no record of hostility in the texts, and evidence used from other ancient Near East theogonies must be used with extreme caution. Rather, two types of royal rule are portrayed, the one patriarchal with the archaic tent as the royal dwelling and which relies on wisdom and consensus, the other, national kingship with the temple/palace, relying on youth and military power. The two can coexist and the balance between them that is found in the Ugaritic texts expresses quite well the complexity of human (and divine) rule that is to be found in many nation-states of the time.

Whether the temple of Baal excavated at Ugarit re-presented liturgically on earth the heavenly temple described in the texts just considered cannot be decided. For an extended treatment of the earthly mountain and its temple, one must turn to the Hebrew Bible, particularly the psalms, but that is beyond the limits of this paper.

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<sup>6</sup>See further R. J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 4; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1972) 35-57.