

**BAAL AND NIQMADDU
A SUGGESTION TO UGARITIC KTU 1.2 I, 36-38**

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1. The episode KTU 1.2 I, 36-40 reports one of the most outstanding moments in the myth of Baal. Indeed, after the message delivered by the legation of Yam, El takes the decision to proclaim the latter as a new ruler over the gods, including Baal. Thus, El pronounces the following words with reference to Baal:

36 (... ...) 'bdk . b^cl . yymm . 'bdk . b^cl
 37 [nhr]m . bn . dgn . 'a[s]rkm . hw . ybl . 'argmnk . k²ilm
 38 [] ybl . w/kbn . qdš . mnhyk (... ...)¹

¹ An epigraphic problem in line 38 concerns the reading of the sign before *bn*. From the photograph published by M.S. Smith (Plates 40 and 41, in the book quoted in the next footnote) it is difficult to discern which sign is to be preferred. On the basis of Smith's collation, the sign for *w* appears to be more plausible. However, he translates the passage «like the Holy One», apparently reading *k*. It is probably difficult to resolve the problem, as the tablet is slightly damaged here and both signs are very similar in shape; hence the uncertain reading in CTA, 8: (w/k)bn, whereas KTU(2), 7 reads: *kbn* (see M. Dietrich - O. Loretz, "Der Baal-Zyklus 1.1-1.6", in *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments*. Band III. *Weisheitstexte, Mythen und Epen. Mythen und Epen* IV, Gütersloh 1994, p. 1123: *wie* ...). Apart from Smith's erroneous reproduction of the original lines of the tablet at p. 268 (the beginning of Smith's translation of line 27 is actually the end of line 36 of the original and, consequently, the beginning of Smith's translation of line 38 is actually the end of line 37), the stychometric analysis suggested by him seems to make the text much too complicated. His proposal is conditioned by the fact that the lacuna at the beginning of line 38 is restored by Smith *l'yk* following D. Stuart, *Studies in Early Hebrew Meter*, Missoula 1976, pp. 67, 71 n. 30, and to some extent D. Pardee, "The New Canaanite Myths and Legends", *BiOr* 28, 5-6, 1980, pp. 269-291 (p. 272). If we simply restore the lacuna as *hw*, following CML, and read the sign as *k* (which is a plausible hypothesis), we could restore the passage as follows: *hw . ybl . 'argmnk . k²ilm // [hw] ybl . kbn . qdš . mnhyk*, a good example of anaphoric - chiasmic structure, frequently attested in the Ugaritic literature, as also stated most recently by C.L. Miller, "Patterns of Verbal Ellipsis in Ugaritic Poetry", *UF* 31, 1999, pp. 333-372, especially p. 357 (see J.C. De Moor, "Syntax Peculiar to Ugaritic Poetry", in J.C. De Moor - W.G.E. Watson [eds.], *Verses in Ancient Near Eastern Prose*, AOAT 42, Kevelaer/Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1993, pp. 191-205, especially pp. 193-194; W.G.E. Watson, "Strophic Chiasmus in Ugaritic Poetry", *UF* 15, 1983, pp. 259-270; J.W. Welch, "Chiasmus in Ugaritic", *UF* 6, 1974, pp. 421-436). This stychometric analysis is now accepted by many scholars; a new translation of the myth is also provided by D. Pardee, "The Ba'lu Myth", in H.H. Hallo - K.L. Younger Jr. (eds.), *The Context of Scripture - I. Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, Leiden 1997, pp. 241-74 (according to Pardee, p. 246, the epigraphical uncertainty is resolved by his rendering: *like* ...). The present article was submitted in April, 2003, hence I was not able to take into account: D. Pardee, "Le traité d'alliance RS 11.772+", *Semitica* 51, 2003, pp. 5-31.

- 36 (... ...) your slave is Baal, o Yam, your slave is Baal,
 37 [O Riv]er, the Son of Dagan, your captive, He will bring tribute to you, like the
 Gods,
 38 [] will bring, like (?) the Son of Holiness, offerings to you (... ...).

El's discourse is meant to exact obedience from Baal and to humiliate him in front of Yam. The consequence of the present humiliation is Baal's reaction which will unavoidably lead to the final duel with Yam and to his defeat, as related in KTU 1.2, IV.

From a literary point of view, the peculiarity of this passage lies in the type of language employed, which recalls the language used in diplomatic documents, namely "treaty terminology", as identified by Fensham².

In my view, the issue appears to be of some interest, especially when taking into account the neat differentiation characterizing, more generally, the language of poetic texts, on one hand and of prose texts on the other³. Hence this "borrowing" from a genre to another one appears even more striking.

In this respect, Fensham's statement that «a third possible base for mythological material in the Canaanite world is politics»⁴ is significant. In fact, the scholar views the presence of "diplomatic language" within literary texts as linking the world of mythological and epic narrative to the real (i.e. the political and cultural) world.

Even though it is extremely difficult to discover allusions to actual political events within Ugaritic literature, such a statement might seem to be quite plausible.

Probably Ugaritic literature was no different from the literatures of ancient Near East, and possibly there are more instances than we are actually able to discern.

2. In this respect, I would like to draw attention to the expression *hw ybl 'argmnk* ("he will bring tribute to you") contained in line 37. This expression has been singled out because of its specific connection with KTU 3.1⁵, 18-19, 24-26, where the following parallels can be found:

KTU 3.1, 18-19

hlny . 'argmn d[ybl . n]qmd
lšpš 'arn (... ...)

here is the tribute which Niqm[addu bri]ngs

² F.Ch. Fensham, "Notes on Treaty Terminology in Ugaritic Epics", *UF* 11, 1979, pp. 265-274; see also the analysis by M.S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle. Volume I. Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1-1.2*, Leiden, 1994, pp. 267-268.

³ W.G.E. Watson - N. Wyatt (eds.), *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies*, Leiden - Boston - Köln 1999, Chapter V, and Chapters VI-IX.

⁴ F.Ch. Fensham, *op. cit.*, especially p. 274.

⁵ G.N. Knoppers, "Treaty, Tribute List, or Diplomatic Letter: KTU 1.3 Reexamined", *BASOR* 289, 1993, pp. 81-94, especially p. 86; M.S. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 308; see also, G.N. Knoppers, "Ancient Near Eastern Royal Grants and the Davidic Covenant: A Parallel?", *JAOS* 116, 11, 1996, pp. 670-697, especially p. 693.

to the Sun of 'Arn⁶

KTU 1.3, 24-26:

'argmn . nqmd . mlk . 'ugrt

dybl lšps

mlk . rb . b'lh

the tribute, of Niqmaddu king of Ugarit,

that one he brings to the Sun,

the Great King, his Lord

At first glance, these lines immediately recall the mythological episode under discussion. The god Baal is described as bringing tribute, 'argmn⁷, in much the same way as king Niqmaddu. In my opinion, this connection has never been seriously evaluated for a better comprehension of the episode of Baal's, especially when taking into consideration the crucial significance of KTU 3.1 in a historical perspective⁸.

In fact, KTU 3.1 records the large tribute paid by the king of Ugarit, Niqmaddu (possibly Niqmaddu II), following the ratification of a treaty between him and the Hittite king, Suppiluliuma. If we accept the usually assumed identification of the two historical figures mentioned in the text as Niqmaddu II and Suppiluliuma I, at the end of the XIV century, we are fully able to comprehend that this tablet reflects quite a traumatic and essential event of the history of the Ugaritic kingdom as a whole⁹. In fact, in the second half of the XIV century and for the first time in its history, the kingdom of Ugarit was forced to become the vassal of a foreign and stronger power, namely the Hittite empire. At that period, Suppiluliuma was indeed able to incorporate the many small kingdoms concentrated in the northern region of Syria. A detailed description of the present political scenario has recently been provided by I. Singer¹⁰ and J. Freu¹¹, who particularly point

⁶ A translation of these lines is also given by J. Tropper, "Die enklitische Partikel -y im Ugaritischen", *UF* 26, 1994, pp. 473-482, especially p. 477.

⁷ The meaning "tribute" for the non-semitic term 'argmn has been reaffirmed recently by W.G.E. Watson, "Non-Semitic Words in the Ugaritic Lexicon", *UF* 27 1995, pp. 533-558, (pp. 541-542).

⁸ Interestingly, this typology of diplomatic language can also be found in the letter KTU 2.72, 24-29, even though the completely different context does not allow any potential allusion to be identified, in my opinion, it is further evidence for what we are suggesting here. On this text see *Une bibliothèque au sud de la ville. Ras Shamra - Ugarit*, sous la direction de P. Bordreuil, Paris 1991, pp. 142-150.

⁹ According to Knoppers' thorough analysis, KTU 3.1 may be considered a covering letter accompanying Niqmaddu's tribute. This statement is questioned by D. Pardee, "Remarks on J.T's «epigraphische Anmerkungen»", *AuOr* 16, 1998, pp. 85-102, especially p. 99 (see also KTU[2] which classifies the text as a "record of payment of tribute"). See also M. Dietrich - O. Loretz, "Der Vertrag zwischen Šuppiluliuma und Niqmaddu: Eine philologische und kulturhistorische Studie", *WO* 3, 1966, pp. 206-245. Originally the tablet was published by Ch. Vrololeaud, "Lettres et documents administratifs provenant des archives d'Ugarit", *Syria* 21, 1940, pp. 247-273 (pp. 260-266). The text is included in the second edition of KTU, 199-200, see also the correction to by J. Tropper, "Epigraphische Anmerkungen zur Neuauflage von KTU", *AuOr* 13, 1995, pp. 231-239, (p. 235), where he reaffirms Knoppers' statement.

¹⁰ I. Singer, "A Political History of Ugarit", in *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies*, cit., pp. 603-733.

out the historical significance of the event for the life of Ugarit (as well as of the other Syrian kingdoms): «Niqmaddu II witnessed the most important political development in the Late Bronze Age history of Ugarit: the shift from the loose hegemony of Egypt to full integration into the Hittite Empire»¹².

3. The historical significance reflected by KTU 3.1 should induce us to consider the episode reporting Baal's humiliation within the myth from a special perspective.

Undoubtedly, Baal was usually described as the defeated king within the diplomatic propaganda of KTU 3.1. Accordingly, on the basis of such a connection, one might suppose a direct reference to the political event within the Baal's episode cited above by the poet who composed the text at that period. As is well-known, *Ilmlk* is generally considered to have written at the court of Niqmaddu II, so that ultimately he too might have been a witness of the political event mentioned.

The hypothesis may appear to be most intriguing, but unfortunately it is very difficult to be demonstrated with certainty; especially when taking into account the recent reconsideration of the problem concerning the period within which *Ilmlk* is usually supposed to have written his poems (i.e., according to the new proposal, the end of the XIII century rather than the end of the XIV century)¹³.

On the other hand, if we try to account for the striking textual connection that emerges between the mythological and the diplomatic texts, we have to emphasize one aspect which seems to have been underestimated.

It is as follows. The figures of the main god of the pantheon and the king were identified on a specifically ideological level within the ancient Near East. In other words, the category of the chief ruling god and of the leader of the community frequently appear to overlap. Ugaritic civilization is one example among the many attested in antiquity to have shared such a conception, as was also pointed out by M. Yon¹⁴. Hence, such an identification should be viewed as a cultural trait preceding any political event that actually happened.

¹¹ J. Freu, "Ugarit et les puissances à l'époque amarnienne (ca 1350-1310 av. J.-C.)", *Semitica* 50, 2000, pp. 9-39, especially pp. 29-32.

¹² I. Singer, *op. cit.*, p. 636.

¹³ D. Pardee, *op. cit.* (see footnote n. 1), p. 241 n. 3; Singer, *op. cit.* (see footnote 10), especially p. 688 n. 284, 705 n. 340; D. Pardee, Review to M. Smith's book, *JNES* 57, 1998, pp. 46-48, especially p. 47. Though such a hypothesis seems to be very stimulating, nevertheless it requires further research, as was also pointed out also by D. Pardee, "Ugaritic Studies at the End of the 20th Century", *BASOR* 320, 2000, pp. 49-86, especially p.80. See A.S. Dalix, "Šuppiliuma (II?) dans un texte alphabétique Ugarit et la date d'apparition de l'alphabet cunéiforme. Nouvelle proposition de datation des 'Archives Ouest' ", *Semitica* 48, 1998, pp. 5-15.

¹⁴ M. Yon, "Baal et le roi", in J. Huot - M. Yon - Y. Calvet (eds.), *De l'Indus aux Balcons* (Fs J. Deshayes), Paris 1985, pp. 177-190; see also more in general, A. Annus, *The God Ninurta in the Mythology and Royal Ideology of Ancient Mesopotamia*, SAAS 14, 2002; N. Wyatt, "Arms and the King. The Earliest Allusion to the *Chaoskampf* Motif and Their Implication of the Ugaritic and Biblical Traditions", in M. Dietrich (ed.), "Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf", *Festschrift für Oswald Loretz zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres mit Beiträgen von Freunden, Schülern und Kollegen*, AOAT 250, Münster 1998, pp. 833-882.

We may imagine (as KTU 3.1 also seems to confirm) that, apart from the period in which the Baal cycle was composed, the traumatic event concerning the incorporation of Ugarit into the Hittite empire (with the resulting payment of a large tribute by the king Niqmaddu) must in some way have been impressed in everyone's memory¹⁵.

In the light of the ideological imaginary, that we have singled out, we may assume that it was natural for the poet composing the episode of Baal's humiliation to perceive a parallel between the historical event and the mythical story. This parallel was then translated into an allusive literary pattern which consists of the use of diplomatic expressions within the mythological text. In my opinion, if this is true, we are dealing with a case which may be considered a rare example that provides us with information regarding the creation to the making of a literary text in ancient Ugarit.

This means that the main purpose of the "political allusion" emerging from Baal's episode was not to make the text describe the virtues of the unfortunate sovereign behind the mythical figure of the main god. To find such a link would seem to be a misleading guideline for the entire Baal cycle. On the contrary, the literary strategies of the episode narrated in KTU 1.2 I, 36-40 seem to draw the attention of the reader to the dramatic and crucial significance of Baal's humiliation. Thus, the use of a language evidently belonging to another genre, namely that of diplomacy, as well as the ideological overlap of god and king, are the poetical and cultural tools skilfully employed by the poet. We could label such a compositional process as a "politically discreet allusion", a discreet allusion that enables the text to achieve a powerful stylistic effect¹⁶.

If we try to go a step further in pointing out the relevance of this literary strategy, we have to reflect on the following aspect: the episode of Baal's humiliation turns out to have the function merely of a general preamble determining an intense climax which unavoidably leads to Baal's triumph. The god will fight a duel with his enemy Yam and will defeat him; the entire world will salute Baal as the new king of the universe and "bring" him (this time!) sumptuous materials as tribute for the construction of his palace¹⁷.

Not so different was the fate of the unfortunate king Niqmaddu, who did not try to fight against Suppiluliuma openly, but instead was able to lead the entire community of Ugarit into general wellbeing, through the traumatic incorporation of his kingdom. His wise politics, in fact, would permit a dignified identity under the main and powerful authority of Hatti. The last two centuries of the history of Ugarit are sufficient evidence for this.

¹⁵ L. Bolzoni, *La rete delle immagini. Predicazione in volgare dalla origine a Bernardino da Siena*, Torino 2002.

¹⁶ As to the complexity of this type of communication, see the recent article by M.H. Feldman, "Ambiguous Identities: The Marriage Vase of Niqmaddu II and the Elusive Egyptian Princess", *JMA* 15, 2002, pp. 75-99, where the strategy suggested to be behind the enigmatic scene represented on the fragments of the alabaster vase RS 15.239 / Damascus Museum 4160 seems to be analogous to the present discussion.

¹⁷ A subtle connection between the episode of Baal's humiliation and the events told in KTU 1.4 (in particular the crucial episode of the construction of Baal's palace) is a suggestion made by G. Mazzini, "Dinamiche testuali nella tavoletta KTU 1.4", *EVO* 14, 2001, pp. 151-157, especially see footnote n. 8.