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What Has Ugarit to Do with Jerusalem?

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When Tertullian asked his famous rhetorical question, 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?',[1] I suppose him to have been contrasting the sophistical philosophical thinking of the Greeks, appealing to a reasoning that was ultimately human in origin, with the kerygmatic nature of biblical thought (and the theologies deriving therefrom), appealing to a reasoning that was believed to be divine in origin. Human autonomy was to be rejected in favour of the Word of God, mere speculation to yield to true religion.

My title comes at this matter from left field. For in contemporary scholarship I venture to suggest that for most biblical scholars, the kind of reasoning applied to the Bible, which has for a considerable time conditioned the nature of its discourse, has been essentially determined by human logical categories, at least in principle, thus conceding ground fairly consistently to the autonomy of reason in the Athenian sense.

However – and you might have anticipated a qualification – things have been a little more complicated than this.

For generations we knew of the ancient Western Asiatic world only through the looking-glass of the Bible, and for its later period through the mirror of the Greek historians and antiquaries such as Berossus, Philo of Byblus, and Eusebius. Wonderful names like Tiglath-Pileser, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadrezzar promised great things, but like Ozymandias (Rameses II), the splendour of their common title – 'King of kings' – was measured by almost complete ignorance of their life and times.

With the birth of archaeology in the early nineteenth century, the situation began to alter. Over generations of scholarship and research, the ancient world slowly yielded up its secrets, and we have been able to piece together, clue by clue, potsherd by potsherd, tablet by tablet, something of

the rich and complex world of the ancients. Some of the ancient literature recovered has had a massive impact on the reading and literary public. Thus the Akkadian epic of *Gilgamesh* was republished in 1999, in a new translation by Andrew George, commissioned by Barnes and Noble, the American chainstore bookshop, as a hardback best-seller (and is now a best-seller for Penguin in paperback). The Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, with its exquisite iconography, has captured the imagination of generations of students and lay people alike.

One of the consequences of this continuing process of rediscovery was its inevitable impact on the world of biblical scholarship. It was increasingly recognized that themes in the Bible had not only their parallels, but also their antecedents, in these older traditions, particularly from Mesopotamia, the fabled homeland of the patriarchs. From its original position of splendid isolation, it became ever clearer that biblical literature not only had many parallels in other ancient literatures, but owed this older material many debts too. Perhaps the most striking individual case was the discovery by George Smith in 1872, among the growing library of Akkadian tablets in the British Museum, of the story of *Atraḫasīs*, the precursor of the story of Noah's flood in Genesis.[2]

As the volume of archaeological discoveries burgeoned (and it was often quantitative, measured by the number of crates shipped back to the great museums of Europe and North America, for this was the era of the foundation of the great collections), interest in the perceived influence, particularly of Mesopotamia, upon the biblical world grew to the point where some less cautious scholars appeared to be claiming that *nothing* in the Bible was original: *all* was derivative, and the inspiration was always Mesopotamia. But this enthusiasm eventually gave way to a more realistic assessment, and the dust has long settled.[3]

Egypt, paradoxically, was never viewed as posing a particular threat of any kind to the authority of the Bible, and for a considerable number of scholars has offered a solution to one of the most persistent historical problems, concerning the antiquity of biblical monotheism. The Bible itself attributes this great intellectual and spiritual breakthrough to Moses (whose name is Egyptian), though its evidence is ambiguous, to say the least, allowing a Midianite (Exodus 3) or an Egyptian (Exodus 6) locus for Moses' encounter with God. The so-called 'Amarna Age', the short period in the eighteenth dynasty, in the mid-fourteenth century BCE, when the Egyptian cult of the sun-disc (Aten) flourished under Akhenaten (Amenhotpe IV), has often been seen as providing precisely the stimulus for which historians search, in terms of a strictly historical antecedent

cause.[4] Unfortunately, despite initially favourable appearances, the Aten cult cannot conclusively be said to be monotheistic, and this view is convincingly rebutted by important authorities.[5]

Excavations in Syria never appeared to rival, let alone to eclipse those of Mesopotamia or Egypt, and indeed nothing of any striking significance in relation to biblical studies, with perhaps the exception of the Moabite Stone, emerged during the entire nineteenth century.

In 1928, however, well into the twentieth century, a farmer, ploughing his field at Ras Shamra near the coast of northern Syria, uncovered the upper stonework of a type of corbelled tomb already known from Mycenae in Greece. Preliminary excavations in the neighbourhood began in 1929, and apart from the war years, these have continued ever since.

There are three main sites in the area, some 12 kilometres north of Latakia. The first discovery was of the harbour town in the bay of Minet al Beida (ancient Maḫadu, 'Port(-Town)'). Excavations here were carried on for five years. Already in 1929 a trial cut had been made at neighbouring Tell Ras Shamra, about two kilometres to the east, and the first clay tablets were discovered there in the first season. This has turned out to be a substantial if compact city, with two main temples on the north-eastern acropolis, a large palace constructed over several phases to the west, and stone construction everywhere of a high order, well-laid streets, with domestic and municipal drainage and sewerage systems. The tell was soon recognized as the ancient city of Ugarit, mentioned in the fourteenth-century diplomatic correspondence from the Tell el Amarna archive. The third site at neighbouring Ras Ibn Hani, a coastal promontory two kilometers south-west of the main city, revealed a summer palace and adjacent coastal town, and further tablets.

Inscribed tablets appeared in the city excavations from the first season, and have continued throughout most of the subsequent seasons. Before long they had eclipsed all written sources from Phoenicia from the entire preclassical era. Only at the excavations at Tell Atchana, ancient Alalakh, and at the massive site of Tell Mardikh, ancient Ebla, have tablets been discovered in any quantity elsewhere in western Syria.[6]

The archives from Ugarit are striking on a number of counts. Documents were discovered in seven languages, indicating a truly international city, with wide-ranging commercial and diplomatic connections; languages attested are Akkadian, Cypro-Minoan, Egyptian, Hittite (both cuneiform and hieroglyphic), Hurrian, Sumerian, and Ugaritic. This last language was entirely unknown, and written in an alphabetic cuneiform script, in contrast with the syllabic form of the other cuneiform scripts. This was

hailed by some as the earliest alphabet, but is now known to have been an adaptation for writing on clay of the linear 'proto-Canaanite' script, which already had a seven hundred-year prehistory.[7]

It is the religious texts in the Ugaritic language which have had the greatest impact on wider scholarship, for they witness to the religious beliefs of West Semitic peoples in the period immediately preceding, and perhaps even overlapping with, the earliest Hebrew records. In brief, they have become of primary importance for the study of the earliest Israelite religion. Indeed, they have a broader impact, for this archive far surpasses in quantity and quality all other Canaanite, Phoenician, and any other Syrian religious documentation for the entire pre-current era and even contributes significantly to the prehistory of Greek religion.

The Ugaritic texts belong to a number of literary forms. There are letters, legal documents, commercial documents, administrative lists, and a variety of religious texts: incantations, ritual lists and calendars, omen-texts of various kinds, such as inscribed livers and lungs, pantheon-lists, two long epic poems (*Keret* and *Aqhat*), hymns, shorter mythic texts, and a number of associated texts narrating the destiny of Baal, the local storm-god.

The religious texts were immediately recognized by scholars as of considerable importance for biblical scholarship, though paradoxically they remain to this day largely unknown to the general public. Though the majority of these texts date from the turn of the thirteenth and twelfth centuries BCE, and are consequently removed both geographically and, on a conventional dating, historically from Israelite literature, the flowering of which has been progressively lowered in date over the last few decades, the extent of the relationship between the two has been progressively more appreciated.

Attitudes among biblical scholars to the Ugaritic material have varied considerably, however. On the positive side we may cite such descriptions as '*La Bible Cananéenne*', the title of a French translation of selected texts,[8] while M.E.J. Richardson wrote of them rather whimsically as 'The less inspired Scriptures'.[9] Considerable numbers of the small fraternity of scholars who specialize in the field are eloquent in their defence and recognition of their primary importance for biblical scholarship.

At the other end of the spectrum of opinion there has always been a constituency among biblical scholars who regard any comparative discussion with deep suspicion, and the Ugaritic texts in particular as 'a bad thing'. Here are a few representative examples of the more extreme negative assessment of some. L. Bronner wrote of

> ... the sensuous fertility cults of the natives, with their child sacrifices, depraved godlets, and immoral religious practices ... the seductive nature worship which was the religion of Canaan ...[10]

U. Oldenburg castigated Canaanite religion's

> ... utter depravity and wickedness[11]

while J.C. de Moor's final estimation of the texts was expressed thus:

> They merely describe the world of the gods such as they felt it had to be. A world full of hate, violence, treason, wickedness, greed, partiality, rashness, blunders, drinking-bouts and orgies. This is the pantheon of disillusion ...[12]

This is purple prose indeed, bringing to bear every rhetorical turn in the service of prejudice. De Moor at least had the merit that he reached this conclusion following a detailed analysis of what, adopting a phrase of J. Assmann, he called 'the crisis of polytheism', which allegedly afflicted Western Asia as a result of the 'Amarna revolution', the era of Pharaoh Akhenaten in Egypt. Unfortunately, this appraisal of the period as one of theological bankruptcy, disillusion, and reform, as the ancient world supposedly absorbed the implications of the monotheistic Aten cult for its own polytheistic systems, errs in one small respect, as we have noted: the Aten cult was not monotheistic. And the various strategies which have been employed to try and establish that Moses was an Egyptian, whether from Akhenaten's time, or from the supposed period of the theological fall-out that followed, have one thing in common: they are all without any clear historical justification. More seriously, the attempt to show that the entire structure of a religious culture was essentially based on bad faith and despair is simply unbelievable, and these descriptions bear no relation to the evidence of the texts.

But I am concerned here not so much with this shrill opposition from certain conservative theological quarters, which is entirely predictable, but rather with a much more pernicious bias which has tended to permeate even liberal scholarship. This may be identified, following Edward Said's fine study, as 'orientalism',[13] and is essentially the racist and colonialist attitude which informed the growth of the European world empires in the nineteenth century, fired at once by capitalist greed, the desire to spread the gospel (provided that it did not interfere with capitalism, of course), and above all the firm conviction of the inherent superiority of the white man over those of a different hue. It is the second of these

motives which concerns us, for it has seriously skewed scholarly assessment of the non-biblical material.

In his recently published, horrifying account of the rape of the Congo by Leopold II of Belgium, Adam Hochschild characterized the contemporary European attitude in the following terms, as expressed by the district commissioner Léon Rom, who summed up his view of Black African culture thus:

> The product of a mindless state, its feelings are coarse, and in addition, it is proud and vain. The black man's principal occupation, and that to which he dedicates the greatest part of his existence, consists of stretching out on a mat in the warm rays of the sun, like a crocodile on the sand ... The black man has no idea of time, and, questioned on that subject by a European, he generally responds with something stupid.[14]

This extraordinary passage could be a parody of the package-tour industry of today, down to the Germans hogging the poolside with their towels from breakfast time. It is surely a classic case of the transference of one's own traits to others, so that we may criticize ourselves without censure.

Rather less terrifying in its discourse, yet equally pernicious in the long term, was the implicit racism of the vast bulk of the classical anthropology of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which has been well catalogued by Said and Kuper[15] and, with particular reference to the Bible, Judaism, and Christianity, by H. Eilberg-Schwarz and K. Whitelam.[16] Eilberg-Schwarz lamented the false dichotomy between 'primitive' pagan religions and 'advanced' Judaism, itself fulfilled in Christianity:

> Since the Enlightenment, Judaism has typically been regarded as superior to other religions, with the single exception of Christianity. Although inferior to Christianity, 'the absolute religion', Judaism was not considered sufficiently primitive to be classified with the religion of savages. This judgment gave rise to the conviction that interpreters of Judaism had little if anything to learn from either the discipline of anthropology or comparative enquiry.[17]

One implication of this passage is that Canaanite religion *was* primitive, and therefore incommensurable with Judaeo-Christian religion.

Whitelam complained of 'the silencing of Palestinian history', not only in the biblical tradition, but in the subsequent Jewish and modern Israeli perception of the Jewish relation to the land. But he also demonstrated how many important Christian interpreters of the evidence (notably

W.F. Albright) had skewed the evidence to accord with ideological presuppositions.[18]

But let us remain with the black African imagery, for this lies very close to home in the pages of the Bible itself, and I suspect is the most significant contributing factor in the prejudice with which we are concerned. In the story of the drunkenness of Noah in Genesis 9:20–7, Ham, second son of Noah, and eponymous ancestor of all African peoples in the cosmology of the text, 'saw his father's nakedness'. The precise meaning of this coy expression need not concern us, and indeed is much debated; what matters is that such an act, even inadvertent, brings a curse down on the perpetrator of the deed. But wait ... It is not on Ham that the curse is subsequently pronounced, but on his son, Canaan.

We would nowadays understand Canaan to belong to the so-called Semitic peoples, descendants of the eponymous ancestor Shem. But he has been singled out for particular opprobrium, and furthermore, denied his natural consanguinity with Israel (shared by all the other speakers of Semitic tongues) in this fictitious genealogy, and blamed for the sin of his father. Within the broader context of the Hebrew Bible, the motive for this is only too clear. The Israelites are enjoined in Deuteronomy 27:2 to commit genocide against the Canaanites and their confrères in the following chilling terms:

> Then Yahweh your god will give them up to you, and you shall strike them, you shall impose the ban on them [in effect this means 'annihilate']: you shall make no treaty with them, nor show them any pity.

The rationale offered in the following verses (3–4) is that intermarriage and apostasy are feared as the result of any positive contact between the two peoples. But the sanctions seem a little excessive, and we may suspect that they are motivated by more pressing concerns. These turn out on examination to reflect an exceedingly complex historical situation.

The very concept of apostasy is really alien to ethnic religion, of the kind practised by ancient societies before the rise of confessional religions during the 'axial age'. Religious life in the ancient Near East, Israel and Judah not excluded, consisted broadly, in the Iron Age period, of polytheistic conceptions of deity, and a fairly relaxed syncretistic adoption of the gods of other systems where cultural, commercial, or diplomatic usage justified it. Individual piety also meant that private persons might have a particular devotion to a deity perceived to have helped them in time of trouble. Naaman's new devotion to Yahweh (2 Kings 5) was undoubtedly

reciprocated in similar Israelite piety towards Syrian gods. Religion in Israel would have been largely indistinguishable from the religions of the surrounding peoples of the Levant.

The picture that the biblical narrative draws of a pristine monotheistic revelation in the time of Moses, from which the Israelites subsequently lapsed, as they were tempted into paths of unrighteousness by the wicked Canaanites, has shaped much biblical scholarship since the genesis of the discipline. Today this whole construction is called seriously into question by the majority of biblical scholars, who recognize in this narrative a mythic construction, in which the Israelites project their own much later theology (from the fifth century BCE and afterwards) into the primordial past, and associate it with the birth of their nation. That which is crucial to world-construction must of necessity be shown to belong to *illud tempus*, the very beginning of time. A simple example illustrates the principle: the Sabbath observance, which became a primary marker of Jewish identity following the exile in Babylon, is structured into the very foundation of the world in Genesis 1,[19] with its six days of creation followed by the divine rest.

So what is the main purpose of the so-called historical books of the Bible, if not to relate sober and veridical history? It is to explain Israel's present, that is, the people's condition at the time of the composition and editing of the narratives in the fifth to the third centuries BCE. Because they have been through the ordeal of exile, when the Babylonians crushed the kingdom, destroyed the temple, and deported the royal family and the nobility, they require a theological explanation. A theodicy. The gods, and especially Israel's god, are by nature righteous. If they punish their people, it is because the people have sinned. What sin could be so monstrous as to lead Yahweh to reject his own people? The ultimate sin: apostasy, real or imagined. Looking back at their earlier religious history, with its happy syncretism and evident debt to surrounding cultures and above all to the dominant 'Canaanite'[20] culture of the region, they see to their horror that much of the substance of the ancient cult is essentially 'Canaanite'! Without the clear historical awareness which we can happily enjoy with hindsight and a little help from archaeology, they think that the transformation of the old belief system, 'Israelite religion', into the new one, 'Judaism', will somehow free them from the burden of the past. All is thus cast in a framework of shrill denunciation: no punishment is too bad for those who would lead Israel astray. It is a matter of life and death for the Jews. It should surely be no less for their opponents. (We could even extend this narrative into the present day, as a partial explanation of the

intractability of the present Middle East conflict. For 'Canaanites' read 'Palestinians'.)

But history is full of little ironies. Such is the symbolic power of the ancient glue – 'Canaanite' glue, remember! – that holds a culture's identity and aspirations in shape, that for all the twists and turns of history, it remains pretty firmly in place.

We may now, after this lengthy introduction, turn to consider some of the chief features of the religion of ancient Ugarit, with a view to showing how they lie at the very foundations of later Israelite, and still later Jewish, belief. Isolating these features and recognizing the connections and the infinite permutations of the development of ideas has been my main research over the last twenty-five years. But it also reflects the work of colleagues in European and North American universities, of course. And like all cultural realities in a complex world, the following ideas are by no means necessarily peculiar to the West Semitic world (sc. Ugarit and Israel), but emerge from a broader scene in which many of them were widely adapted to local concerns, often with a surprising symbolic constancy. The main issue in the present discussion is the particular closeness with which the Hebrew reflects the Ugaritic forms of the common tradition.

I shall give examples in four main areas, though others might also be adduced, such as the precisely cognate nature of the technical terminology of cult practice and the religious shaping of space and time, those primary data of experience, to say nothing of the closeness of poetic style, construction, and even vocabulary in the two literatures. The main areas I shall discuss briefly are

(i) cosmology: the shape of the universe,
(ii) myths of creation through divine conflict,
(iii) royal ideology, with specific reference to the divine begetting of the king, and
(iv) theology.

(I) COSMOLOGY[21]

The conception of the world throughout the ancient Near East in the pre-Ptolemaic era was of a flat earth, bounded round the outside by the cosmic ocean, which, held back by hemispherical boundaries, also overarched the firmament of heaven and subtended the underworld. The earth thus hung, it was believed, as a diaphragm within the sphere, around which flowed the endless waters of the abyss, a gigantic placental structure. The name of this vast body of water, the abyss (Greek ἄβυσσος), was derived from

Sumerian AB.ZU, 'the waters of knowing', loaned into Akkadian and Ugaritic as *apsu*, and into Hebrew as *'epes*.[22] Various permutations were found, and no model was entirely consistent, being the product of long ages of reflection and narration. The West Semitic versions specifically express the idea of the 'end of the world', bounded by this cosmic ocean, at which primordial, formative events take place. Thus the sacred marriage between the old high god El and his daughter-wives in the Ugaritic text *Shahar and Shalem*, KTU 1.23.30 (to which we shall return below), takes place on this remote strand. The narrative begins:

> El went out to the shore of the sea,
> and stepped out to the shore of the abyss.

At this point, the old god, who like Abraham is childless, begins a journey into life and renewal in the production of divine offspring. The conceptual framework here is the same as that obtaining with events in Egypt in the narrative of the Pentateuch. The *yam sûp* separates Egypt from Asia, and while commonly translated as 'the Red Sea', or as 'the Sea of Reeds' (thus many modern versions), is rather the 'Sea of the End', or as I translate it, since Egypt is implicitly a place of death, contrasting with the land of the living to which the Israelites aspire, the 'Sea of Extinction'. The text of Hosea 2 may even be a direct reflex of the Ugaritic myth, for it too accepts the same presuppositions. Verse 5 reads thus:

> Or I shall strip her entirely naked
> and I shall make her as on the day of her birth.
>
> Then I shall place her in the desert,
> and I shall set her down in a dry land,
> and I shall make her die of thirst.

The nakedness is not explained, but, allowing for Hosea's own negative interpretation of the motif, surely points right back to the origin of the girl herself (and may be compared to Hagar's lot in Genesis 16, below). Is this not Yahweh's own daughter, just born, and yet to be married by her own divine father? Indeed, this marriage will not be long in being consummated, for in vv. 16–17 we read that:

> Lo,
> I shall be seducing her
> as I take her out into the desert
> and as I speak to her heart.
> ...

> And she will respond to me there as in the days of her youth,
> and as the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.

Nor is this all, for having peeled away the figures of the surrounding verses, which describe all the corruption that has taken place since that idyllic moment in the past, to be repeated in the future in the redemption of Israel, we have to recognize the other half of the marriage metaphor, the offspring, now located far away in Hosea 11:1:

> For a child (or: prince, *na'ar*) was Israel and I loved him
> and from Egypt I called (or: named) my son.

There are many detailed differences between the ancient Near Eastern cosmologies: the evidence from Ugarit shows it to have been closely related to, and indeed the foundation of, the biblical conception.

(II) MYTHS OF CREATION[23]

A number of models were used in the ancient world to express the idea of creation. Typical are sexual images (alluded to above, and of which more below), technological metaphors, the creative role of the divine utterance, and the conquest of the embodiment of chaos, itself divine, by a creator god who becomes ruler of the pantheon.

The versions of this last mythic form found in the ancient Near East all derive from at most two early narratives, which may themselves derive from a common source.[24] These first find expression in the Sumerian myth of Ninurta the storm-god and his combat with Anzu,[25] a cross between a lion and an eagle, thus a chimera and symbol of chaos; and between the Amorite storm-god, originally Tishpak, later identified as Enlil, Marduk or Baal in Ugarit and Yahweh in Israel, and a draconian seamonster, also chaotic, called 'Deep' (*Ti'amat*), or 'dragon' (*mušḫuššu*).[26] The Ugaritian form of this god is known as 'Sea' and 'River' (*Yam*, *Nahar*), where the river is the encircling ocean. He is also called *Litanu* ('Wriggler'), which appears in Hebrew as *Liwyātān* (Leviathan), and 'dragon' (*tannînu*, Hebrew *tannîn*). All the versions of the myth have quite distinctive traits. The two most intimately linked, as with general cosmology noted above, are the Ugaritic and Hebrew versions. Simply on poetic grounds, they are closely related, a feature enhanced when their ideology is considered. Let us consider the following parallels.

KTU 1.5 i 1–3 reads:

> Though you smote Litanu the fleeing serpent,
> finished off the writhing serpent,
> Encircler-with-seven-heads ...[27]

The wording of this, even to some of the same recherché terms occurring, evidently lies behind the futuristic verse Isaiah 27:1:

> On that day Yahweh will punish
> with his relentless sword, great and sharp,
> Leviathan the fleeing serpent,
> yea, Leviathan the writhing serpent,
> and he will slay the Dragon which is in the sea.[28]

Similarly, four names are used of the enemy in the now expanded tetracolon in Psalm 74:13–14a, 15b:

> You split Sea by your power;
> you shattered the heads of Dragon;
> you crushed the heads of Leviathan
>
> ...
> you dried up perennial River.

These names correspond precisely to those of Baal's enemy, Yam, in the Ugaritic tradition, and are not attested beyond these two literatures.

In Ugarit the myth is employed to champion the storm-god, Baal, as king among the gods, and to celebrate the building of his temple. This is at the same time a thinly disguised piece of royal propaganda, presenting the king as a victorious warrior who, like the god, has entered triumphantly into his inheritance.[29] Each of these traits features in the numerous biblical allusions to the myth.

One striking parallel is the appeal to the legal concept of inheritance, here legitimized by victory in the cosmic battle. Let us consider the following Ugaritic passage, in which Baal, now victorious, addresses the war-goddess Anat:

> Come,
> and I shall reveal it
> in the midst of my divine mountain, Saphon,
> in the sanctuary,
> on the mountain of my inheritance,
> in Paradise, on the height of victory.[30]

This theme becomes one of the main leitmotifs of the Pentateuch. While there are numerous secondary uses, in which the 'inheritance' is just a legal metaphor for possession of territory, its roots appear fairly clearly in such passages as the following.

Psalm 105:10–11:

> [Yahweh] raised it up as a statute for Jacob,
> for Israel as an everlasting covenant,
> saying:
> 'To you I give the land of Canaan
> the measure of your inheritance.'

The implication of this gift, that it is the outcome of the military conquest of someone else's territory, finds expression at the end of the psalm, in vv. 44–5. It is more frankly expressed in such passages as the following, placed on the mouth of Moses:

Numbers 32:32:

> We shall go over equipped for battle in the presence of Yahweh, into the land of Canaan, to take possession of our inheritance beyond the Jordan.

and

Deuteronomy 4:37–8:

> [Yahweh] has brought you out of Egypt, in his own presence and with his mighty power, to drive out nations greater and more powerful than yourself, and has given you their land as your inheritance ...

There is nothing very distinctively Israelite here, apart perhaps from the emphasis on the covenant; but this itself is the analogue of ancient Near Eastern treaty formulations: all conquest in the ancient world is actually achieved by a victorious war-god, Israelite, Egyptian, or Assyrian, by means of his surrogate armies.

But in Exodus 15:17 the direct debt to the Ugaritic *Vorlage* is inescapable, showing the specific channel through which the tradition has run:

> You brought them and planted them on the mountain of your inheritance,
>
> the foundation (which) you made for your dwelling,[31] Yahweh,
> the sanctuary, my lord, which your hands established.

This passage, from the 'Song of the Sea', which adapts the old conflict myth to Yahweh's overcoming of Pharaoh and of Israel's regional enemies, uses the same formula 'the mountain of my (or your) inheritance' as found in Ugaritian tradition.[32]

Ugaritic literature has yielded only one version of the conflict myth thus

far, though there are hints of others,[33] but it is widely used in the Hebrew tradition, with nearly fifty allusions or accounts. Much has been made by John Day of the fact that the Ugaritic narrative does not specify that the story is about creation.[34] Its primary function is the establishment of Baal's kingdom and his royal palace (sc. his temple). But given that temples in the ancient world are models of the universe, the core of all reality, it is rather nit-picking to distinguish the themes as unrelated. All construction, sacred and political, in the ancient world is essentially the reification of the divine plan.

Not all the biblical accounts are overtly cosmogonic. They deal more broadly with the divine presence in the world, guaranteed by Yahweh's primordial victory over the powers of chaos. He can be appealed to in time of crisis to re-enact his victory, as in Psalm 74, while in Deutero-Isaiah the poet appeals to the archetypal conquest as guarantee of the one he anticipates even now in exile:

Isaiah 51:9–10:

> Awake, awake!
> clothe yourself in power, arm of Yahweh;
> awake, as in days of yore,
> of generations long past!
> Was it not you who smote Rahab,
> transfixing Dragon?
> Was it not you who dried up Sea,
> the waters of the great abyss,
> who made the valleys of Sea a path
> for the passage of the redeemed?

It comes as no surprise, then, to discover an echo of the Ugaritic myth in the most unlikely place, in Genesis 1. This majestic narrative is commonly presented as the apogee of creation stories. One god, in complete control of things, orders the construction and differentiation of the various orders of reality without the least hint of conflict or even effort. But appearances can be deceptive. Very striking is the series of binary divisions brought about by the divine deed or word: light and darkness, waters and waters, waters and dry land, and so forth. The most important of all occurs in v. 1, commonly translated as

> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

But as every first-year student of Hebrew knows, this is not what the verse

says, unless we repoint it to construct a main clause. A more accurate translation is generally agreed to be

> In the beginning of God's creating the heaven and the earth ...

The verse leads immediately, through the parenthetical v. 2, on to the main verb of v. 3:

> God said, 'Let there be light!'

But let us consider the first verse further. What imagery lies behind it? And what is the precise nuance of the verb *bārā'*, 'create'? The terms 'heaven' and 'earth', *šāmayim* and *hā'āreṣ*, constitute the primordial binary division: that is, they are already differentiated from something prior, the chaos of v. 2 (*tōhû wābōhû*). They are the raw shaping of the cosmos before further processes occur. The latter word, *hā'āreṣ* (*'ereṣ*), is the equivalent of Ugaritic *arṣu*, which has some ambiguity about it. It can mean both 'earth' and 'underworld'. The same ambiguity may be discerned in the Hebrew usage in a number of places,[35] and the present instance is a good candidate for this interpretation. What God is achieving here is the complete separation of the substance of chaos into two parts, which now form the bounds of the cosmos. A close parallel to this is the Babylonian creation poem, in which Marduk splits Ti'amat 'like a mussel', and creates the framework of the universe from her corpse.[36] Reading between the lines of the Ugaritic narrative, we have reason to think that Yam is treated similarly, while another metaphor is that Mount Saphon, seat of the great gods, is Yam's corpse. This approach is supported by the common figure in the Bible of the pitching of the cosmic tent, as in Isaiah 48:13:

> It was my hand that fixed the earth,
> and my right hand that spread out the heavens.[37]

('Earth' here has the same nuance as in Genesis 1:1, as 'underworld'.)
The recognition of a process of separation in Genesis 1:1 leads us to question the term *bārā'*, 'create'. The Qal form is used exclusively of the deity himself. The Piel form[38] has the sense of 'cutting' (Arabic *barāy*) and Dantine has argued that this primary sense is to be recognized in the usage of Genesis 1.[39] So behind the surface tranquillity of God's deliberate formation of the world lies an altogether more turbulent past, of the conflict myth, now sublimated with the reduction of the other gods to mere matter.[40]

(III) ROYAL IDEOLOGY

A subdivision of the theme of creation, cosmogony, is the generation of the gods, theogony. The creation of man also belongs in this category, because stories about human origins, such as the narratives in Genesis 1 and 2, are typically narratives about the generation and birth of a Primal Man, who is embodied in the king and is quasi-divine, as a 'son of God'. If the combat myth justifies royal power on the basis of military prowess, the present one speaks of him as the begotten son of the high god, and therefore his legitimate heir by birth.

The Ugaritic myth *Shahar and Shalem* (KTU 1.23) has no known antecedents.[41] It narrates how El, the ancient moon-god and androgynous parent of all, begets two daughters (aspects of the sun-goddess) and then marries them, producing the twin gods of the morning and evening star, sc. Venus, who in West Semitic ideology is a type of the king. Its ideological significance has not really been appreciated by Ugaritic scholars, but its numerous Hebrew derivatives indicate how deep-rooted is its social symbolism.

We noted the presence of this tradition in Hosea in our discussion above. The following narratives are also cognate with the Ugaritic tradition: Genesis 16 (the birth of Ishmael: subsequent redaction has isolated him from his brother Isaac, born in Genesis 21); Genesis 22 (Lot and his daughters: the birth of Ammon and Moab); the allegories of the two girls in Ezekiel 16 and 23, daughter-wives of Yahweh, are familiar with the tradition. The divine marriage and birth of the king are celebrated obliquely in Psalm 19, while Psalm 8 is a hymn to the newborn twin gods, the 'babes and sucklings' of English versions, and the Greek text of Psalm 110 appears to allude to the tradition.[42]

(IV) THEOLOGY

Perhaps the underlying problem in all this discussion and comparative analysis is the fundamental issue: are there similar or different theologies underlying the two traditions? Most biblical scholars would immediately assert that there are different ones, that the conception of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible is radically different from 'Canaanite' perceptions. Where the former is monotheistically conceived, transcendent, involved in the teleological working out of a divine purpose through the successive ages of history, the latter are pluralistic, immanent, and with no particular historical aim or even consciousness. They are essentially 'nature deities'.

This judgement errs on two counts: both propositions are entirely

misleading. The second in particular is a caricature of the reality of religion in both Ugarit and the wider world, and has been largely constructed precisely in order to maintain the putative contrast. This is not dissimilar to the misrepresentation of the 'Canaanite' tradition by the Hebrew Bible itself, reflecting its own polytheistic past: the fiercest criticism is always reserved for the foe who is most feared. It is like early Christian caricatures of the philosophies and theologies of the classical world. There is no warrant for this one. Certainly we have polytheism, as is well attested of Iron Age Israel itself. But it is probably fair to say that 'monotheism' is a misnomer for Israelite theism at any time before the Roman period. And one of the inescapable problems of hermeneutics is the reading back of later conceptions into a tradition, so that much of what we unconsciously read in the Old Testament is put there by the presuppositions of the New, these themselves being largely the product of patristic reflection and eisegesis. This may well make for a strong theological tradition; it is however highly misleading if the product of such theology is then taken as the axiom by which to assess the older material in its historical context. Good theology: bad history. History can only work in one direction. There are no hermeneutical circles in history.

In any event, polytheism may grow up pretty haphazardly with the amalgamation of different cultures, for history is never tidy, but neither is it ever static or unreflecting: there are always moves towards its rationalization in a tendency towards monarchism (with its high gods, kings of the pantheon, and so forth). The 'official' pantheon lists from Ugarit illustrate this rather nicely: all the chief categories of deity are placed in a sevenfold structure (seven a symbol for totality, just like one), and the central role of the sacred mountain as their focus and locus is represented by its middle position among three sets of seven.[43] Thus a centralist, unitary principle underlies the plurality. Similar tendencies towards divine monarchism, no doubt a stage on the road to monotheism, are widely attested in the ancient world.[44]

As for the alleged immanence of the gods of polytheism, this conception can only be the product of a superficial equation of divine names with functions, so that Shamash, Shemesh, or Shapsh is simply the sun, Yareah or Yarihu the moon, and so forth. This is to ignore the rich symbolising which accompanied all ancient perceptions of the divine, especially clear in hymnody. The logical upshot of such misperception, visited on Israel, would be the straight equation, without qualification, of Yahweh with Baal, because both are 'rocks', both cause the rain, both are war-gods, both are the source of fertility in society and livestock, as well as both having

amorous tendencies. Indeed, Yahweh owes a considerable theological debt to both Baal and to El, both attested at Ugarit, if we give credence to recent scholarship. Yahweh is now even blessed with a consort, who is none other than the Ugaritic and West Semitic sun-goddess Athirat, biblical Asherah![45] The close parallels between the Ugaritic and Hebrew language about the deity have been well analysed by Marjo Korpel,[46] while John Gibson has demonstrated the pluralistic language about God in the Hebrew Bible.[47]

As for historical consciousness, supposedly unique to Israel, while her neighbours wandered in a mythic miasma, this really does not bear examination. It is an entirely false perception of ancient psychology. The old view of the 'biblical theology school' of the middle of the twentieth century, associated with such scholars as G.E. Wright, was thoroughly discredited by B. Albrektson, with his slim monograph *History and the Gods*.[48] He demonstrated that Mesopotamian writers had at least as sophisticated a view as biblical writers, while the scale of the teleology perceived by theologians in the latter was largely an import from Enlightenment thinking. Glassner[49] and van de Mieroop[50] have also written on the sophistication of Mesopotamian historiography. It was probably due to exposure to Mesopotamian practice, and later to Hellenistic practice, that we owe the inspiration of the Hebrew writers. What about Ugarit? We have no deliberate historiographical writing. This is scarcely due, however, to the absence of historical thinking. Perhaps an archive still awaits discovery. I have attempted in various studies[51] to discern historical references in the poetic texts, seeing them as addressing events of which we learn through diplomatic correspondence. What is clear is that the vocabulary of time-experience in Ugarit and Israel was identical,[52] and the onus is on those who would prove that they were seriously to be distinguished.

So what conclusions may be drawn from our survey? It is evident that if one wished to eradicate so-called Canaanite influences from the Hebrew Bible, Israelite religion, and Judaism, not a lot would be left. The baby would be washed out with the bathwater. Our discussion has highlighted the essential falsity of the exclusivist approach when carried to its logical conclusion. And an exclusivism applied to only one cultural zone, ancient 'Canaan', is manifestly arbitrary and misguided.

Rather does our survey offer a plea for an inclusive, or even preferably a pluralistic approach, recognizing that all cultures have always been alert to the experience of the numinous, that all have recognized the sacred, and indeed that all have common aspirations, however diversely formulated. Not only that, but the neat distinctions we like to make between cultures,

nations, and languages are themselves inevitably to some extent arbitrary. The boundaries are never impervious when examined closely, and cultural osmosis inevitably, and persistently, takes place across such boundaries.

Nor is this all merely a revisionist take on ancient history, or a purely academic concern. We live in a world dangerously polarized between opposing ethnic and ideological identities, each intent on vilifying, misrepresenting, and even demonising the opposition. Scholarship that merely reflects, rather than criticizes, this stance is unworthy of the name. We have all lived through the twentieth century, the most appalling period in human history in terms of violence, repression, and mass-murder. I should like to think that the eirenic concerns expressed in the discipline I represent, which has fought valiantly against its detractors, may contribute just a little to defusing the threats continuing to face our still very dangerous world.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AuOr	*Aula Orientalis*
BDB	F. Brown, S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs (eds), *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906).
BS	Bollingen Series
ERTR	Egyptian Religious Texts and Representations
HALOT	L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, rev. W. Baumgartner and J.J. Stamm, E.T.M.E.J. Richardson, 5 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1994).
JHC	*Journal of Higher Criticism*
JSOTS	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* Supplement
KTU	KTU^1 = M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*, AOAT 24/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag; Kevelaer: Verlag Butzon and Bercker, 1976) KTU^2 = M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and other Places*, ALASP 8 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995), also cited as *CAT* KTU (Roman) used for text references.
POS	Pretoria Oriental Series
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SEÅ	*Svensk Exegetisk Årskrift*
UCOP	University of Cambridge Oriental Series

SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
UBL	Ugaritisch-Biblische Literatur
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
UT	Urban-Taschenbücher
YES	Yale Egyptological Studies

NOTES

1. Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, 7.
2. See Lambert and Millard, 1969: 3.
3. For a recent balanced appraisal see Chavalas 2002. The paper has a useful 22-page bibliography on the topic.
4. See in particular de Moor, 1997.
5. E.g. Piankoff, 1955: 12; Wilson, 1951: 223–9; Morenz, 1973: 147; Tobin, 1989: 158. Cf. also Assmann, 1984: 248–9, cit. Allen, 1989: 89.
6. Tell Meshkene, ancient Emar, and Tell Hariri, ancient Mari, are two important sources of written documentation from central and south-eastern Syria.
7. Alphabetic inscriptions have now been discovered from Wadi Hol in Egypt dating to *c.* 2000 BCE.
8. Del Medico, 1950.
9. Richardson, 1994.
10. Bronner, 1968: 2; cited Wyatt, 1996a: 393 n. 35.
11. Oldenburg, 1969: xi; cited Wyatt 1996a: 393 n. 35.
12. De Moor, 1997: 83–4.
13. Said, 1978.
14. Hochschild, 1999: 148.
15. Kuper, 1998.
16. Whitelam, 1996.
17. Eilberg-Schwartz, 1990: ix.
18. Whitelam, 1996.
19. See Wyatt, 1990 and references there.
20. The term 'Canaanite' generally denotes people other than the referring community; thus in Ugaritic usage, 'Canaanites' are always mentioned as outsiders. Cf. discussion and references in M.S. Smith, 2002: 14–18. There is, however, a convention (and conventions can survive accusations of inaccuracy) that Ugaritian materials provide the best chance we have so far of reconstructing the 'Canaanite' religion of biblical reference.
21. For an extended treatment see Wyatt, 1996a: 19–115.
22. The Hebrew term has shifted slightly in sense ('extremity'), while retaining something of its cosmological burden: Wyatt, forthcoming.
23. For an extended treatment see Wyatt, 1996a: 117–218.
24. I have argued that this tradition is the mirror image of the flood tradition, and like it, probably goes back to the Neolithic, perhaps in the sixth millennium: Wyatt, forthcoming.
25. See Dalley, 2000: 203–27; Annus, 2001.
26. For a recent treatment of all these examples, see Wyatt, 1998a.
27. Wyatt, 2001: 125, §4(2a); 2002a: 115.
28. Wyatt, 2001: 125, §4(2b).
29. Cf. Wyatt, 2002b.

30. KTU 1.3 iii 28–31; Wyatt, 2002a: 78. A slightly abbreviated version (scribal error?) occurs at KTU 1.3 iv 18–20 (Wyatt, 2002a: 81).
31. Or 'enthronement'.
32. Ugaritic: *ǵr nḥlty*; Hebrew *har naḥ^{a}lāt^{c}kā*.
33. Cf. Wyatt, 1987, which discusses the possibility of four candidates of dragon-slayer.
34. Day, 1985; see my response, Wyatt, 1985.
35. E.g. Jonah 2:6, Ezekiel 26:20, Numbers 16:31, etc.
36. *Enuma Elish* iv 123–46: Dalley, 2000: 253–5.
37. See Wyatt, 2001b: 173–6, §§6(16–25).
38. *HALOT* distinguishes this as *br'* III, I suspect with no justification. BDB puts both forms under *br'* I.
39. Danthine, 1961.
40. Day, 1985: 49 considers this to be a process of demythologization, which I think is a misconstruction (Wyatt, 2001a: 4 n. 4).
41. It is tempting to link it with south Arabian religion, though this is only attested later.
42. Wyatt, 1996a: 270–3, 284.
43. Wyatt, 1998b.
44. Cf. the supposed monotheism of Akhenaten above; the New Kingdom hymns to Amun-Ra are couched in quasi-monotheistic form, like the poetry of Deutero-Isaiah. This is strictly henotheism. On Assyrian tendencies see Parpola, 1997.
45. Cf. Olyan, 1988; Wiggins, 1993; Hadley, 2000.
46. Korpel, 1990.
47. Gibson, 1989.
48. Albrektson, 1967. See also Wyatt, 1996a: 373–424; 2001b: 301–32.
49. Glassner, 1993.
50. Van de Mieroop, 1999.
51. Wyatt, 1979: 2001a; 2002b.
52. Wyatt, 1996b; 2001b, 33–52.

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