

DAVID TOSHIO TSUMURA

Was There a Cult of El in Ancient Canaan?

*Orientalische Religionen
in der Antike*

55

Mohr Siebeck

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David Toshio Tsumura

Was There a Cult of El in Ancient Canaan?

Essays on Ugaritic Religion and Language

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This volume is the outcome of my fifty years of study in Ugaritic language. I began my Ugaritic study at Brandeis University with Professor Cyrus H. Gordon in 1969 and wrote my dissertation on KTU 1.23 (UT 52) under his supervision, finishing in 1973. After that, I taught Semitic linguistics, especially comparative linguistics, at the University of Tsukuba. After fifteen years there I switched the center of my research to Biblical studies, and since then have taught Biblical exegesis as a full-time teacher at Japan Bible Seminary.

During the past decades I have worked especially on the *Chaoskampf* problem in Genesis 1 and published *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), as the outcome of the Genesis Project of Tyndale House, Cambridge, revised as *Creation and Destruction* (Eisenbrauns, 2005), as well as various articles, as those in *Conversations on Canaanite and Biblical Themes* (De Gruyter, 2022) and *Congress Volume Aberdeen 2019* (Brill, 2022).

While teaching the Bible and writing commentaries on 1 and 2 Samuel (NICOT; Eerdmans, 2007, 2019) in the cultural context of Japanese polytheism, I became more and more aware of the many similarities between the Canaanite-Ugaritic religion and the Japanese polytheistic religious traditions such as ancestor worship and *kami*-worship, that is, *god*-worship, both of which are real and active religious practices even in modern Japan.

I became the chief editor of the *Shinkaiyaku* translation of the Japanese Bible. In 2017, after a decade of working, we finished a major revision. Following the tradition of the Japanese Bible, we translated Hebrew *ʾēl* or *ʾēlōhîm* as a singular *kami* or a plural *kami-gami* according to context. We did not make any distinction such as that found in the English distinction between “God” and “god”.

This experience made me look again at Ugaritic studies, in particular to consider whether the modern study of polytheism in ancient Canaan, especially in Ugarit, has been adequate. I looked particularly at the following questions: Was there a cult of El in ancient Ugarit? In the early history of Israel in Canaan? Scholars tend to ask just whether the term *il* in Ugaritic is a generic noun “god(s)” or the proper noun “El.” However, such an either-or question does not seem adequate for understanding the multifarious features of polytheism. We moderns need to study polytheism from within instead of just applying our modern polytheism–monolatry–monotheism framework.

In this study, while reviewing critically my own previous work both linguistic and philological on the Ugaritic texts, I rethink the nature of polytheism on the basis of closer readings of the Ugaritic religious texts, especially KTU 1.23. I hope that this book

may become an initial step in dealing with polytheism from within and help us to reset our research on the right track.

Many colleagues have helped in finalizing this monograph. I would like to give special thanks to the following scholars for their suggestions at various stages of my articles, some providing valuable information by sending me indispensable PDF articles during the pandemic, though I bear the responsibility for the views expressed in this book: Profs. Alfonso Archi, Daniel Fleming, Alan Millard, Dennis Pardee, Gary Rendsburg, Mark Smith, Wilfred Watson, Nick Wyatt, and my former students Drs. James Ford and Takayoshi Oshima as well as their friend Dr. Aicha Rahmouni, who kindly let me read a part of her nearly finished book *The Gods of Mount Şapānu* (2022). Especially, Dr. Oshima helped me both in the content and in copyediting for the Mohr Siebeck format. Also, I thank the series editors of ORA for accepting this collection of articles and Markus Kirchner and Dominika Zgolik for their editorial advice. My wife Susan, a linguist who has worked on the historical Japanese calendars, has helped me greatly in various ways for revising and preparing this book for publication. To her I dedicate this book with love and respect.

2023

D.T.T.

In Hamura, where I have taught the Bible

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Abbreviations of Modern Works

<i>1 Samuel</i>	D. T. Tsumura, <i>The First Book of Samuel</i> (NICOT). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.
<i>2 Samuel</i>	D. T. Tsumura, <i>The Second Book of Samuel</i> (NICOT). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019.
AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> , 1992.
AB	Anchor Bible
<i>AfO</i>	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
<i>AH</i>	W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, <i>Atra-Hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood</i> . Oxford: Clarendon, 1969.
<i>AHw</i>	W. von Soden, <i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> . Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965–1981.
<i>AI</i>	Y. Aharoni, <i>Arad Inscriptions</i> . Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981.
AIL	Ancient Israel and its Literature
<i>AIR</i>	P. D. Miller, Jr., P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride (eds.), <i>Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross</i> . Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987.
<i>AJBI</i>	<i>Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute</i>
<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
ALASP	Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syrien-Palästinas und Mesopotamiens
ALBO	Analecta Lovaniensia Biblica et Orientalia
ANESS	Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement
ANEM	Ancient Near Eastern Monographs
<i>ANET</i> ²	J. B. Pritchard (ed.), <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Second edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955.
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
<i>ARTU</i>	J. C. de Moor, <i>An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit</i> . Leiden: Brill, 1987.
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
<i>ASJ</i>	<i>Acta Sumerologica Japan</i> . Hiroshima Daigaku/ Chūkintō Bunka Sentā (Japan)
<i>ASTI</i>	<i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i>
<i>AuOr</i>	<i>Aula Orientalis</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologists</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BASP</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
BCILL	Bibliothèque des Cahiers de l'Institut de Linguistique de Louvain
<i>BCM</i>	W. G. Lambert, <i>Babylonian Creation Myths</i> (MC 16). Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2013.
<i>BDFSN</i>	J.-L. Cunchillos and J.-P. Vita (eds.), <i>Banco de Datos Filológicos Semíticos Noroccidentales</i> . 1. <i>Textos Ugaríticos</i> , 1993.
<i>BGUL</i>	S. Segert, <i>A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language</i> . Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
BMECCJ	Bulletin of the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan
<i>BO</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>

- BW* G. Rendsburg, R. Adler, M. Arfa, and N. H. Winter (eds.), *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon*. New York: KTAV and New York University, 1980.
- BWL* W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960.
- BZAW* Beihefte zur *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
- CAD* *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, Vols. 1–21. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956–2010.
- CAT* M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places (KTU²: second, enlarged edition)*. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995.
- CB* C. H. Gordon, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilization*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1962, 1965.
- CBQ* *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
- CDAIU* T. J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit (HSM 39)*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989.
- CHANE* Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
- CHP* W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques (JSOTS 26)*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984.
- CM* Cuneiform Monographs
- CMHE* F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973.
- CML* G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956.
- CML²* J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, second edition. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1977, 1978².
- COS* W. W. Hallo (ed.), *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 1: *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*; vol. 2: *Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World*; vol. 3: *Archival Documents from the Biblical World*. Leiden: Brill, 1997, 2000, 2002.
- CRALTU* G. del Olmo Lete, *Canaanite Religion according to the Liturgical Texts of Ugarit*. Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 1999.
- CRALTU²* G. del Olmo Lete, *Canaanite Religion according to the Liturgical Texts of Ugarit*, second English edition, thoroughly revised and enlarged (AOAT 408). Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014.
- CTA* A. Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques (MRS 10)*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1963.
- CTL* Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics
- CU* J.-M. de Tarragon, *Le Culte à Ugarit: D'après les Textes de la Pratique en Cunéiformes alphabétiques (CahRB 19)*. Paris: Gabalda, 1980.
- DDD²* K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, second edition. Leiden: Brill, 1995, 1999².
- DEUAT* A. Rahmouni, *Divine Epithets in the Ugaritic Alphabetic Texts (HdO 93)*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- DUL* G. del Olmo Lete and J. Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
- DUL³* G. del Olmo Lete and J. Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, 2 vols., third revised edition, trans. and ed. by W. G. E. Watson. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- EANEC* Explorations in Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations
- EB* Études Bibliques
- EHG* M. S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, second edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, 2002².
- EIA* A. Archi, *Ebla and its Archives: Texts, History, and Society (SANER 7)*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015.

- EUT* M. H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts* (VTS 2). Leiden: Brill, 1955.
- Exeg* *Exegetica* (Studies in Biblical Exegesis). Biblical Exegesis Study Group in Japan (<http://www.exegetica.jp>).
- FAT* Forschungen zum Alten Testament
- GAG*³ W. von Soden, *Grundriß der akkadischen Grammatik* (AnOr 33). Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1952, 1995³.
- GKC* E. Kautsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, second English edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910.
- GUL* D. Sivan, *A Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (HdO 28). Leiden: Brill, 1997, 2001.
- GUS* Gorgias Ugaritic Studies
- HALOT* L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. by M. E. J. Richardson. Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000.
- HdO* Handbuch der Orientalistik (= Handbook of Oriental Studies)
- HGG* D. R. Frayne and J. H. Stuckey, *A Handbook of Gods and Goddesses of the Ancient Near East: Three Thousand Deities of Anatolia, Syria, Israel, Sumer, Babylonia, Assyria and Elam*. University Park, Penn: Eisenbrauns, 2021.
- HS* *Hebrew Studies*
- HSS* Harvard Semitic Studies
- HUCA* *Hebrew Union College Annual*
- HUS* W. G. E. Watson and N. Wyatt (eds.), *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies* (HdO 39). Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- IBD* B. B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (FAT 11). Tübingen: Mohr, 1994.
- IDB* *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
- IEJ* *Israel Exploration Journal*
- ISIBF* R. S. Hess and D. T. Tsumura (eds.), *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11* (SBTS 4). Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994.
- IOSOT* International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament
- IU* J. Huehnergard, *An Introduction to Ugaritic*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2012.
- JA* *Journal Asiatique*
- JANER* *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religion*
- JANES* *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*
- JAOS* *Journal for the American Oriental Society*
- JBL* *Journal of Biblical Literature*
- JCS* *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
- JESHO* *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
- JHNES* Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies
- JRAS* *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
- JSOT* *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
- JSOTS* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement
- JSS* *Journal of Semitic Studies*
- KAI* H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften*, Vols. I–III. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1964–68.
- KTL* J. Gray, *The Krt Text in the Literature of Ras Shamra*. Leiden: Brill, 1964.
- KTU* M. Dietrich, O. Loretz and J. Sanmartín, (eds.), *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1976.
- KTU*² M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín (eds.), *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places* (KTU: second, enlarged edition =CAT) (ALASP 8). Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995.

- KTU*³ M. Dietrich, O. Loretz and J. Sanmartín, (eds.), *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani und anderen Orten. Dritte, erweiterte Auflage = The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places*, third, enlarged edition (AOAT 360). Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013.
- KUB* Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi
- KUSATU* *Kleine Untersuchungen zur Sprache des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt*
- Lane E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Books 1–4. London: Williams and Norgate, 1863.
- LC* J. Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan: The Ras Shamra Texts and Their Relevance to the Old Testament*, second edition (VTS 5). Leiden: Brill, 1965.
- LHB* Library of the Hebrew Bible
- LKK* H. L. Ginsberg, *The Legend of King Keret: A Canaanite Epic of the Bronze Age* (BASOR SupS 2–3). New Haven: ASOR, 1946.
- LSAWS* Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
- MC* Mesopotamian Civilizations
- MCA* Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences
- MKT*² J. Aistleitner, *Die Mythologischen und Kultischen Texte aus Ras Shamra*. Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1959, 1964².
- MLC* G. del Olmo Lete, *Mitos y Leyendas de Canaan*. Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1981.
- MO* P. Bordreuil and D. Pardee, *Manuel d'Ougaritique*, 2 vols. Paris: Geuthner, 2004.
- MRLLA* Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity
- MRS* Missions de Ras Shamra
- MSL* Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon
- MU* P. Bordreuil and D. Pardee, *A Manual of Ugaritic* (LSAWS 3). Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009.
- NIDOTTE* W. A. VanGemeren (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- NICOT* New International Commentary on the Old Testament
- Or* *Orientalia*
- OBM* M. S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- OCG* T. J. Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God: Ancient Israelite Religion through the Lens of Divinity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- OCPR* E. Matsushima (ed.), *Official Cult and Popular Religion in the Ancient Near East: Papers of the First Colloquium on the Ancient Near East – the City and Its Life, Held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (Mitaka, Tokyo), March 20–22, 1992*. Heidelberg: Winter, 1993.
- OIP* Oriental Institute Publications
- OLA* *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*
- OM* *Orient and Méditerranée*
- ORA* *Orientalische Religionen in der Antike*
- OTA* *Old Testament Abstracts*
- OTL* *Old Testament Library*
- PLMU* C. H. Gordon, "Poetic Legends and Myths from Ugarit," *Berytus* 25 (1977), 5–133.
- POANE* K. Watanabe (ed.), *Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East: Papers of the Second Colloquium on the Ancient Near East – the City and Its Life, Held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (Mitaka, Tokyo), March 22–24, 1996*. Heidelberg: Winter, 1999.
- POS* Pretoria Oriental Series
- PSD* *The Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary*, 2006 (<http://psd.museum.upenn.edu/nepsd-frame.html>)
- PTU* F. Gröndahl, *Die Personennamen der Texte aus Ugarit* (Studia Pohl 1). Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1967.

- RA* *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale.*
RAAM H. Gese et al., *Die Religionen Altsyriens, Altarabiens und der Mandäer.* Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1970.
RCU D. Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit* (WAW 10). Atlanta: SBL Press, 2002.
RHR *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*
RIH Ras Ibn Hani
RINAP The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011–
RIA *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*
RMFGG M. S. Smith, *The Rituals and Myths of the Feast of the Goodly Gods of KTU/CAT 1.23: Royal Constructions of Opposition, Intersection, Integration, and Domination* (SBLRBS 51). Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2006.
RSO Ras Shamra – Ougarit
RSP L. R. Fisher (ed.), *Ras Shamra Parallels*, vol. 1 (AnOr 49). Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1972; vol. 2 (AnOr 50), 1975. S. Rummel (ed.), *Ras Shamra Parallels*, vol. 3 (AnOr 51), 1981.
RTU N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The World of Ilimilku and his Colleagues.* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.
RTU² N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, second edition. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.
SAAS State Archives of Assyria Studies
SAHL Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant
SANE Sources from the Ancient Near East
SANER Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records
SAOC Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
SBLDS Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLRBS Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
SBTS Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
SEL *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici*
SFSHJ South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism
SH *Scripta Hierosolymitana*
SLOCG E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (OLA 80). Leuven: Peeters, 1997.
SMSR *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni*
SO Studia Orientalia (Helsinki: Societas Orientalis Fennica)
SPUMB J. C. de Moor, *The Seasonal Pattern in the Ugaritic Myth of Ba'lu According to the Version of Ili-milku.* Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1971.
SSN Studia Semitica Neerlandica
TDOT G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974–2018.
TO, I A. Caquot, M. Szyner, and A. Herdner, *Textes Ougaritiques*, Tome I: *Mythes et Legendes.* Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1974.
TO, II A. Caquot, J.-M. de Tarragon, and J.-L. Cunchillos, *Textes Ougaritiques*, vol. 2: *Textes Religieux, Rituels, Correspondance.* Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1989.
TR D. Pardee, *Les Textes Rituels* (RSO 12). Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 2000.
TSSI J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*; vol. 1: *Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions*; vol. 2: *Aramaic Inscriptions*; vol. 3: *Phoenician Inscriptions.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, 1975, 1982.
TUAT Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments
TynB *Tyndale Bulletin*
Ug. *Ugaritica*

- UBC M. S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, vol. I: *Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1–1.2* (VTS 55). Leiden: Brill, 1994.
- UDB J.-L. Cunchillos et al., *The Texts of the Ugaritic Data Bank*. Madrid: Laboratorio de Hermeneumatica, 2005.
- UDGG D. T. Tsumura, *The Ugaritic Drama of the Good Gods: A Philological Study*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1973.
- UG² J. Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik*, zweite, stark überarbeitete und erweiterte Auflage (AOAT 273). Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000, 2012².
- UHP M. Dahood, *Ugaritic-Hebrew Philology*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965.
- UHPP D. Pardee, *Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetic Parallelism: A Trial Cut ('nt I and Proverbs 2)* (VTS 39). Leiden: Brill, 1988.
- UL C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature: A Comprehensive Translation of the Poetic and Prose Texts*. Roma: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1949.
- UM C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Manual* (AnOr 35). Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1955.
- UMC C. H. Gordon, *Ugarit and Minoan Crete*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1966.
- UNP S. B. Parker (ed.), *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (WAW 9). Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997.
- UPN D. Pardee, "Ugaritic Proper Nouns," *AfO* 36/37 (1989/90), 390–513.
- UR G. D. Young (ed.), *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981.
- UT C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (AnOr 38). Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1965.
- UTS Gordon, *UT*, 1965, with Supplement (1967).
- UVST² J. Huehnergard, *Ugaritic Vocabulary in Syllabic Transcription* (HSS 32), revised edition. Leiden: Brill, 1987, 2008².
- VANEP J. C. de Moor and W. G. E. Watson (eds.), *Verse in Ancient Near Eastern Prose* (AOAT 42). Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1993.
- VT *Vetus Testamentum*
- VTS Vetus Testamentum Supplement
- WAW Writings from the Ancient World
- WBC Word Biblical Commentary
- WbM H. W. Haussig (ed.), *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, Bd. I: *Götter und Mythen im Vorderen Orient*. Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1965.
- WCJS *World Congress of Jewish Studies*
- WO *Die Welt des Orients*
- WUS J. Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch der ugaritischen Sprache*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1967.
- YBI D. E. Fleming, *Yahweh Before Israel: Glimpses of History in a Divine Name*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
- YGC W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968.
- ZA *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*

Other Abbreviations or Special Usages

↓↑	Indicates “vertical” dependence in a poetic parallelism. $A\downarrow-x // b\uparrow-x'$ means that the element a in the first line grammatically depends on the element b in the second line, while x' in the second line is simply a restatement of x in the first line.
*	Sign for a proto form; for a root morpheme
<	Indicates a form came from another form.
[a]	The phonetic sound [a]
/a/	The phoneme /a/
⟨a⟩	The grapheme ⟨a⟩
<t>	The letter t is supplied.
AH	Atra-Hasis epic
Akk.	Akkadian
col.	collective
cstr.	Construct
DN	Divine name
EA	El Amarna
Ee	Enuma elish
Gilg.	Gilgamesh Epic
GN	Geographical name
gen.	Genitive
Hur.	Hurrian
<i>IL</i>	Ugaritic alphabetic spelling <i>IL</i> , that is, the letter I followed by the letter L . E.g., <i>WLD</i> is a combination of three alphabetic letters (graph).
<i>il</i>	Ugaritic term for “god” or “divine being”, sometimes used for the DN “El”
?ilu	Ugaritic word for “god” or “divine being”
?ilūma	Plural form of ?ilu
?llu	Ugaritic word for DN “El”
?llū	Ugaritic word for <i>The Deity</i> , the collective godhead
l.	line
LB	Late Bronze
LBH	Late Biblical Hebrew
LXX	Septuaginta
masc.	Masculine
MB	Middle Bronze
OA	Old Assyrian
OAkk.	Old Akkadian
OB	Old Babylonian

Obj.	Objective
pl.	Plural
PN	Personal name
ptc	Participle
RS	Ras Shamra
SB	Standard Babylonian
sg.	Singular
Sum.	Sumerian
Ug.	Ugaritic

Introduction

How Can a “Canaanite Religion” Be Written?

More than 50 years ago A. L. Oppenheim wrote a section of a book entitled “Why a ‘Mesopotamian Religion’ should not be written.”¹ He explained that the then available evidence, both archaeological and textual, was limited both in quantity and in quality, and given the extent of the region, it certainly would be difficult to deal with “Mesopotamian religion” as a whole. He also realized “the conceptual difficulties of understanding a *polytheistic* [my italics] religion as far removed [from Western Europe] in time and background as that of Mesopotamia.”²

The situation has changed greatly in the past half century. While it is still difficult to write about the Mesopotamian religion as a whole, many individual ancient sites such as Ebla and Emar have produced an abundance of religious source materials related to their own city states.³ Yet, it still is not easy to present a systematic study of a polytheistic religion for even a single city in the ancient Syria. The difficulty is certainly due to the fact that any polytheistic religion would reject foreign systematization.

The situation is similar with regard to ancient Canaan. It may be rather worse than in Mesopotamia, since Canaan, especially the southern area, has rarely left us written texts, due to the fact that they were written on perishable materials, namely papyrus and parchment.⁴ The only unified corpora of written texts in Canaan has come from the northernmost Ugarit,⁵ where documents were usually written on clay tablets, following the Mesopotamian tradition. Some thousands of written documents have been

¹ A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, revised edition, completed by E. Reiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964, 1977), 172–83.

² Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 182.

³ A. Archi, “Part IV. Religion of Ebla,” in *EIA* (2015), 499–722; D. E. Fleming, *The Installation of Baal’s High Priestess at Emar: A Window on Ancient Syrian Religion* (HSS 42; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

⁴ See Ch. 1 below. Most of the written sources from the southern Canaan are very short – a few words or even a few letters inscribed on potsherds, metal objects, stones or clay. The longest inscription is the Siloam Tunnel inscription of the eighth century BC. Cf. G. I. Davies et al., *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 2004) and M. Lubetski and E. Lubetski, *New Inscriptions and Seals Relating to the Biblical World* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012).

⁵ Even though one Ugaritic text (KTU 4.96:7 = RS 11.840:7) treats a Canaanite person (*kn⁶ny*; see *DUL*³ [2015], 444) as a non-Ugaritian, the culture and its religion is essentially LB “Canaanite.” See A. F. Rainey, “A Canaanite at Ugarit,” *IEJ* 13 (1963), 43–45. For the Ugaritic language, which has no “Canaanite shift,” see Section D of Chapter 1.

unearthed from the sites of Ugarit and its vicinity.⁶ They include several copies of the “pantheon” list in Ugaritic, Hurrian and Akkadian, dozens of myth and ritual texts, as well as mention of hundreds of personal names, many of which are theophoric.⁷ In view of this, the question now is not whether, but *how* and *how much* a description of a Canaanite *polytheistic* religion can be written.

It is generally accepted that every aspect of the life of ancient people was religious. Hence, any information extracted concerning their life economic or artistic, in wartime or in a peacetime, may be useful for the better understanding of their religious life. Not just mythological and liturgical documents, but even lists of various items in the economic texts from Ugarit (e.g., 4.15, 4.341) provide important information for understanding the religious life of the ancient Canaanites.

Various genres of Ugaritic texts are available and useful for the study of the Canaanite background of the Old Testament. There are literary and religious, legal, and economic texts, as well as letters, scribal exercises, seal inscriptions, labels, ivories, etc.⁸ Some are written in prose; others in poetry. Some are long, with a few hundred lines of poetic text, while some are only a few words, often fragmentary. But, in distinction from the extant biblical manuscripts, all Ugaritic textual evidence comes from the LB Age, and virtually all are original, that is, written either by the Ugaritians themselves or their contemporaries, except for some translations of earlier or foreign originals.

The Essence of Polytheism

Y. Kaufmann noted long ago that the characteristic of “polytheism” is not in its plurality of gods and goddesses.⁹ Rather it consists in the religious dichotomy of two realms, that is, the *divine* realm and the *meta-divine* realm. According to Kaufmann:

The distinguishing mark of pagan thought [is] the idea that there exists a realm of being prior to the gods and above them, upon which the gods depend, and whose decrees they must obey. Deity belongs to, and is derived from, a primordial realm.¹⁰

Thus, for Kaufmann, the existence of two realms, that is, the *divine* realm and the *meta-divine* primordial realm, is the distinguishing mark of polytheism. Hence, he observes that the essence of polytheism is not so much “the plurality of gods per se” as “the notion of many independent power entities, all on a par with one another, and all rooted in the primordial realm.”¹¹

⁶ See *KTU* (1976), *KTU*² (1995), and *KTU*³ (2013).

⁷ See Ch. 4, E.

⁸ See *KTU*³.

⁹ Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 21–24. See Frayne and Stuckey, *HGG* (2021).

¹⁰ Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, 21.

¹¹ Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, 23. On the recent assessment of Kaufmann’s contributions, see B. D. Sommer, “Yehezkel Kaufmann and Recent Scholarship: Toward a Richer Discourse of Monotheism,” in *Yehezkel Kaufmann and the Reinvention of Jewish Biblical Scholarship*, ed. by J. Y. Jindo, B. D. Sommer and T. Staubli (OBO 283; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2017), 204–39.

The divine beings, both good and evil, are thus all born out of the same meta-divine realm. They are the outcome of the primordial realm. Hence, *theogony* and *theomachy* are, according to Kaufmann, the two basic features of polytheism, while, on the other hand, in Israelite religion, there is no *theogony*, hence no *theomachy*.¹² Only God, who is Yahweh, existed eternally and created the entire *cosmos* (“heavens and earth” in Gen 1:1) without any preexisting matter.¹³

However, Kaufmann’s dichotomy does not help us to understand the very basic feature of polytheism, that is, the plurality of deities. Even though, according to Kaufmann, all the deities belong to the meta-divine realm and originated out of that realm, the gods and goddesses are still considered to exist as individual divine beings and at the same time are described grammatically using plural forms.

It seems, however, that neither the plurality nor the singularity of deity matters in polytheism. In Homeric Greek, where *ó θεός* and *οί θεοί* can refer to either “god” or “gods,”¹⁴ the grammatical number, singular or plural, seemingly does not matter.¹⁵ Also, I would like to call scholars’ attention to the fact that “eight million” deities are worshipped in one sanctuary, the *Shin-den* (lit. “house of god[s]”) in the Japanese imperial palace even today. The singular form “*kami*” can refer both to a single deity and to the entire group of deities. Instead of approaching polytheism from the monotheistic point of view, one should understand the nature of polytheism from within.¹⁶

¹² I distinguish between *theomachy* and *divine battle*. The former is the battle between two divine beings, while the latter is the conflict between a god such as Yahweh, Assur, Kemosh, etc., and his people’s enemy, which may be symbolized by dragons, as in Ps. 74 and other poetic texts. See D. T. Tsumura, “Creation out of Conflict? The *Chaoskampf* Motif in the Old Testament: Cosmic Dualism or *creatio ex nihilo*,” in *Congress Volume Aberdeen 2019* ed. by G. Macaskill, C. M. Maier and J. Schaper (VTS 192; Leiden: Brill, 2022), 474–91 and “Chaos and *Chaoskampf* in the Bible: Is ‘Chaos’ a Suitable Term to Describe Creation or Conflict in the Bible?” in *Conversations on Canaanite and Biblical Themes: Creation, Chaos, and Monotheism*, ed. by R. S. Watson and A. H. Curtis (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), 243–81.

¹³ See D. T. Tsumura, “The Doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and the Translation of *tōhū wābōhū*,” in *Pentateuchal Traditions in the Late Second Temple Period: Proceedings of the International Workshop in Tokyo, August 28–31, 2007* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 158; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 3–21. For the problem of the so-called *Chaoskampf* theory, see Tsumura, “Creation out of Conflict?”; “Chaos and *Chaoskampf* in the Bible.”

¹⁴ See B. N. Porter (ed.), *One God or Many? Concepts of Divinity in the Ancient World* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Note that presumably only one “golden calf” was made by the Israelites under the supervision of Aaron, but he says to them (Ex 32:4): “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” (ESV) Later, Jeroboam II uses almost the same words when he made two calves, one for Bethel and the other for Dan (1 Kgs 12:28). See below, esp. Ch. 3.

¹⁶ J. Assmann explains “polytheism” by looking at from outside, as follows: “There has never been a religion that declared its commitment to polytheism as a regulative idea. Polytheism is a concept suitable only for describing monotheism as a counter-religion that polemically distances itself from other religions.” See *The Price of Monotheism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 35. For an important work on polytheism, see B. Pongratz-Leisten, “Divine Agency and Astralization of the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*, ed. by B. Pongratz-Leisten (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 137–87.

Three Approaches

The years 2020–2022 saw the publication of several major works on Canaanite and Israelite religions, T. J. Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God* (2020), F. Pfitzmann, *Un YHWH venant du Sud* (2020), D. E. Fleming, *Yahweh Before Israel* (2021), and D. O. McClellan, *YHWH's Divine Images* (2022).¹⁷

The religious aspects of the Hebrew Bible, and especially the origin and nature of the Israelite god Yahweh, have recently become hot issues, in particular with regard to the question of the origin of monotheism in the religious history of ancient Israel. The above works, except the last one, adopt a certain kind of *religionsgeschichtlich* approach assuming that there must have been a movement from polytheism to monolatry to monotheism. This is the culmination of the *diachronic and comparative* study of Israelite religion promoted during the nineteenth century by eminent European scholars. On the other hand, the *synchronic and cognitive* linguistic approach is a promising one for religious studies of the Bible.¹⁸ While it is a useful tool for the biblical studies after the liberation from the long dominating *historical-critical* approach, its synchronic *only* tendency seems to miss some important aspects of ancient people with regards to their religious practices, which permeated the entire aspect of ancient life. What I present here, however, is a third approach, something between these two approaches, namely, a *contextual and contrastive* approach, primarily based on the written sources.¹⁹ Thus, we can list three approaches to the study of ancient Near Eastern religions:

diachronic and comparative
synchronic and cognitive
contextual and contrastive.

Ever since the discovery of the Ugaritic documents, two relationships, namely, that between Yahweh and Baal and that between God and El, have been issues in the study of ancient Israelite religions. As for the comparison between Yahweh and Baal, both being distinct proper names, it is obvious that there are many characteristics which distinguish the Israelite god Yahweh from the Canaanite storm god Baal, though there are also many similarities between them (e.g., both Yahweh and Baal have the role of the

¹⁷ T. J. Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God: Ancient Israelite Religion through the Lens of Divinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); F. Pfitzmann, *Un YHWH venant du Sud: De la réception vétérotestamentaire des traditions méridionales et du lien entre Madian, le Néguev et l'exode (Ex-Nb; Jg 5; Ps 68; Ha 3; Dt 33)* (ORA 39; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020); D. E. Fleming, *Yahweh before Israel: Glimpses of History in a Divine Name* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021); D. O. McClellan, *YHWH's Divine Images: A Cognitive Approach* (ANEM 29; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2022).

¹⁸ For example, see D. O. McClellan, *YHWH's Divine Images: A Cognitive Approach* (ANEM 29; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2022). It is the current fashion among biblical scholars to approach Hebrew Bible from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. Note that papers which take a cognitive approach were scheduled to be presented in more than thirty sessions during SBL/ Denver 2022, including four sessions on "Cognitive Linguistics in Biblical Interpretation."

¹⁹ For the contextual approach, see K. L. Younger, "The 'Contextual Method': Some West Semitic Religions," in *COS 3* (2002), xxxv–xlii.

water controller and are warrior gods),²⁰ which is quite natural given their common cultural background.

As for the comparison between God and El, the linguistic similarity is clear, for the deity is expressed by the graphic representation *ʔL* (=Heb. *ʔēl* and Ug. *ʔil*) in both languages. However, what is significant and crucial is to note the features that distinguish the concept of “God” (*ʔēl*, *ʔēlōʔh*, *ʔēlōhīm*) and the Canaanite concept of *IL*.²¹

Hence, the directions of comparison are different in the Yahweh-Baal relationship and the God-El relationship. In other words, while the former comparison is characterized by the phrase “different but similar,” the latter comparison is characterized by the phrase “similar but different.” While the two divine beings called by the two proper names (DN) “Yahweh” and “Baal” are certainly distinct from each other, they are often described in similar terms in texts. On the other hand, while the terms for “deity,” *IL* and *ʔēl* or *ILHM* and *ʔēlōhīm*, are morphologically identical, or at least cognate, the Hebrew deity *ʔēlōhīm* (“God”) is the only and sovereign deity, has a personality, and created the cosmos without any cooperation of a female deity, as distinct from the Ugaritic god El, whose consort was Asherah.

Whether this Hebrew deity, called Yahweh, and the Canaanite god “El” (*ʔilu*) are “translatable” into each other is hotly debated and especially has been challenged by the work of the Egyptologist J. Assmann.²² Biblical scholars such as R. Hendel and M. S. Smith²³ have responded to this challenge in diametrically opposite ways. Hendel, like Assmann, held that “a lack of translatability was a basic feature of earliest Israel.”²⁴ Smith, on the other hand, holds that ancient Israel constructed a cross-cultural translatability of divinity.

Without going into the theoretical argument here, I would like to deal with the “similar but different” comparison between the Ugaritic-Canaanite *El* and the Israelite God. Hence, I pay attention to the relationship between Ugaritic religion and Hebrew religion and to the relationship between the Ugaritic concept of the deity *ʔil* and the Hebrew

²⁰ See, for example, D. T. Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 130–40 (“God and the Waters”); “Creation out of Conflict? The Chaoskampf motif in the Old Testament: Cosmic Dualism or *creatio ex nihilo*,” in *Congress Volume Aberdeen 2019*, ed. by G. Macaskill, C. M. Maier and J. Schaper (VTSup 192; Leiden: Brill, 2022), 487–88; E. L. Greenstein, “The God of Israel and the Gods of Canaan: How Different were They?” in *Proceedings of the WCJS 12* (1997), Division A: *The Bible and Its World*, 47*–58*.

²¹ Whether this “either-or” question, i.e., “El” (*ʔilu*) or a “god” (*ʔilu*), is adequate for the understanding the polytheism will be discussed in detail in Ch. 4.

²² For example, J. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997, 1998); *The Price of Monotheism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

²³ M. S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010, originally published in FAT series, by Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); R. Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁴ Smith, *God in Translation*, 99. See R. Hendel, “Gods in Translation and Location,” in *Mighty Baal: Essays in Honor of Mark S. Smith*, ed. by S. C. Russell and E. J. Hamori (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 119–37.

concept of the deity *ʾēl*, using concrete examples. For example, one of my major concerns is a detailed analysis of the pantheon lists in multiple languages from ancient Ugarit. In Chapter 4, E, I discuss the translation of the Ugaritic alphabetic term *il* into Akkadian DINGIR^{lu4} (=ʾIlū), as well as the existence of the Ugaritic deity *ʾIlū* in the Hurrian pantheon list.

The distinctive features of the Hebrew God, however, must have been a great surprise to the ancient (and modern) polytheists when they first encountered him. It should be noted that while western Christians were extremely disturbed when they were informed that the Genesis story of the Deluge was similar to the *Gilgamesh Epic*, the Japanese polytheists who encountered the Genesis 1 creation story for the first time in the early 19th century were amazed by the totally different nature of the deity of the Bible.²⁵ Hence, our *contextual and contrastive approach* is surely a significant way to understand polytheism in ancient Canaan, which is itself the historical, namely spatio-temporal, context of the Hebrew religion. It goes without saying that such a *historical approach* is not same as a *diachronic and comparative approach*.²⁶ In this sense, among the most recent works, Fleming's work is very much "historical," not diachronic.

Polytheism from Within

In the 1970's I was studying Canaanite religion through mythological texts such as the *Baal Cycle* and the myth and ritual text KTU 1.23, together with liturgical texts. At that time, I, like others, assumed that there was a cult of El (*ʾIlū*) in ancient Ugarit during the LB Age and that people worshipped the god El as the primary deity at the temple of El. But much later I came to consider the fact that no specific temple (*bt*) for El (*ʾIlū*) has been found on the acropolis of Ugarit and realized that the phrase *bt il* most likely means "sanctuary" (lit "house of god(s)" [*ʾilu*]) rather than "the temple of El." That made me wonder whether there was indeed an official cult of El (*ʾIlū*) in ancient Ugarit, and if it might be possible that rather there was just an ordinary and general belief in *IL* the Deity.²⁷

Furthermore, a detailed study of the Ugaritic "pantheon" lists has shown me that the Ugaritic religious texts have been studied from the Western monotheistic perspective, not from the point of view of the texts themselves, and that we may have totally misunderstood the religious tradition of polytheism in ancient Canaan. In other words, we, the modern scholars, may have been misled in our understanding of the nature of *polytheism* because we have been explaining it in terms of, or from the perspective of, *monotheism*, though unconsciously. Thus, we must reexamine the question of whether our

²⁵ See D. T. Tsumura, "Rediscovery of the Ancient Near East and Its Implications for Genesis 1–2," in *Since the Beginning: Interpreting Genesis 1 and 2 Through the Ages*, ed. by K. R. Greenwood (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 237.

²⁶ See J. Barr, "The Synchronic, the Diachronic, and the Historical: Triangular Relationship?" in *Bible and Interpretation: The Collected Essays of James Barr*, vol. 2, ed. by J. Barton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 151–63. For a recent assessment of James Barr's scholarship, see S. E. Porter (ed.), *James Barr Assessed: Evaluating His Legacy over the Last Sixty Years* (Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2021).

²⁷ See Ch. 4, C.

modern *religionsgeschichtlich* approach to polytheism is adequate from the ancient polytheistic perspective. We may have assumed too easily that monotheism is the end product of a religious development from polytheism via monolatry. As A. Rahmouni aptly says, “The notions of polytheism toward/versus monotheism would have been strange and unfamiliar to Ugaritian perceptions and world-views.”²⁸

In the following chapters, I intend to deal with polytheism from within the Ugaritic religion and to clarify the meaning and significance of the plurality of deities from within the context of Canaanite polytheism.

While it is reasonable for us to read the Hebrew Bible (OT) by placing it in its cultural and religious context (ANE), the extra-biblical context is not so unified. For instance, Mesopotamian concepts and Egyptian concepts are different from each other in various areas. H. Frankfort has long reminded us that the concept of kingship is different in the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures.²⁹ Of course, comparing A and B is meaningful only if A and B have something in common. But the differences between them are more significant than the similarities. If we are to avoid the pitfall of a patternism which sees only similar aspects, we must always ask in *what* aspects two things are similar.³⁰

I believe that without proper training in linguistics, philological studies become a show-off of one’s broad knowledge of languages by an etymological acrobat, and on the other hand, without adequate training in philology, religious scholars easily become the victim of a speculative enterprise without noticing the pit in their path. Therefore, in the following chapters, I present revised versions of a selection of my previously published articles in the areas of religion, language, and philology that demonstrate this. While the study of religious texts is not itself the study of religion, one cannot do any scholarly work on religion without a careful examination and understanding of the religious texts involved. Therefore, the written sources need to be read with an exact knowledge of scripts and sounds, of grammar and syntax, as well as of various motifs and literary genres. It must be emphasized that we must be careful not to impose our modern western cognitive perceptions onto the ancient religious phenomena of the Near East.

Let us stop treating polytheism *diachronically* as if it were the pre-stage of monotheism or as if monotheism were corrupted into polytheism. Let us stop dealing with variations in religious phenomena *diachronically*, as if the Canaanite idea of the nature of deity developed along a line of a unilateral evolutionary framework. Rather, we should treat the variations in the polytheistic thinking in the context of polytheism itself, as they are reflected, for example, in the usages of the term *il* in Ugaritic. Before we ask whether a cult of El existed in LB Ugarit, we need to clarify the meaning of the alphabetically written term *il* in Ugarit. That is the ultimate concern of the present book.

²⁸ A. Rahmouni, *The Gods of Mount Šapānu: Deity Groups in the Ugaritic Alphabetic Texts* (EB ns 92; Leuven: Peeters, 2022), 1 n4.

²⁹ H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948, 1978).

³⁰ See A. Gibson, *Biblical Semantic Logic: A Preliminary Analysis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981).

Structure of this Book

The first division deals with “Background” issue of the religion of ancient Ugarit. Chapters 1 and 2 survey the culture and religion of the Canaanites and discuss methodological issues in the comparative study of Ugaritic and biblical studies by reviewing Cyrus H. Gordon’s contributions to these studies. The next chapters discuss major topics in Ugaritic religion: Chapter 3 focuses on the relationship between Canaanite religion and Israelite prophetic theology, as reflected in Hosea’s message of the eighth century BC. Chapter 4, the central chapter, deals with the crucial issue, was there a cult of El in ancient Ugarit? Until now, scholars, including myself, have assumed that such a cult long existed in Ugarit. We have also asked whether the term *il* is a proper noun, hence referring to the god El (*ʾIlu*), or a generic noun, meaning a “god” (*ʾilu*). But I conclude that asking such an either-or question itself is inadequate, for in a polytheistic thinking, the term *il* can be a generic noun, *ʾilu*, referring to a god and/or gods, the specific god “El” (*ʾIlu*), or the collective godhead *Deity* (*ʾIlū*). The next part, Chapters 5 through 8, deals with the text KTU 1.23, which describes *The Deity* (*ʾIlū*) impregnating two human women. Chapters 9 and 10 deal with the king’s role in the monthly dynastic rituals and in the funerary cult, respectively.

The final division of this book deals with several topics, as the interrelationship between sound and script in terms of the *sandhi* phenomenon in the Ugaritic language (Chapter 11), misspellings (Chapter 12), and a morphological issue with regard to the *prmae waw* verb (Chapter 13) as well as some problems in the introduction to the Keret (Kirta) epic (Chapter 14), and how Ugaritic economic texts shed light on the interpretation of a biblical narrative (Chapter 15).

Part 1 – Background

Chapter 1

Canaan and the Canaanites

The study of the land of Canaan and its culture is crucial for understanding the message of the OT because its events took place in the context of ancient Canaan. Furthermore, Hebrew is linguistically a branch of the Canaanite languages, and the literary forms in the Bible have strong affinities with the “Canaanite” literatures of both the Late Bronze (LB) Age and the Iron Age. Also, the Israelites early on adopted the Canaanite-Phoenician alphabetic script for writing.

A. Sources

Information about Canaan and the Canaanites comes from three different types of sources: documentary or inscriptional, archaeological, and traditional.¹

For the LB Age (1550–1200 BC), inscriptional data from Canaan (i.e., the southern Levant) is unfortunately very scarce. As of 2018, the earliest Canaanite linear alphabetic letters are attested in a fifteenth-century BC Lachish inscription.² However, virtually all linguistic data concerning the LB Canaanites come from outside Canaan (i.e., el-Amarna and Ugarit) through cuneiform texts on clay tablets, except for a few Akkadian clay tablets found at LB Hazor, Aphek, Ta’anach, and other sites.³

The Amarna tablets are a direct source of information. Among the large number of fourteenth-century documents (some four hundred texts) found in the Middle-Nile city of Amarna written in Akkadian,⁴ the *lingua franca* of the ancient Near East at the time, the majority were letters sent to the pharaohs by vassal kings of the Levant and the rulers of Cyprus and Ugarit.⁵ The city of Ugarit was located north of Canaan, but its culture

¹ For a good, though somewhat outdated, introduction to the Canaanites, see A. R. Millard, “The Canaanites,” in *People of Old Testament Times*, ed. by D. J. Wiseman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 29–52.

² See F. Höflmayer, H. Misgav, L. Webster and K. Streit, “Early Alphabetic Writing in the Ancient Near East: The ‘Missing Link’ from Tel Lachish,” *Antiquity* 95/ 381 (2021), 705–19. See below, n19.

³ W. Horowitz, T. Oshima and S. L. Sanders, *Cuneiform in Canaan: The Next Generation* (University Park, Penn.: Penn State, 2018).

⁴ See J.-P. Vita, “Akkadian in Syria and Canaan,” in *History of the Akkadian Language*, vol. 2: *The Second and First Millennia BCE. Afterlife* (HbO 152; Leiden: Brill, 2021), 1213–65.

⁵ W. L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); A. F. Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna based on Collations of all Extant Tablets*, 2 vols. (HdO 110; Leiden: Brill, 2015).

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