

NOTES ON A CANAANITE PSALM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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In 1936 H. L. Ginsberg drew up conclusive evidence that Psalm 29 is an ancient Canaanite Baal hymn,¹ only slightly modified for use in the cultus of Yahweh.² Accordingly, Psalm 29 takes on a rare new importance for the analysis of Canaanite prosodic canons and their influence on Israelitic psalmody. The Ugaritic literature is largely epic, and while refrains and lyric or odic passages appear, we do not have from Ugarit a clear cut example of the Canaanite cultic psalm. Thus Psalm 29 fills a real gap in the extant Canaanite literature.

Once again it was Ginsberg who made the first steps in analyzing the

¹ C. L. Woolley, *Carchemish*, Part II, *The Town Defences*, Plates 4 and 12.

² This information was obtained by Dr. Albright in a recent conversation with Miss Tufnell at the Institute of Archaeology of the University of London.

³ Dr. Nelson Glueck has kindly provided us with the plan of the gate of Ezion-geber (Tell el-kheleifeh) which is simpler than either the East Gate or the Solomonic Gate at Megiddo, but is built along the same architectural lines.

⁴ Cf. C. U. Torrey, *Pseudo-Ezekiel and the Original Prophecy*, New Haven, 1930; Wils Messel, *Ezechielfragen*, Oslo, 1943.

⁵ The writer's dissertation, which deals with the place, date, language and composition of the book of Ezekiel will appear in print later this year.

⁶ *Kivve Ugarit* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1936, pp. 129 ff. See also T. H. Gaster's important treatment, "Psalm 29," *JQR* 37 (1946-47), pp. 55 ff.

⁷ The revisions would include the substitution of "Yahweh" for "Baal" (which occasionally disturbs the meter), and particularly the closing verse (v. 11). Note in Psalm 96 that the revision has progressed much further (e.g., *mitspehöl 'ammim* for *bené 'elim*).

repetitive parallelism which characterizes the Ugaritic epics and Psalm 29.³ This form of verse structure (type ABC:ABE) and its variations has received extensive study more recently by W. F. Albright who has shown that it is found in remarkable abundance in the earliest poems of Israel.⁴ This fact thus serves to illustrate that the early poets of Israel, particularly the composers of the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5) and the Song of Miriam (Ex. 15), were strongly under the sway of Canaanite stylistic canons.

Along with elaborate repetitive parallelism, there is another prosodic feature in Psalm 29 which has not received due attention as typical of early Canaanite style. This is the use of mixed metrical patterns, i. e., the use of the metrical units 3:3 and 2:2 as building blocks in alternating rhythms, in which the tricolon (3:3; 2:2) and more rarely 3:2:2 is frequently utilized to vary the standard verse (the bicolon 3:3 or 2:2).⁵ Mixed meter is not infrequent in Ugaritic epic style,⁶ but to judge from Psalm 29, it seems to have abounded in old Canaanite hymns. The first two strophes of Psalm 29 may be schematized as follows: Strophe I (vv. 1, 2), 2:2 2:2 2:2 2:2; Strophe II (vv. 3-6), 2:2 2:2 2:2 2:2 3:3. As Ginsberg has noted,⁸ Strophe III has suffered haplography, the torso of which is preserved in v. 7. Repetitive parallelism invites such scribal errors. Textual difficulties urge caution in scanning vv. 8-10. In any case vv. 8, 9a seem to have been originally a tricolon 3:3:3.

This alternation of metrical forms with the use of the tricolon, complete with repetitive parallelism, is also characteristic of Israel's two great victory songs mentioned above, and of the Lament of David.⁹ For example, Strophes II and III of Ex. 15 (vv. 6-8, 9-11) scan 2:2 2:2 2:3 3:3 and 2:2 2:2 2:2 2:2 3:3 respectively. The final two strophes of Judges 5 (vv. 24-27 and 28-30) with several minor emendations each scan 3:3 2:2 2:2 3:3 2:2 2:2 3:3. In Psalm 68 the pattern 2:2:3 appears in vv. 2, 5a, 6, etc.,¹¹ which is not surprising in light of the numerous Canaanitisms in its text. We have thus another indication of the influence of Canaanite stylistic canons upon Israelite poetic composition, an influence which appears, moreover, only in the earliest poetry of Israel.

An additional Canaanitism in the vocabulary of Psalm 29 seems to be

³ In "The Rebellion and Death of Ba'lu," *Orientalia* V(NS):2 (1936), p. 180.

⁴ To be published in the article, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," in the forthcoming T. H. Robinson Volume.

⁵ Not to be confused, of course, with Qinah meter (3:2), a relatively late developed style in Hebrew poetry.

⁶ E. g., I Aqbat 44-45; 68:24-26; 52:39-49; etc.

⁷ Probably the first and second cola are to be reversed. The article and sign of the direct object were not present in early Canaanite or Hebrew poetry and are to be disregarded in scanning.

⁸ "The Rebellion and Death of Ba'lu," *op. cit.*, p. 180.

⁹ See already, Albright, "The Earliest Forms of Hebrew Verse," *JPOS* II (1922), pp. 69-86.

¹⁰ These analyses of Ex. 15 and Judg. 5 were done in collaboration with D. N. Freedman and are to be published in detail in the near future.

¹¹ Prof. Albright kindly called my attention to this fact.

have escaped notice. This is found in the troublesome expression, *b'hadrat qôdêš*. Various explanations have been given, most of them involving emendation.¹² But the dependant passages, Ps. 96:9 and I Chr. 16:29¹³ seem to lend weight to the Massoretic reading and urge caution; though on the other hand, the agreement might reflect simple harmonization. In KRT A 11.154.5, *hadr* is in strict parallelism with *lâm* ("dream" or "vision"), and clearly means "apparition" or "divine appearance." Gordon translates "theophany."¹⁴ The connection with the root *hdr*, ("to be splendid, glorious" or the like) is quite clear. One may compare the semantic development of *k'ôdôd YHWH* which comes to mean, virtually, the physical manifestation of Yahweh in acts of special revelation.¹⁵ In light of these facts we would prefer to read, *b'hadrat qôdêš* or better *b'hadrat qôdôš*,¹⁶ and translate v. 2b, "Prostrate yourselves before Yahweh when he appears in holiness." Vs. 1, 2 are, of course, the introduction to the divine appearance—the theophany of the storm-god. The heavenly council (the *bnê 'êlîm*) is pictured as bowing in awe before Yahweh who reveals his terrible presence in the heavens. Such a rendering thus fits neatly into the context and explains a meaningless—if familiar—expression.¹⁷

¹² Quite generally the text has been emended to *hadr* or even **hadr* (!) on the basis of the versions, notably LXX *en autâ hagia autâ*. But one suspects that the LXX translator is making a try at interpreting from context. Cf. Perles, "Babylonische biblische Glossen," *JJZ* 8:4 (105) p. 127 whose etymology for *hadr* (from Acc. *adrâ*, "to fear"), is palpably false.

¹³ Two other occurrences of *hadr* exist. Prov. 14:28 and II Chr. 20:21, but both are problematical. In the former passage many commentators read *hedar* (LXX *dozê*). The text of the latter is in disarray to judge from the Septuagint as well as from the weird Hebrew of the MT.

¹⁴ *Ugaritic Handbook*, p. 225. Cf. *Ugaritic Literature* (Rome, 1949), p. 71.

¹⁵ On *k'ôdôd YHWH*, see now G. von Rad, *Deuteronomium-Studien* (Göttingen, 1948), pp. 25 ff.

¹⁶ Cf. the LXX. In Phoenician-type orthography, used in Israel before the 9th century B. C., the final suffix would not have been represented by a mater lectionis. The reading of the suffix is also desirable for metrical reasons.

¹⁷ Prof. Albright has called my attention also to the idiom *yšb l-* (v. 10) which appears to be characteristically Canaanite (cf. Gordon 127:23, *yšb lksî*, etc., etc.). On *mabbîl*, see Albright, "The Pictorial-onomimic Primeval," *JBL* LVIII:II (1939), p. 98, and the references cited there.