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**Giovanni Garbini**

***Il Poema di Baal di Ilumilku***

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This book contains an introduction to the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, a lengthy poem composed by the high priest Ilumilku (or “Ilimilku” or “Ilimalku”). The introduction is followed by a new Italian translation of the text and of some related Ugaritic texts written by other scribes.

After a long and fruitful career, Semitist Garbini proposes his own analysis of the poem, which differs considerably from the predominant interpretations (cf. Smith 1994, 58–114) in several respects. Of course, it is not surprising that interpretations vary. The surviving tablets are so fragmentary and display so many rare words that the precise meaning of certain sections and of the poem as a whole will remain a matter of dispute. However, all specialists, including Garbini, agree that the text sheds light on the background of the Hebrew Bible.

In the introduction (9–74) Garbini first discusses part of the scarce remains of the literature of ancient Syria. The texts show that the Syrian literary and religious traditions had their own distinct characteristics and a large degree of originality. Unfortunately, almost nothing has survived from regions such as Phoenicia, although their literary production must have been extensive. Most extant texts come from Ugarit, and Ilumilku’s

Baal Cycle is among the most important ones. As other Syrian cities must have had different myths, it is uncertain how representative the Ugaritic poem is of the Syrian religious literature.

Garbini regards the fragmentary tablets *KTU* 1.1–1.6 (= *CTA* 1–6) as the only remains of Ilumilku's Baal poem and assumes that their order in *CTA* and *KTU*<sup>1/2/3</sup> is correct. Contrary to most other scholars, however, he denies that the two fragments regarded as parts of *KTU* 1.2 (= *CTA* 2) can belong to the same tablet (77–79, 87). He assumes that the smaller fragment (RS 3.346, labeled 2a by Garbini) is the rest of a one-column tablet of relatively small size (12 x 8 cm). He regards it as a secondary addition by Ilumilku himself, a pendant to the beginning of *KTU* 1.6.

Garbini bases his translation (80–156) on the text of *KTU*<sup>1</sup> (1976), not on the improved transcriptions in *KTU*<sup>2</sup> (1995) or *KTU*<sup>3</sup> (2013). There is no transcription of the Ugaritic text beside the translation, but the footnotes to the translation comment on the meaning of relevant or unclear Ugaritic terms. Between the sections of the text, short explanations clarify the textual coherence and indicate what may have been described in the lost parts of the tablets.

Garbini argues that the Baal Cycle describes a transformation of Baal's role: having been a storm god, Baal ends up as the king of the Netherworld. This transformation of Baal's role was incited by the god El, who had been the god of the Netherworld in the past but who has now become the father of the gods and of humanity. El's wife, the goddess Athirat (Asherah), is still in the Netherworld, but El has settled himself on "Mount Kas," a mountain that Garbini identifies with Mount Casius (Arabic: Jebel el-Aqra'), 40 km north of Ugarit (58, 82, with reference to *gr ks* "mountain of the cup?" in *KTU* 1.1:III.12). Since the Netherworld lacks a divine ruler, the sea god Yam is proclaimed its new king. However, this god is killed by the god Baal.

After this victory, Baal indicates that he wants a palace, just like the "sons of Athirat" (*KTU* 1.3:v.38–39, etc.), hoping that this will enable him to usurp El's leading position. El unexpectedly gives permission to build the palace, expressing the wish that Baal will indeed have a palace like those of the "sons of Athirat" (*KTU* 1.4:iv.62–v.1). According to Garbini, this wish is crucial for the interpretation of the poem as a whole: El misleads Baal when he utters these words, realizing that Athirat and her sons still reside in the Netherworld. Although Baal's palace is built on his holy mountain Şapānu, Baal will become king of the Netherworld, the place where the divinized kings—the so-called Repha'im—reside after their death. Hence, El will get rid of Baal.

According to Garbini, Ilumilku was unable to incorporate older traditions smoothly into the final part of his poem. He was bound to connect ideas that were difficult to reconcile. El had to triumph as the unrivaled ruler of heaven and humanity. Therefore, Mot, the god of death, had to kill El's rival Baal. However, Ilumilku could not deprive Baal completely of his powers and had to enable him to continue to give rain on the earth. Therefore, he let the goddess Anat kill Mot and made Baal come back to life. With such peculiar twists the Baal myth ends.

Of course, it is good news that a new Italian translation of the fascinating Baal Cycle has become available. Also, it is important to take a different interpretation of the poem seriously. There are several new observations in this book that deserve attention.

However, it is difficult to accept the interpretation of the poem as a whole. Garbini's assumption that El was originally the ruler of the Netherworld finds no support in the text of the poem but is based on Garbini's hypothetical reconstruction of the history of the Semitic religions. Also, the idea that the Netherworld lacked a divine ruler has no basis in the text itself, where the Netherworld is clearly the dominion of Mot, the god of death (e.g., *KTU* 1.4:VIII:1–14).

Equally unconvincing is Garbini's identification of El's abode with Mount Casius. The grounds to identify Baal's mountain Şapānu with Mount Casius are much stronger, and the Ugaritic texts suggest that the abode of Baal and the abode of El were two completely different mountains (Smith 1994, 122, 174). It is more plausible to locate El's mountain near the sources of important rivers, for instance, in the Lebanon or near the upper Euphrates (Smith 1994, 225–34, with reference to *KTU* 1.4:IV.21–22: "at the springs of the Rivers, amid the streams of the Deeps").

In the book there are virtually no references to the recent international discussion about the poem, although Italian readers may want at least some basic information about it. Unfortunately, also some recent discoveries with a high relevancy remain unmentioned.

(1) Garbini (78) maintains the traditional order of the columns of *KTU* 1.1 (ii–iii–iv–v). However, Mark Smith (1994, 20–21) and Dennis Pardee (2012, 66–67) have shown that the traditional obverse-reverse orientation of the tablet must be reversed, which leads to a complete inversion of the sequence of the columns (v–iv–iii–ii) and, of course, to a different interpretation of the text. According to Pardee (2012, 70–71), also the traditional obverse-reverse orientation of the larger fragment of *KTU* 1.2 (RS 3.367; Garbini: 2b) must probably be reversed. If Pardee is correct, Garbini's argument that the fragments 2b and 2a cannot be remains of the same tablet because of their content becomes obsolete.

(2) An examination by Pardee in 2006 (Pardee 2009; 2012, 61–66) has shown that the small fragment RS 3.364, known as *CTA 8* or *KTU 1.8*, belongs to *KTU 1.3*, with a good physical join between the smaller and the larger fragment at the top of 1.3:VI. Garbini does not refer to Pardee’s discovery and still assumes that RS 3.364 was not part of Ilumilku’s composition (157–58). According to Pardee (2009, 387; 2012, 66) and Smith and Pitard (2009, 9), the join between *KTU 1.3* and 1.8 demonstrates that *KTU 1.3+1.8* and *KTU 1.4* are sequential. However, others continue to adduce arguments for a different arrangement (e.g. de Moor 2012: 1.3+1.8, 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6).

(3) Garbini assumes that Ilumilku was high priest of the court of the fourteenth-century king Niqmaddu II (now known as Niqmaddu III). Since the discovery of RS 92.2016 in the House of Urtenu, it appears more probable that he was high priest during the reign of Niqmaddu IV (formerly III), at the end of the thirteenth century (Smith and Pitard 2009, 7–8; Pardee 2012, 44–46).

In the appendices Garbini discusses and translates the text of some fragmentary tablets related to the Baal Cycle but not written by Ilumilku: *KTU 1.8* (but see above), *KTU 1.133*, *KTU 1.7*, *KTU 1.12*, *KTU 1.10+11*, *KTU 1.101*, *KTU 1.108*. The volume ends with indices, but a bibliography is lacking.

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