Just How "Divine" Were the Kings of Ugarit?

N. Wyatt – Edinburgh

1. *Introduction*

Gregorio del Olmo Lete, to whom this paper is dedicated with pleasure as an act of homage, has made significant contributions to our understanding of the royal ideology of ancient Ugarit. His discussions, and other recent treatments of the topic suggest that it is time to offer a new appraisal. In the following I shall examine one particular context which may throw some light on the specific question of my title.

2. *The idea of "deity"*

The first matter with which we should deal is the broad one of how "deity" is to be conceptualized. This may seem a strange question, but it is clear to me that many of the problems faced by historians of religion and theologians alike when treating LBA religion are the product of the unquestioned assumption that there is no problem, and that the same philosophical presuppositions underlie our and their evaluations of the matter.

This is not only far from evident, but is, I believe, a false assumption. In particular, our view of deity, being the product not merely of religious experience and tradition within the western (and now post-Enlightenment) environment, but also of persistent philosophical and theological scrutiny, both from dogmatic and rationalist perspectives, has introduced a number of dimensions into the concept, such as ontological factors, for example the "necessity" of divine existence, the logical possibility and indeed necessity of one deity alone, the purely "spiritual" nature of deity, and so on, which makes it into a product simply incommensurate with ancient world ideas. To be sure, we find in the Upaniṣads and some early Greek writers serious examinations of the problems which were to become the bread and butter of later thinkers; but we look in vain in the surviving writings of the ancient Near East for even a hint at such questionings.[1] The doubter in the existence of God in Israel is simply dismissed as a fool (Ps. 53:2).[2]

---

1. This is in no way to regard ancient thought as in any way puerile or unsubtle. There is certainly considerable sophistication in all ancient theological systems, but so far as we know it operated at an intuitive rather than a consciously intellectual level. For Ugaritian thought see Wyatt, "Understanding polytheism: structure and dynamic in a West Semitic pantheon", *JHC* 5 (1998) 24-63, where I have developed del Olmo's views on the pantheon.

2. MT *'āmar nābāl b'libbô 'ên *'lōhîm*. This is of course susceptible of a pluralistic interpretation: "the fool has said in his heart, «there are no gods!»" It could be a monotheistic jibe, or indeed a polytheistic one directed against new-fangled monotheism. The early Christians were accused of atheism.

Certainly, the thinking of impossible thoughts is the way in which new ideas emerge, for there is no unthinking the thought, and no unsaying the speech.[3] But there is no evidence that Ugaritian thought ventured into any new territory on theological principles.

It may be as well to begin with a brief consideration of the more general issue of how the idea of "deity" arose in the first place. A number of options have been proposed by scholars, though it is perhaps significant that all the early theories, expounded by anthropologists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were based on contemporary evidence from newly-discovered cultures in Africa, Asia and the Americas. Any explanatory value with regard to the past was entirely inferred, and with the advantage of hindsight, quite unconvincing. E. Tylor considered that early peoples discerned a spiritual dimension in natural objects, giving rise to the theory of animism. This lived on in the view of H. Frankfort that they believed in a "personal universe", constitutionally incapable of seeing it other than in personified terms. He notoriously *did* apply these claims specifically to ancient Near Eastern cultures, and claimed that Israel was alone in discarding such perceptions, together with the supposedly circular or cyclical temporal thinking that accompanied such a view. He received short shrift from J. Rogerson.[4] A more sophisticated form of animism has recently been postulated by S. Guthrie,[5] who argued that anthropomorphism was and remains an adaptative strategy for all humans. I have recently used this new account as an insight into the real nature of myth.[6] The virtue of this new approach is that it is based on a universal view of human psychology (not just a spurious "primitive" mentality), and can be corroborated from secular as well as religious contexts. It is therefore empirical and falsifiable. So far as the alleged uniqueness of the Israelite experience is concerned, there have recently been salutary developments in its serious contextualization within the broader ancient Near Eastern matrix.[7]

3. *The evidence of the narrative texts*

In turning to the Ugaritic evidence, the problem with regard to texts whose first function, however broadly characterized, was "literary" in purpose is that figurative language might be used for any number of effects. Its formal ideological significance is not self-evident, as we might expect, in contrast, with ritual texts, where the evidence would point more directly to the king's contextual function. Thus the features we shall note, and which have been extensively analysed, remain inconclusive. Having conceded this, I have argued in previous discussions that they are in fact ideological in purpose, because in some cases at least (the "Baal cycle" and "the Gracious gods", KTU 1.1-6, 1.23) the materials are evidently intended to communicate ideological values. In others, *Keret* and *Aqhat* (KTU 1.14-16, 1.17-19), such features may be more incidental to the plot, but are probably intentional elements on the part of Ilimilku.[8]

---

3. Cf. Wyatt, *Religious texts from Ugarit. The words of Ilimilku and his colleagues*, Sheffield 1998, pp. 275-276 n. 116, for discussion of a similar impossible thought in *Aqhat*, at KTU 1.17 vi 34-8.

4. H. Frankfort, *The intellectual adventure of ancient man*, Baltimore 1949; (= *Before philosophy* Harmondsworth 1952); J. Rogerson, *Myth in Old Testament interpretation*, Berlin 1974.

5. S. Guthrie, *Faces in the clouds*, Oxford 1993.

6. Wyatt, "The mythic mind" (forthcoming in *SJOT*).

7. See in particular the various essays in D. Edelman (ed.), *The triumph of Elohim. From Yahwisms to Judaisms*, Kampen 1995, and K. van der Toorn (ed.), *The image and the book. Iconic cults, aniconism, and the rise of book religion in Israel and the ancient Near East*, Leuven 1997.

8. These observations are made with due cognizance of the argument of Wyatt, "The mythic mind", that mythology is not so much a literary genre as a religious mind-set. When the mind indulges in the fanciful story-lines and the metaphorical worlds of myth, it does so to some useful and utilitarian purpose.

3.1. *The Baal Cycle of texts (KTU 1.1-6)*

I have recently argued[9] that the Baal cycle of myths deals essentially with the concerns of royal ideology. The evidence now available from earlier periods, Eshnunna in the twenty-fourth and above all Mari in the eighteenth century BCE, suggested new departures in the assessment of the Ugaritic material. In so far as the divinity of the king is concerned, the symbolic and ritual association of weapons used by kings in both cultic and military contexts with the dragon-killing myths of gods such as Baal, Adad and Tishpak and their mythic weapons suggests that in some measure the king was regarded as an avatar of the deity (or the deity the apotheosis of the king). To us it appears no more than a point of close comparison. For the ancients it was surely much more, since the identity of purpose and role pointed to an identity of being on some level. Though the Baal myth, then, deals entirely in divine affairs, with no explicit mention of the real world of Ugarit, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that behind the legitimization of Baal's rule in heaven and the construction of his house (palace or temple) on Mount Saphon lie the concerns of the king's rule on earth and the construction of his house (palace or continuation of his dynasty)[10] in Ugarit. This however does not in itself constitute *prima facie* evidence for divine kingship, since it operates on the principle of "as above, so below" (the paradigmatic nature of heavenly patterns) rather than any formal ontological identity. But we shall note a similar process of "identification" in ritual contexts, where it cannot be so easily written off.

Another feature in the Baal cycle may have a direct bearing on the problem we are here addressing, and we shall deal with the details of this below under the rubric of ritual material. This concerns the narrative of the enthronement of Athtar following the death of Baal.

3.2. *The Story of Keret (KTU 1.14-16)*

S. Parker proposed[11] that the *Keret* story was designed in its final recension to demote the king from an older divine status to a merely human status. But I have argued[12] that the internal evidence of the story, comparing his anticipated death with that of Baal, points rather in the opposite direction, for it suggests that as Baal died and rose again, so will the king die and rise again, a redemptive figure, and implicitly divine. Certainly *Keret* offers a serious critique of the hero's kingship, but that is not because the institution is deficient, but rather because the king fails to adhere to his duties.

It is in incidentals that *Keret* points unselfconsciously to important features of kingship. These are threefold. Firstly the king is called *bn il*, and El is called *ab adm*, where the two formulae represent the notion of divine parentage of the king. Secondly Yasibu is described as one who is the suckling of goddesses, another metaphor for a divine status, but with a foothold in the ideology of real kingship, his mother being herself assimilated to the royal goddess(es).[13] Thirdly, the destiny of the king is implicitly

---

9. Wyatt, "Arms and the king: the earliest allusions to the *Chaoskampf* motif and their implications for the interpretation of the Ugaritic and biblical traditions", M. Dietrich - I. Kottsieper (eds.), *'Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf...'. Festschrift O. Loretz*, Münster 1998, pp. 833-82. A remarkable example of the continuity of the symbolism of "divine weapons" was displayed on 1 July 1999, the day on which I completed this paper, when the new mace was unveiled by the queen at the opening of the Scottish Parliament. Now the commentators tell us that it is a symbol of democracy(!): in the past it was precisely a symbol of ultimate royal (= divine) power against democratic disturbance of the *status quo*!

10. Cf. 2 Sam. 7, where Nathan brings David an oracle playing on the desire of the king to build a temple (*bayit*) for Yahweh, and Yahweh's counter-proposal to build a dynasty (*bayit*) for the king.

11. S.B. Parker, "The historical composition of *KRT* and the cult of El", *ZAW* 89 (1977) 161-75.

12. Wyatt "Ilimilku's ideological programme: Ugaritic royal propaganda, and a biblical postscript", *UF* 29 (1997) 773-96.

13. It is nowhere stated that the mother of the heir is *rabitu* in Ugarit, though this title is used of the mother of the queen of Ammithtamru II (I. Singer, "A political history of Ugarit", W.G.E. Watson - N. Wyatt [eds.], *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies*,

described in terms intended to evoke the search for the dead Baal, thus inviting a deliberate comparison between Baal and the king[14].

In this case the features noted may be said to serve a literary purpose, and could thus be estimated, as used to be done, as *"Hofstil"* (courtly style), the natural hyperbole of the heroizing process of the narrative concerning the king. In Keret's case, he being rather an anti-hero, it might be argued to give the greater pathos to his final discomfiture. Again, however, if my arguments concerning Ilimilku's intentions are at all cogent, then such ideological language is arguably employed precisely to make an ideological point.

Apart from any agendas within *Keret*, it is of course entirely natural that the descriptions of royal behaviour found in the narrative should simply follow accepted and familiar procedure. It would be odd indeed if there were not such a correspondence between the literary and historical levels of reality. It is on this basis that we shall return to a ritual sequence narrated in *Keret* which has a specific bearing on our problem.

3.3. *The Story of Aqhat (KTU 1.17-19)*

The story of *Aqhat* probably lacks the overtly ideological intention that may be discerned in the previous examples. While I think it makes a number of assumptions about royal ideology, it is more a matter of taking these for granted than using them to ulterior purpose.[15] Nor does it make specifically theological claims like *Keret*.

One feature of the text is worth exploring in the light of our task, however: this is the king's ritual behaviour, with which we shall deal below.

4. *The evidence of the ritual texts*

I wish to treat four ritual contexts here. The first is to be reconstructed from a mythological context, being the narrative of the enthronement of Athtar, as noted above. The second occurs in *Keret*, the third in *Aqhat*, while the fourth is found in the texts which belong formally to the genre of ritual texts.

4.1. Because of lack of space, we need not cite the narrative of Athtar's enthronement, as readers will be familiar with it.[16] Athirat is instructed to choose "the first of" (rather than "one of") her sons, to be proclaimed king. Some years ago[17] I supposed that this text was to be interpreted as the mythic account of a royal enthronement, and was to be seen as the *Vorlage* of such passages as Exod. 19-32, which tells of the ascent of the sacred mountain by Moses. This too is an essentially mythic narrative, and the real world to which it relates was the ritual setting of the royal ascent and enthronement, as practised in Jerusalem.

Leiden 1999, pp. 680-681). But Athirat and Shapsh are both called *rbt*, and some ideological link is to be supposed to make sense of what would otherwise be an implausible coincidence.

14. Wyatt, *UF* 29, pp. 783-785.

15. On the arguments for recognizing Danel to be a king see Wyatt, "The Story of Aqhat", W.G.E. Watson - N. Wyatt (eds.), *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies*, Leiden 1999, pp. 249-251.

16. For my translation of the text see Wyatt, *Religious texts from Ugarit*, pp. 131-3 (KTU 1.6 i 44-67). My only alteration would be now to follow the proposal of C. Virolleaud, "Un poème phénicien de Ras-Shamra. La lutte de Môt, fils des dieux, et d'Aleïn, fils de Baal", *Syria* 12 (1931) 193-223, esp. 195, 201-202, taken up by J.A. Emerton, "Ugaritic notes", *JTS* 16 (1965) 438-443 and J. Day, *King and messiah in Israel and the ancient Near East. Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, Sheffield 1997, p. 81, so that ll. 50-2 are now to be read as an account of the preparations for the anointing of Athtar.

17. Wyatt, "The hollow crown: ambivalent elements in West Semitic royal ideology", *UF* 18 (1986) 421-436.

The Ugaritic text undoubtedly provides an important insight into the inauguration of the king in Ugarit.[18] If this proposal is cogent, it has a number of implications for our enquiry. For the rituals which transform the status of the earthly king, removing him from "merely human" status to that of a sacral figure, to be couched in the form of a narrative about a god, carries with it the hint that the king himself is to be seen as transformed into a god. In other words the story has about it the power of words of institution, or performative utterance, and the ritual described is a performative act.[19] The enthronement of the king is thus his apotheosis. This may be seen to be corroborated by other rites, in particular those dealing with his role as warrior, where again a mythic paradigm is offered (Wyatt, *Religious Texts*), and that of the sacred marriage: KTU 1.23 deals with El's original, prototypical generation of royal sons, Shahar and Shalem being avatars of Athtar, preserving his dual nature, while KTU 1.132 deals with a form of recapitulation, in which the king, now impersonating Baal, performs the marriage with the chthonian goddess Pidray (herself no doubt impersonated by the queen or a hierodule). Such impersonations were by no means pale echoes of divine patterns, but rather the effective reactualizations of the mythic paradigm.

An important element in the narrative of Athtar's enthronement is his subsequent descent from the throne. This was interpreted by H.R. Page[20] as a deposition myth, and certainly its derivative forms, such as Isa. 14:4-21 and Ezek. 28:2-10, 12-9 and a number of post-biblical texts indicate that it could become transformed in this way in an almost anti-ideological manner.[21] But this is not the meaning of the Ugaritic text. Athtar comes down voluntarily from his elevated position, but still rules below with a universal kingship. How then are we to understand this curious feature? I suggest that this is a metaphor for a double-transformation of the king, which allows him to hold the dual status (both divine and human) which is so puzzling to the modern commentator. By going up and sitting on Baal's throne, Athtar participates in Baal's status and therefore his order of reality. So far so good, for both are divine. But this also serves as a means of conferring divinity of the king at the time of *his* elevation.[22] He too is made into a god by the royal ascent. By coming down again he re-enters the human world. He is thus made divine for the duration of the rites, before resuming his normal status.

The mountain the king ascends is an imaginary mountain. More precisely, as a "mountain", identifiable with the *omphalos* (in the case of Ugarit, with Mount Saphon), it is the elevated ground, the dais, which marks off the sanctuary of the temple from the less holy ground outside it. So ascending the mountain and entering the holy of holies amount to the same thing. This is the dwelling (= place of enthronement) of the god, and the king (or high priest, or sage)[23] who entering the god's domain shares in his order of being. Thus humanity is offered up to the gods in the person of the king, and accordingly transformed.

18. If the objection be raised that it would be wrong to extrapolate a social institution from a mythic narrative of this kind, my response is that paradigms of myth are precisely the validations of social practice, and in this case the myth provides the ideological basis for the royal institution.

19. This therefore resolves the problem I had with Mettinger's use of this term. See Wyatt, *Myths of power. A study of royal myth and ideology in Ugaritic and biblical tradition*, Münster 1996, pp. 285-286; T.N.D. Mettinger, *King and messiah: the civil and sacral legitimation of the Israelite kings*, Lund 1976, pp. 260-261. Within the world of ritual, the rite is precisely the medium which *effects* the transformation of which the words of institution speak. Thus in Judah, the words of Ps. 2:7 transform the king from a mere mortal to a divine being, the closest possible parallel to the present situation.

20. H.R. Page, *The myth of cosmic rebellion. A study of its reflexes in Ugaritic and biblical literature*, Leiden 1996.

21. The sheer complexity of the matter, and the continuation of its ideological dimension, the royal ascent, is clear from H.S. Kvanvig, *Roots of apocalyptic. The Mesopotamian background of the Enoch figure and the Son of Man*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1988. More needs to be said on the Levantine elements in the tradition, as attested in Ugarit.

22. Exactly the same thing is afoot in Solomon's elevation to "Yahweh's throne" in 1 Chron. 28:5, 29:23.

23. A wealth of late mystical material is derived from these cultic circumstances, which are also paralleled in Mesopotamian and Egyptian royal protocols. The god's throne and the king's throne are alike the meeting-points of heaven and earth.

4.2. In the *Keret* story we find evidence, I suggest, the correct interpretation of which indicates that the deification was not a once-only (or once-for-all) event taking place at the king's enthronement, but something which was repeated in the cult. Every time the king entered the holy of holies, carrying with him the burden of his people's sins, their repentance, their pleas or their thanksgiving, it was by virtue of a repeated deification that the rituals were rendered effective. This would be reinforced in his ascent of the temple tower (see below), as it were a reenactment of the inaugural royal ascent. How was this deification achieved? The most likely explanation is the process of ritual preparation described, reinforced by the act of ascent. We have the preparation in two forms, as an instruction on how to proceed (with divine authority, since it is Baal who speaks) in KTU 1.14 ii 9-26, and then in a narrative describing the king fulfilling the instructions, in KTU 1.14 iii 52-iv 8. There are a number of stages in the procedure:

i)   ritual washing;
ii)   rouging;[24]
iii)   entry into the sanctuary;
iv)   various sacrificial and libational acts;
v)   ascent to the highest part of the temple (in this narrative the tower);
vi)   raising of the hands to heaven, in a gesture affirming the link achieved;
vii)   formal offering as a sacrifice, and feeding of the gods;
viii) descent from the high place, thus bringing the ritual process to an end.

It is certainly no coincidence that seven specific elements in the cult are listed, for this forms a totality of necessary stages. The eighth stage, which seals the process, also marks the king's return to the "real" or profane world. While no ritual act of "desacralization" is specified, we may take it to be implicit in the closing off of the divine interlude. It also transmits the divine benefits received to the external world ("brings them down to earth").

4.3. The issue from *Aqhat* which is of interest to us concerns his ritual enrobing in the preparation of his duties. The term used is *uzr*. A number of options have been offered, which I have discussed previously.[25] Having opted for the garment interpretation, I drew attention to such items of apparel as are worn by the king on the Baal stela (RS 4.427), on terracotta stands (RS 78.41 + 81.3659), and worn by El (the king's "father") on statuettes (RS 23.394 and 88.70) and possibly on the stela RS 8.295. Perhaps the similarity, or even identity, of these garments is intended to communicate some ideological or theological principle, that when so garbed the king has assumed ("donned") divinity. The idea should not appear strange. Changes of clothing, such as those of Joseph or Jehoiakin, clearly convey important significance as signs of transformation in biblical tradition. And priests routinely wore masks to impersonate (and thus "become")[26] gods in the Egyptian cult, and the performance in all the cultures of the ancient Near East in the sacred marriage presupposed the identity of actors (kings or priests, queens or priestesses) and deities portrayed. The degree of mystical identity between heaven and earth is strange only to a modern mentality seduced by late dualistic theories.

4.4. At first glance entirely independently of this literary usage - though there is no reason why we should expect the link to be explicitly made - was the language used of the king in texts we associate more formally with the cult. Again, he stood apart from the people, including the priests. He acted as *pontifex*,

---

24. On the use of red ochre in ritual contexts see Wyatt, *Religious texts*, p. 186 n. 44 and references. See further R. Rudgley, *Lost civilisations of the Stone Age*, London 1998, pp. 176-183.

25. Wyatt, *Religious texts*, p. 251 n. 6.

26. There is no problem in the fact that it was priests who played such roles in Egypt, for every priest was theoretically a delegate of the king himself.

as kings so frequently do, between the divine and human realms, participating in both dimensions, and consequently sharing in the ontology of both dimensions. In this context, it may be taken for granted that any hints concerning the king's theological status are to be taken at face value.

Two of the striking features of the royal cultus at Ugarit, that is the rituals whose main purpose appears to have been the consolidation of the royal function as *pontifex*, are the following. Firstly we should note the involvement of deceased kings, known collectively as *inš ilm*, as del Olmo has argued.[27] Their broadly divine status may be accepted without demur, since they are the recipients of sacrifices,[28] as well as corresponding both to the kings of the past who all bear the epithet *il* in the king list (KTU 1.113), but also constitute in part the *rpum*, and appear collectively in the pantheon lists as *mlkm* (KTU 1.47:33 = 1.118:32 = RS 20.24:32). The living king acts as the link between the present order of reality and its past, represented in the traditions and continued divine existence of its past kings.

The second feature which is of significance is the emphasis placed on the ritual purification of the king at the beginning of proceedings, and his formal "desacralization" ($\sqrt{hll}$) at their conclusion. This occurs in the following texts, given in the table. The formulae used are as follows. The purification consists of a ritual washing: *yrthṣ mlk brr*, "the king is to wash himself thoroughly"; when the purity is restated (but not reenacted) the wording is *mlk ytb brr*, "the king shall sit, being purified" (or "remains purified"); while the desacralization is expressed as *whl mlk*, "the king is desacralized". This takes place normally at *ʿrb špš*, "at sunset", but at times *ṣba špš*, which may mean, by distinction, "at sunrise".

TEXT (KTU 1.)	PURIFICATION (I)	PURIFICATION (II)	DESACRALIZATION
41:3 = 87:3-4, 55	*yrthṣ mlk brr*		
41:6-7, 46 = 87:7-8, 50-1		*mlk ytb brr*	
41:44 = 87:48-9		*w mlk brr*	
41:48, 53[29] = 87:52, 57			*ʿrb špš whl mlk*
46:9-10			*ʿrb špš whl mlk*
46:10	*yrthṣ mlk brr*		
105:19-20	*yrthṣ mlk brr*		
106:23-4, 33			*whl mlk*
106:26-7	*yrthṣ mlk brr*		
109:2	*yrthṣ mlk brr*		
112:10-1	*yrthṣ mlk brr*		
112:14-5			*ṣba špš whl mlk*
112:16-7	*yrthṣ mlk brr*		
119:5	*yrthṣ mlk brr*		
119:23-4			*ʿrb špš whl mlk*
132:26-7			*ʿrb špš whl mlk*
164:20			*whlt*

The desacralization is not described, so that its formal process remains unclear. But the term used, with its sense of "rendering polluted", that is, the opposite of ritually pure, can scarcely mean an actual pollution of the king, but must indicate rather his change from a peculiar degree of holiness to a lesser degree, which is, to take the term *hll* seriously, "profane", or "secular". In a sense this can have been no

---

27. Del Olmo, "Los nombres 'divinos' de los reyes de Ugarit", *AuOr* 5 (1987) 66; ibid. *La religión cananea según la liturgia ugarítica*, Sabadell (Barcelona) 1992, p. 46 etc. (= *Canaanite religion according to the liturgical texts of Ugarit*, Bethesda MD 1992, p. 61 etc.).

28. KTU 1.39:21-2, 1.46:8-9, 1.106:1-2, 1.112:5-6, 1.132:13-7, 23.

29. Text *ṣbu*. Read *ʿrb*? Cf. 112:14.

more than a counterpart to the original purification, restoring, in a chiastic fashion, as it were, his former status, so that he goes from condition *a* to condition *b*, and then back to condition *a*. Now the question to be asked is what precisely was believed to happen in the king's transitions between states *a* and *b* ?

Since the ritual texts themselves tell us nothing, we must resort to possible analogies, with the result that our enquiry cannot be said to lead to anything provable, and must rather rely on probability.

As so often in studying ancient Near Eastern religion, we must turn from the seriously under-informed West Semitic world to the far more substantially documented area of Egypt in order to identify situations which are suggestive of the kind of pattern we may discern.

A number of scholars have noted that in Egypt the cult of the divine statues was modelled on the protocols of kingship, and indeed the king was in essence one among the gods.[30] Thus the regular waking, purification, washing, anointing, clothing, feeding and processing of images, reflected the similar ritual complexity of the king's daily life. Just as statues were not only consecrated by the opening of the mouth ceremony, the same was done to kings, both living and dead. Thus to all intents, we may regard the ritual processing of the king himself as though he were a god, a dogmatic reality which is abundantly supported by a host of evidences, from the royal titulary to iconographic conventions. Thus A.M. Blackman could write:

«The king was also said to be divinized by the natron, there being a play on the words *niṭer* "natron" and *nuṭer* "god". By being washed or sprinkled with holy water and fumigated with incense, and by the chewing of natron, the king was mysteriously reborn, brought into contact with divinities, and imbued with their unearthly qualities... That the toilet of the sun-god should be identical with that of the king is perfectly natural...»[31]

I suggest that this was the pattern of the Ugaritian cult, *mutatis mutandis*, not in any sense directly copied from Egypt, but derived, like the ancient Egyptian cult, from antecedents stretching far back into the earliest royal political structures.

Similar ritual treatments appear to have been accorded to kings in Mesopotamia at some times during the imperial period.[32]

An important element in the cult at Ugarit, as elsewhere, was the ritual processing of divine images. For purposes of the cult, these did not *represent* the gods: they *were* the gods. In KTU 1.41:54-5 the king is returned to his palace, and we read that "they shall ar[ray] him in fine clothes and shall wash his [face]. They shall r[et]urn him to his pa[lace], and when he is there, he shall r[aise his] hands to heaven." The passage combines the symbolic change of clothing with the apparent inclusion of the king himself as one of the divine images.

---

30. E.g. H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the gods*, Chicago 1948, p. 5: «Pharaoh was not mortal, but a god»; ibid. "State festivals in Egypt and Mesopotamia", *JWCI* 15 (1952) 7: «In Egypt the king is not only the main celebrant; he is, at the same time, one of the beneficiaries of the festival. For in an Egyptian ceremony the divine is not only embodied in the statue of the god who is the object of the rites; it is likewise present in the king who celebrates on behalf of the community. The gulf between the human and the divine... did not separate humanity from the gods; it separated commoners from the divine king.»

31. A.M. Blackman, "Sacramental ideas and usages in ancient Egypt", *RTRPAEA* 39 (1921) 44-78 (p. 46).

32. H. Frankfort (*Kingship*, pp. 224-225) attributes the element of divinity accorded some Mesopotamian kings to their participation in the sacred marriage.

5. *Conclusion*

It is evident that the Ugaritians had no inflexible, monolithic view of the monarchy. A practical distinction could be made between the king as a historical individual, of human parentage, a weak or powerful figure who nevertheless represented, as head of state, the *persona* of the nation. The literary idiom by which this was expressed was through the fiction that he stood apart from ordinary men, and somehow participated in the divine nature. This was expressed through the figure of divine parentage, and reinforced in turn by a similar fiction which assimilated the queen mother (the king's natural mother) with the goddess Shapsh, or her avatar Athirat.

We have seen taht in addition to literary conventions, and the image of the divine king to which they point, the ritual texts appear to corroborate our assessment. The king stands at the apex of society, on the borderline of the divine dimension. His involvement in the royal cultus takes him across this divide, so that he becomes divine in order to represent his people and to acquire benefits on their behalf most effectively. He becomes a man again to bring these benefits down to earth.