

Lady Athirat of the Sea – A New Look at KTU 1.4 ii 3-11

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[The goddess Athirat is designated as ‘Lady Athirat of the Sea’ (*rbt aṯrt ym*) several times in the *Baal Cycle*. At the same time, scholars have assumed, based on the reading of KTU 1.4 ii, that Athirat is a goddess who represents women and women’s domestic labor, since according to this passage, she is described as weaving, laundering, cooking, and serving food to El, her consort. These scholars have not explained the connection between this description and Athirat’s epic epithet as ‘Lady Athirat of the Sea’. Similarly unexplained is the connection between the description of Athirat engaging in domestic chores and the following passage, which deals with fishing and with Athirat’s fisherman Qudshu-wa-Amruru. This essay focuses on the description of Athirat in KTU 1.4, ii, and presents a new reading for a few of its passages. Closer examination of the Ugaritic word *npnyh*, accompanied by an alternate verse division of the text in question, raises the possibility that Athirat is portrayed here in the act of weaving a fishing net, which also serves as her garment. In light of this passage and some further information, the argument can be made that in the coastal city of Ugarit, alongside her other attributes, Athirat was also regarded as a goddess of fishing. She is described as a lady and as the consort of El, the head of the pantheon, as well as the goddess responsible for feeding the inhabitants of Ugarit.]

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Athirat (Asherah) is known to us from the Ugaritic texts as the consort of Ilu (El), the head of the pantheon. She is also called “she who produces gods” (*qnyt ilm*)¹. The gods are her sons, as attested by their designation “Athirat’s sons” (*bn aṯrt*; see KTU 1.3 v 4, 36, 39 and *passim*) and we also find the expressions “Athirat and her sons” (*aṯrt wbnh*; KTU 1.3 v 36-37 and *passim*) and “The seventy sons of Athirat” (*šb ‘m.bn.aṯrt*; KTU 1.4 vi 46; cf. Athirat’s words in KTU 1.4 ii 24-26)². In her role as mother goddess she is also described as suckling gods and kings: the newborn gods suck the nipple(s) of Athirat’s breast(s) (*ynqm bap zd aṯrt*; KTU 1.23: 24 and cf. ll. 59, 61)³.

1. This epithet of Athirat stands in parallel to Ilu’s epithets “he who Creates Creatures” (*bny bnwt*) and “Ilu, Creator of the Earth” (*il qn arš*). Pardee 2003: 256, n. 122.

2. Cf. the epithet *um ilm* (KTU 2.31). According to Rahmouni (2008: 72-73) and Day (1986: 387), this epithet refers to Athirat. It may be that the epithets *rḥmy* (“she who has a womb”) and *aṯrt wrḥmy* (a binominal epithet) in KTU 1.23:13, 16 and 28 represent Athirat as a young wife of Ilu. See Smith 2006: 90-91. For other examples of binominal epithets, cf. *mt w šr* (*mōtu-wa-šarru*), *qdš w amrr* (*Qudshu-wa-Amruru*) and *kṯr w ḥss* (*kuṯaru-wa-ḥasisu*), all of which refer to a single god who is represented by a dual linguistic formation.

3. See Lewis 1997: 209, 213; Smith 2006: 21 and 64-66. In *Kirta* Yaššibu the son of king Kirta is said to be one who suckles at the breast of Athirat and Anat, the wet nurses of the gods (*ynk.ḥlb.a[ṯ]rt/mšš.ḏ.bl[nt]/mšnqt* [.xxxxxxx]);

The epithet *qnyt ilm* usually appears in parallelism with the designation “Lady Athirat of the Sea” (*rbt aṛt ym*)⁴. The goddess Athirat is designated by this last epithet several times in the *Baal Cycle*⁵, but her connection to the sea has not been adequately explained so far. In this paper, I focus on the description of Athirat in KTU 1.4, col. ii, propose a new reading for a few of its lines, and attempt to explain Athirat’s epithet and her association with the sea.

1. Is KTU 1.4 ii 3-11 a description of Athirat performing domestic chores?

Most scholars interpret the scene in KTU 1.4 ii 3-11 as a description of Athirat at home, performing a series of actions. In order to illustrate this interpretation, I will present Smith’s edition, which is based on new photographs of the tablet, and Smith – Pitard’s edition⁶.

3-4	<i>aḥdt.plkh[.b ydh]/</i> <i>plk.t’lt.b ymnh /</i>	She takes her spindle ⁷ [in her hand,] A mighty ⁸ spindle in her right hand.
6-7	<i>tmt’mdh.b ym.</i> <i>tn/npynh.b nhrm/</i>	She conveys ⁹ her garment in the sea, Her two robes ¹⁰ in the rivers,
5	<i>npynh.mks.bšrh/</i>	Her robes, the covering of her skin ¹¹ .
8-9	<i>štt.ḥptr.l išt/</i> <i>ḥbrt.l zr.pḥmm</i>	She sets a pot on the fire, A pot on top of the coals.
10-11	<i>t’pp.tr.il.d pid/</i> <i>tḡzy.bny.bnwt</i>	All the while she is servile before Bull Ilu the Beneficent, Deferential to the Creator of Creatures ¹² .

KTU 1.15 ii 26-28). This identification follows *CTA* I.: 69; *KTU3*: 42; But according to Greenstein (1997: 25 and 45 n. 66) the wet nurses are Astarte and Anat.

4. Other interpretations of *rbt aṛt ym*, such as “Great Lady who tramples Yam” or “She who organizes the day” have been rejected. See for example: Pardee 2003: 253, n. 98; Cho 2007: 225, n. 142. She is also called once by an abbreviated epithet *rbt aṛt* (KTU 1.169:16) which reflects her high rank. Cf. *špš rbt* and *nyr rbt* (Rahmouni 2008: 86).

5. This epithet occurs in KTU 1.3, 1.4, 1.6 and once in KTU 1.8.

6. Smith 1997: 122; Smith – Pitard 2009: 427, 433-434. Differences between the two editions are not significant.

7. Most scholars consider Akk. *pilakku* (or: *pilaqqu*) as a cognate of Ug. *plk* and interpret it as “a spinning tool” (a spindle) used by weavers. See for example Pardee 2003: 257; Wyatt 2002: 93, n.98 – “distaff” and “spindle-whorl”; Ackerman 2008; Smith – Pitard 2009: 440-442. Cf. Aistleitner 1974: 256: weites (ober)gewand. But see discussion below.

8. *t’lt* is here translated as “mighty”. See “*t’lt*” in: *DULAT* II.: 844 – “superior power”, “majesty”. Cf. Pardee 2003: 257: “a spindle befitting her high station in her right hand”; *KWU*: 125: “die sich drehende spindle”. The text raises difficulties. See Smith 1997: 170, n. 100; Smith – Pitard 2009: 441. Cf. other translations of these lines, reviewed by Watson 2007: 673-681.

9. The verb *tmt’* (*m-t-*) is commonly interpreted as either “to remove” or “to carry” (“*m-t-*” in: *DULAT* II.: 591). Smith and Pitard prefer “to convey” (Smith – Pitard 2009: 443). Ginsberg (1936: 21) suggesting *m-t-* and *n-p-y* are two verbs in parallelism, meaning “throw into (the sea)”. Watson (2007: 678) translate “she wet (her garment)”. These suggestions do not provide an adequate interpretation of ll. 5-7.

10. Most scholars take *npynh* as a noun derived from *n-p-y*. See Smith 1997: 122; Wyatt 2002: 93, n.99 (*md* || *npy*); “*npyn*”, in: *KWU*: 89: “Kleid(ung)”; and others. Cf. Pardee 2003: 257 n. 133 – the verb *n-p-y* (“sieve”, “winnow”, “expel”), exists in several Semitic languages, but is unattested in Ugaritic. On this basis Pardee interprets that Athirat’s flesh and clothes have become “soiled” because she “...has been working with the spindle all day”; Wyatt has suggested that Athirat’s clothes are made of the sea. See also Smith – Pitard 2009: 442-443. According to them, both *tn/npynh* in this location and the consonantal sequence *לבוש שנים* in Prov. 31:21 are descriptions of a double garment with two layers.

11. Concerning the order of the lines, see Smith 1997: 170, n. 101; Smith – Pitard 2009: 443-444.

Until now scholars have assumed, based on the reading of column ii, that Athirat is a goddess who represents women, women's domestic labor, and the female gender from the point of view of Ugaritic civilization, since according to this passage, she is described as weaving, laundering, cooking, and serving food to Ilu, her consort¹³. This notion derives chiefly from the mention of a kind of garment (*mdh*) that covers her body (*mks.bšrh*), a spindle (*plkh*), and the pot (*hptr* and *hbrt*) that is placed on the charcoal fire (*l išt* and *l zr.phmm*) – a representation of cooking. But this general frame for understanding ll. 3-11 presents numerous problems, not only because of its incompatibility with the text that follows, but also due to some uncertain or inaccurate word interpretations and some additional evidence. This text needs to be reexamined carefully in the context of KTU 1.4 and in light of the Ugaritic cultural and religious setting¹⁴.

1.1. *The Spinning and Weaving Chore (ll. 3-4)*

Spinning and weaving of cloth and preparation of garments were a typical female occupation¹⁵, and therefore the spindle (*plk*; *pilakku*) became a symbol of the female gender in magical and ritual texts, in law codes, in narrative and iconography and even in royal propaganda throughout the historical-geographical region between Canaan and Hatti¹⁶. The spindle is mentioned in the Bible in David's curse of Joab (2 Sam. 3:29), and it is mentioned again in the poem that extols the "Woman of Valor" (Prov. 31:19; cf. v. 13)¹⁷. Assuming the same symbolism applies to the scene under discussion, Smith commented: "Perhaps Asherah, as the divine mother, was considered a patron of this women's work"¹⁸.

Based on the above and taking inspiration from the Ugaritic passage from the *Baal Cycle*, Ackerman attempted to prove that Athirat was the Ugaritic goddess of spinning and weaving¹⁹. She drew a parallel between Athirat and other goddesses in charge of spinning and weaving in Sumer, Greece, and Egypt. Since the neighboring cultures had goddesses who presided over spinning and weaving, Ackerman argued that there was no reason there should not be a similar Ugaritic goddess. She presented a few textual supports from the Bible; for example, she perceives an echo of Athirat (Asherah) as the goddess of weaving in 2 Kings 23:7: "...at the place where the women wove coverings for Asherah". She also presented several pieces of archeological evidence in support of this thesis. But Ackerman's evidence is circumstantial and subject to interpretation and there is no decisive archeological evidence of a connection between Athirat and the spinning and weaving craft. It should further be emphasized that the Asherah in Canaan may not be identical in character

12. Cf. *ibid.*: 434: "She would exalt Bull Ilu the Beneficent, / Honor the Creator of Creatures". It was suggested that the verses in ll. 8-11 describe Athirat preparing food as a gesture of honor to Ilu, her consort, and as a way to win over his heart by feeding him.

13. For Athirat (Asherah) as consort and as a goddess in charge of the household, see Day 1986: 386, 390-394.

14. See recently the innovative approach taken by Tugendhaft 2018.

15. Baccelli – Bellucci – Vigo 2014: 97-142; Stol 2016: 344-349; Lion – Michel 2016: 1-7.

16. Evidence of the practical and literary use of such gender symbols is found in Karatepe, in Hittite ritual texts, in the Homeric epics and in Classical art. See Hoffner 1966; Greenfield 1978: 75; Rova 2008; Baranowski 2018.

17. Such use of gender symbols is also evident in Deut. 22:5, 2 Sam 3:29 and Ps 127:4-5.

18. Smith – Pitard 2009: 442.

19. Ackerman 2008.

to the Ugaritic Athirat, outside of Canaan, and there may be some differences in their respective attributes²⁰.

Moreover, closer attention to the way in which KTU 1.4 ii 3-4 describes Athirat as holding her *plk* in her right hand weakens the argument that Athirat is the goddess of spinning and weaving. The spinning tool was usually held in the left hand, and it was thus represented in Ancient Near Eastern art²¹. It therefore seems that the interpretation of the *plk* as a spinning and weaving tool or as a feminine symbol, does not fit the scene depicted in KTU 1.4 ii 3-4. Note that the *Baal Cycle* does not provide any further support for this interpretation of Athirat's character.

1.2. *Laundering Garments in the Sea and Rivers (ll. 5 – 7)*

Lines 5-7 have yielded a number of different interpretations because of the difficulties involved in interpreting the words *tmt*^c and *npynh*, as well as the syntax of this verse²². These difficulties even led Smith to alter the line sequence in his editions so as to enable a reading in which Athirat removes her garments and washes them in the sea and rivers, in accordance with the general assumption that Athirat is engaging in female domestic chores. He writes thus: "The reference to garments in line 5 does not fit with the two preceding lines (2-4) involving the spindle. Rather, it belongs with the reference to garments in lines 6-7, and perhaps it is to be reconstructed after lines 6-7"²³. He further explains this conjecture: if line 5 is retained in place it might be explained as an unusually long – and thus unacceptable – *casus pendens*. And according to the poetic pattern, line 5 is better viewed as the third line in the tricolon with lines 6-7²⁴.

However, the interpretation that would have Athirat launder her garments in salty sea water is peculiar. But Athirat is indeed performing an action which is related to sources of both fresh and salty water. And if so, we may ask – is her activity related to the landscape and geography around Ugarit, and to its culture?²⁵

1.3. *Cooking on the Charcoal Fire and Serving Ilu (ll. 8-11)*

At first glance, Athirat seems to be preparing food (ll. 8-9). She sets the pot (*hptr* and *hbrt*) on the fire and coals²⁶. This lends itself to the interpretation that in the following lines (ll. 10-11) she is serving the food before Ilu. In accordance with this interpretation, ll. 8-11 depict another domestic

20. See major studies on Athirat (Asherah) in the Bible, Ugaritic texts, other texts, archaeology and iconography: Olyan 1988; Smith 1990: 15-21, 80-114; Wiggins 1991: 383-394; Binger 1997; Merlo 1998; Hadley 2000; Wiggins 2007; Cornelius 2008; Rich 2012; See also recently Eichler 2019.

21. Baccelli – Bellucci – Vigo 2014: 114-117. See representation in art in figs. 5.3-5.5 there. Cf. *ANEP* no. 144: Stone relief from Susa picturing a seated lady on a stool holding a spindle in her left hand and wool in the right. (p. 43 and 266).

22. For interpretations see notes 9 and 10 above.

23. Smith – Pitard 2009: 436.

24. *Ibid.*, and cf. Smith 1997: 170, n. 101.

25. The city of Ugarit is located near the Mediterranean Sea and between two rivers: So, the sea and *nahr Shbayyeb* and *nahr ed-Delbeh* may have played a socioeconomic role in the life of the city of Ugarit - as a source of fish and of fresh water. See Yon 2006: 12 and 23 fig. 13; Calvet 2007: 104, fig. 2. Prof. E. L. Greenstein has related the rivers mentioned in this verse to the "two springs of the rivers" // "streams of the deep" in Ilu's place of dwelling (personal communication). We may also take into account the fact that Yamm is a central deity in Ugaritic Culture.

26. For a short discussion of the meaning of *hptr* and *hbrt* with references see Smith – Pitard 2009: 445.

chore. But although Athirat may be engaged in food preparation, she does not, at any rate, serve the food in ll. 10-11, where it is clear that Athirat is taking action without Ilu's presence. Athirat arrives at his abode only later, in KTU 1.4 iv 20-30, where Ilu also expresses his gladness at her arrival²⁷.

Lines 8-11 are not a scene of hospitality, since the descriptive vocabulary is unlike that used in the hospitality scenes in *Aqhat* (KTU 1.17 v 16-21) and in *Kirta* (KTU 1.15 iv 4 – v 14; vi 1-5), and does not include lexemes such as *t-b-h* "to slaughter", *'-d-b* "to prepare", *l-h-m* "to dine" (in the Š stem), *š-t-y* "to drink", *š-q-y* "to wine" (in the Š stem), *s-'-d* "to support", "to comfort", "to welcome" and the like. No eating and drinking are mentioned.

Although the words *tġzy* and *t'pp* appear in parallelism, their meaning is unclear; in any case it cannot be "to serve food"²⁸. Consequently, numerous interpretations have been proposed. Both verbs may be connected to gestures made with the eyes (based on Semitic cognates). The sense of the root *ġ-z-y* may be "to lower (the eyes)" or "to shut (the eyes)", when one person is acting in deference to another; and *t'pp* (from *'-w-p*) may mean "to bat the eye(lids)"²⁹. We may prefer the suggested general meaning of *ġ-z-y* "to honor", "to indulge", "to please" (with gifts) or "to satisfy" as fitting the narrative context of cols. i and iii, and interpret *t'pp* (derived from *'-p-p* or *'-w-p*) according to the parallelism³⁰.

To summarize, we have seen that this characterization of Athirat as a housewife or a representative of women and women's work is alien to the plot and to the narrative sequence and is plagued by several problems. Furthermore, it does not provide us with a suitable explanation for the connection between KTU 1.4 ii and Athirat's epic epithet as *rbt aṭrt ym*. It seems that a new interpretive frame is called for to explain Athirat's actions in col. ii lines 3-11, her connection to the sea and rivers, and her epithet *rbt aṭrt ym*.

2. KTU 1.4 ii 3-11 - Athirat as a Prominent Goddess in the Life of Ugaritic Culture

Recently Ayali-Darshan has proposed an explanation to the epithet *rbt aṭrt ym* in reference to the details of the text: Athirat is a partner to Ilu's coronation of Yamm in KTU 1.1; and in KTU 1.4, col. ii Qudshu-wa-Amaruru is Athirat's fisherman and Athirat is described as engaging in some kind of activity at the seashore. Since the epithet *aṭrt ym* presents a difficulty (it refers to Yamm, her son, rather than to her father or consort, according to the conventional usage) Ayali-Darshan concluded that the epithet was derived from Astarte (*ṭrt*) known from the Syrian and Mesopotamian cities, in accordance with the Syrian tradition discovered at Emar, which designates Astarte as Yamm's consort. The Ugaritic author who wished to describe Athirat's particular

27. Pope has argued that at this point Ilu and Athirat's relations had cooled and they have been separated from each other. Pope 1955: 35-42; idem. 1979: 701-708. For the basis of this claim see also CTH 342 in Goetze 1969: 519; Hoffner 1990: 69-70.

28. For a summary of previous interpretations of *t'pp* and *tġzy* see Smith – Pitard 2009: 408-409 and 446-447; Cf. Pardee 2003: 257, n. 135: "she cleanses herself, then prepares something warm to eat/drink".

29. Cf. *p'ph.sp.trml* in KTU 1.14 iii 43 and vi 30 is a representation of feminine beauty, and in Prv. 6:25 the eyelids (Heb. [עפעע*]) are used seductively.

30. In col. i 20-22 Ba'lu asks Kutharu-wa-Ḥasisu to prepare a gift (*mgn* || *mġz*) for Athirat. Ba'lu will honor her by bringing this gift that will oblige her to exert her influence on Ilu, on Ba'lu's behalf. Compare KTU 1.4 iii 26, 29, 31 and 35. Cf. *KWU*: 18: "umsorgen" (based on Arabic cognate *'-f-f* VI).

connection with the Sea borrowed Astarte's epithet and transferred it to Athirat³¹. However, these explanations that connect Athirat with the Sea are insufficient. Why should Athirat be called "Lady of the Sea" exclusively, if she is involved in the coronation of several deities in addition to Yamm? And Why is Qudshu-wa-Amruru designated "the fisherman of Athirat Lady of the Sea" in particular (and not of other gods or simply on his own)?³² Compounding these difficulties and similarly unexplained is the connection between the description of Athirat engaging in domestic chores and the following passage, which deals with fishing and with Athirat's fisherman Qudshu-wa-Amruru (KTU 1.4 ii 28-36 see text below).

2.1. Athirat's Garment – Athirat's Net - a New Interpretation (ll. 3-7)

A closer examination of the Ugaritic word *npyn* undermines its interpretation as "a garment". Etymologically this word may derive from the root *npy* meaning "sieve" or "sifter". The Ugaritic noun *npt* probably derives from the same root³³. The Akkadian cognate *napû(m)* II means "to sieve, sift", and its noun derivation is *nappîtu(m)*³⁴.

If the Ugaritic passage is reconsidered while keeping the original line sequence Athirat appears to be described as weaving a fishing net, which also serves as her garment³⁵. She weaves it with a *plk* – a tool of the fishing craft meaning "rod" or "double pin"³⁶. My interpretation retains the text's original order but divides the lines differently, as follows:

3-4	<i>ahdt.plkh[b ydh]/</i> <i>plk.t'lt.b ymnh /</i>	She takes her double pin [in her hand,] A mighty hook in her right hand ³⁷ .
5-7	<i>npynh.mks.bšrh/tmt'.</i> <i>mdh.b ym.</i> <i>tn/npynh.b nhrm/</i>	Her nets, the mantle of her flesh ³⁸ , she sheds ³⁹ , her garment in the sea, Her two nets in the rivers.

31. Ayali-Darshan 2016: 107-108.

32. Athirat is identified with the rivers and the sea mostly in KTU 1.1-1.6. Nonetheless, the scene describing Ilu and his wives in KTU 1.23 occurs at *gp ym* and *gp thm* (seashore and rivers, abysses; line 30). Considering this evidence, Qudshu-wa-Amruru may be called her fisherman.

33. "*npt*" in: *DUALT* 2: 629. For previous interpretations of *npyn* see note 10 above.

34. "*napû(m)* II" in: *CDA*: 240; "*nappû*" and "*nappîtu*" in *CAD* N/1 312.

35. The idea of a net-like garments is not strange. Such dresses made of faience (bead-net dresses) were worn by women in ancient Egypt. See for example nos. 27.1548.1 and 33.1020.1 in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. See also Staehlin 1966: 169. Cf. the Egyptian tale "The Boating Party" from Papyrus Westcar in: Lichtheim 1973 I.: 216-217; for a new translation see "The Marvel which Happened in the Reign of King Snefru" in: Simpson – Ritner 2003: 16-18.

36. It may be that *plk* is a cognate of Akk. *pallukku* "double pin", "rod", "part of a loom". See "*pallukku*", *CDA*: 262; "*pallukku* A", *CAD* P 69. Mutzafi discusses Neo-Mandaic *pelqo* and Literary Mandaic *pilqa* and mentions a Mandaic text (*Draša d-Yahia* ll. 4-7) that clearly deals with fishing yarn and a fishing net. Mutzafi 2014: 82-84. See text in: Lidzbarski 1915: 163; In this context *'zlak* (fishing net) and *pilqa* (a kind of tool) are mentioned in proximity. Though Mutzafi still interprets it as "spindle" he writes: "Given the fact that in the Iraqi marshes fishing net cords are made of tightly spun threads, *pilqa* 'spindle' [...] in connection to *'zla* 'fishing net' makes perfect sense". Mutzafi, *ibid.* 83. He further comments that JBA *hapax legomenon* פלקא (var. פלקא) could be a spindle equipped with a nail or hook.

37. For ancient fishing methods and gear, see Galili – Zemer – Rosen 2013: 145-166, especially pp. 154 and 163.

38. The words *mks.bšrh* comes here as an apposition to *npynh*. The rest of the parallelism is built on this apposition. Athirat's garment (*mdh*) is her nets (*npynh*) which cover her body (*mks.bšrh*). Similar chains of appositions are common in BH syntax, e.g. Judg. 19:1.

39. See note 9 above.

According to this proposal, in lines 3-7 Athirat first grasps a tool (*plk*) to expertly weave a net, and the next tricolon refers to a net-like garment that covers her body, which she now conveys into the sea and rivers⁴⁰. According to KTU 1.4 ii 28-36, this should be interpreted as a divine fishing net:

28-29	<i>šmḫ.rbt.āt[rt]/ym.</i>	Lady Ath[irat] of the Sea rejoices,
	<i>gm.l ḡlmh.k [tšḫ]/</i>	Aloud to her attendant [she declares] ⁴¹ :
30-31	<i>'n.mktr.ap[]/</i>	“See the skilled work, also ... ⁴² ,
	<i>dgy.rbt.āt[rt.ym]/</i>	O Fisher of Lady Athir[at of the Sea] ⁴³ .
32-33	<i>qh.rtt.bdk[]/</i>	Take a net in your hand... ⁴⁴ ,
	<i>rbt. l.ydm[]/</i>	A great one ⁴⁵ in your hands... ⁴⁶
34-36	<i>b mdd.il.y[m]/</i>	Into the beloved of Ilu, Se[a,]
	<i>b ym.il.d[]/</i>	Into the great sea [] ⁴⁷ ,
	<i>[n]/hr.il.y[]/</i>	To the great [ri]ver, Se[a,]”

The title of Athirat’s servant “Fisherman of the Lady Athirat of the Sea” (*dgy.rbt.āt[rt.ym]*) appears to reflect her nature, as also suggested by her repeated appellation, “Lady Athirat of the Sea”⁴⁸.

Both passages, which are relatively close together (col. ii), mention the sea and river and speak of casting some sort of object into them (in the second passage *ym* is both a body of water and a divine figure – Yamm). In the first passage *npynh* is Athirat’s special garment, perhaps resembling a net, while her *rtt* (net; line 32 above) is an actual fishing net. This new interpretation merits a reconsideration of Athirat’s description. Along with a review of other texts and additional

40. Compare Ginsberg’s translation of ll. 5-7: “Its skin (of some beast or fish), the covering of its flesh. / She flings its vestment into the sea, / Both its skins into the deeps.” Ginsberg 1969: 132. Interestingly, in Iraqi Arab. *nafnūf* means “a woman’s dress” (See نفوف under “نفف nafnaf” in: DMWA: 988a).

41. “Her attendant” (in the singular; Cho 2007: 222-223) is “The fisherman of Athirat”, that is: Qudshu-wa-Amaruru. See KTU 1.3 vi 9-11; KTU 1.4 iv 3-4.

42. According to Cho (2007: 224-226), Qudshu-wa-Amruru has a military character (using the net to catch his enemies). Against this, we should consider ll. 34-36: Qudshu-wa-Amruru is ordered by Athirat to throw this net into the sea as a *dgy* (fisherman). Rahmouni (2008: 152) regard him as an expert seafarer and follows *KTU*’s reconstruction *'n.mktr. p[] ym* (“Look, O expert in the depths [of the sea(?)]”). For a summary of other reconstructions and interpretations of this line see *ibid.* note 1.

43. Cf. Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín who translate *dgy rbt ātrt ym* as “tritons of DN” (“*dgy*” in: *DULAT* I: 266).

44. *KTU3: bdk.t/q[]*.

45. Watson (2001, 2018) has suggested that here, according to the parallelism, Ug. *rbt* means “net”, “seine, trawl” and is a cognate of Akk. *rubbū* “to submerge, put under water”, of Tigrina *rābābū* “(to) plait, catch fish with a net”, and of Ge’ez *marbābt*, *marbābt* “net, fisherman’s net, trap, snare” (from *rbb* I). He further notes the phrase *rababa marbabta* in Ge’ez, meaning “(to) cast a net” (Watson 2018).

46. Might this great net be a seine net? For a short summary concerning fishing nets, see Brewer – Friedman 1989. Fishing with large seine nets is a common theme in Egyptian art. The seine net hangs vertically in the water, held by floats at the upper edge and sinks at the lower (see *ANEP*, no. 112-113); Brewer – Friedman 1989: 38-46.

47. It seems better to understand *ym.il* in this line as a superlative relating to the sea. Cf. *ḡl il* (KTU 1.17 vi 23), *ḫkpt il.klh* (KTU 1.17 v 31) and in biblical Heb. וְהָיָה לְהַרְדֵּת אֲלֵהֶם (1 Sam 14:15); צָדְקָתְךָ כְּהַרְרֵי אֵל (Ps 36:7) and many more instances.

48. Cf. the epithet of Qudshu-wa-Amaruru to Akk. *bā'iru* (“fisherman”). This is an epithet of the god Papulegarra. “*bā'iru*”, in: *CAD* B 32, meaning: 1 a 2'. Cf. also in a Neo-Babylonian cultic text – “fishermen of the Mistress of Uruk” who were supposed to catch fish for the regular offerings of the deity. See *CAD* B 31, meaning, 1a 1'b'.

evidence, it could help explain Athirat's connection to the sea and to fishing, and also illuminate her epithet – "Lady Athirat of the Sea"⁴⁹.

2.2. *Ilu and Athirat as Prominent Gods Caring for the Welfare and Prosperity of the City and its Inhabitants (ll. 8-11)*

As noted above, ll. 8-11 do not describe a hospitality scene. These lines are better understood as a description of Athirat in her role as a consort, constantly tending to Ilu's nourishment and enjoyment. In light of the above-suggested meaning of *t'pp* and *tġzy*, lines 10-11 should be interpreted as follows: "She indulges Bull Ilu the Beneficent consistently, // Always satisfies the Creator of Creatures". Although ll. 8-11 may in fact describe the preparation of food over coals, this is not a description of a specific action or moment. Both verbs are in the D-stem and may express a factitive action or habitual situation⁵⁰. Lines 8-11 may be regarded as a timeless symbolic scene embodying the concept of the supreme divine couple as nurturing and nourishing the city and its inhabitants. Ilu and Athirat are both associated with sources of fresh and salt water, they are both responsible for fecundity and the economic wellbeing of Ugarit – for the birth of gods and men, for feasts and the procurement of food⁵¹, and it is not unlikely that this divine scene is describing the goddess' active engagement in the welfare and prosperity of Ugarit (cf. also Ilu's concern in KTU 1.5 vi 22-25)⁵². The coals and the preparation of food on coals may represent the parity relations of Ilu and Athirat⁵³. In "The Birth of the Goodly Gods" (KTU 1.23) the relations between Ilu (the male character) and Ilu's wives or daughters (the female characters) are associated with the roasting of a bird (a catch) on coals (ll. 37-52)⁵⁴. Thus, the intention behind KTU 1.4 ii 8-9, which describes the roasting or cooking of the catch on the coals and fire, is to depict the connection between Athirat and Ilu, as the divine couple responsible for the sources of food (other than agriculture), fertility, abundance and commerce in Ugarit.

49. Cf. Nanše's epithet in a Sumerian poem entitled "The Home of the Fish". The text most probably was recited by fishermen as they placed traps or nets for fish and was addressed to the fish. Towards the end of the poem the text reads: "The queen of the fishermen, [Nanše], will rejoice with you" (lines 152-153). For text and translation See Civil 1961: 165, 175; Thomsen (1975: 200) has concluded that Nanše "is the protector and helper of fishermen, or maybe a fisherman herself".

50. Sivan 1997: 109.

51. Cf. the fertility god Wadj Wer in ancient Egypt. He is associated both with procreation and prosperity. In iconography his body is covered by water signs, which symbolizes the rich fishing in the Delta lakes. See Hart 2005: 162.

52. Votive fishing tackles found in Ugarit represent the sea's fertility. Frost 1991: 346.

53. *pĥmm* in the plural appears only in KTU 1.23 and in Athirat's description in KTU 1.4 ii 9. *pĥm* in the singular is mentioned also as a material in administrative documents, letters and legal texts. In myth it appears in KTU 1.172.

54. KTU 1.23 has two sections. The first (ll. 1-29) is liturgical. The second (ll. 30-76) is a myth, where Ilu and a pair of maidens take part in sexual activity, the maidens become Ilu's wives, and the outcome is the birth of Dawn and Dusk. For a history of interpretations and bibliography about the text, see Smith 2006: 8-19. Wyatt has already proposed a connection between the lines concerning Ilu and Athirat in KTU 1.4 ii 8-11 and the myth and ritual of KTU 1.23 which relates to questions of existence – birth, hunting, agriculture, and cosmic powers. Wyatt 2002: 93, n.109.

2.3. Additional Supporting Evidence

It must be kept in mind that Ugarit is a coastal city, in which fishing⁵⁵ and seafaring activities in the city and in its two harbors more likely than not fulfilled an important economic role for its inhabitants⁵⁶. Most goods reached Ugarit through its harbors, Minet el-Beida and Ras Ibn Hani⁵⁷. The many anchors found in the excavations of the tell provide evidence of marine activity and of the special religious practices of seafarers in Ugarit⁵⁸.

Temples dedicated to Athirat also existed on coastal towns, as attested by the text of *Kirta* (KTU 1.14 iv 34-36, 38-39).⁵⁹ Athirat is designated as “Athirat of Tyre” and “The Goddess of Sidonites” (*atrt šrm* and *ilt šdnm*; KTU 1.14 iv 35-36, 39). The inhabitants of these coastal cities were seafarers. Does Athirat’s epithet *ilt šdnm* allude to her connection to fishing and seafaring⁶⁰? The name of the city Sidon (צִידוֹן) and the name of the god Šid, who was worshiped in Mediterranean coastal locations, is related to the verb *šd* (Heb. צוּד), used to denote both “hunting” and “fishing” (See Mi 7:2; Eccl. 9:12)⁶¹. It seems possible that Ug. *šd* in KTU 1.23 16, 67-68; KTU 1.114:23 (cf. KTU 1.22 i 10-11; KTU 1.92:2) means both “hunting” and “fishing”, as in Hebrew. Various Ugaritic texts describe Athirat engaged in hunting activities⁶². These depictions of Athirat as a huntress is perfectly consonant with her description as a goddess using a double pin to prepare a special net, which she trawls into the sea and rivers to bring up the catch, and also with the

55. There is little evidence of fish offerings in RS 24.250+259: 21-22 *wk/l.šbšlt.dg.gnh* (for text, translation and notes see Schaeffer 1978b: 26-30; Pardee 2002: 53-56. The divine benefactor remains unknown. For a general overview of fishing in the Ancient Near East – fishing techniques and equipment, preparation and consumption of fish, written sources on the organization of fishing, fish offerings, and on the problem of the archaeological record concerning fish remains, nets and fish-traps, see D.T. Potts 2012: 220-235.

56. See Brody 1989: 46. Evidence of marine activity is described in Hoftijzer – van Soldt 1998: 333-344. The city’s central status and importance in international trade are attested by the wide range of Carminic vessels from Sicily, northern Syria, Canaan and inland Syria (Yon 2006: 16; Calvet 2007: 103. Also, various scripts and languages found in Ugarit tell the story of its cosmopolitan character.

57. Zeynep-Oruç 2013: 63-69 and fig. 31 in p. 139.

58. See Schaeffer 1978a: 371-381; Frost 1991: 355-410, see especially the plan showing the distribution of anchors on the tell (ibid. 395, Pl. I-a). See also Brody 1989: 46-49. Cf. Rich 2012.

59. See also Rich 2012: 29.

60. The notion of Athirat as a patron goddess of fishing and seafaring is not new: Brody 1989: 18-19, 29-30, 97-98. Brody and Rich mention some iconographic evidence attesting to the role of Athirat as the guardian of ships and sailors (Brody 1989: 129, 131-132, fig. 1-3, 8 and especially fig. 10; Rich 2012: 22-25 and fig. 1). Rich also suggests that ship’s masts represented the goddess Asherah metaphorically, thus enabling sailors to better control the natural elements at sea. If we accept this suggestion, it provides another apt explanation for Athirat’s epithet “Lady Athirat of the Sea” or even for the less literal translation of her epithet “Lady Athirat who treads on the sea” and it may also be related to the wooden Asherah poles mentioned in the Bible (e.g. Dt. 12:3; 16:21 and Jud. 6:25-26). But her argument is circumstantial. There is no epigraphic evidence to substantiate this idea.

61. Van der Toorn 1999: 777. The city of Sidon was named after one of its major sources of income: fishing. Sidon is known as a center of trade and maritime supremacy (ibid. 778; Is 23:2-8; Ez 27:8 ff.). Athirat as the goddess of the Sidonites was probably also important in some way related to commerce and fishing, although there is no evidence connecting her to the god Šid. Compare Poseidon who was associated with mercantile gain, harbor works and success in fishing. He is also the god of fresh waters and springs and perhaps fertility. One passage in the *Sibylline Oracles* (5:157) draws on the institution of propitiatory sacrifice to Poseidon before a sea-journey, to avoid a storm. See Gordon 1999: 660-662.

62. Smith 2006: 58-60 and passim.

connection between Qudshu-wa-Amruru to Athirat. Moreover, Athirat's celestial associations made her important for the steering of vessels and maritime navigation⁶³.

My argument that Athirat is strongly associated with the sea and that she is the goddess of fishing and patron of seafarers receives further support in view of attributes of central goddesses in the same historical-geographical zone: Tinnit, Atargatis, Artemis⁶⁴, as well as Aphrodite (who also are related to the sea and perhaps also to hunting and fishing)⁶⁵. At any rate, the suggestion that Athirat is a sea goddess who wields a net, and that she is associated with fishing is strongly supported and can be confidently accepted⁶⁶.

3. Conclusion – Athirat's Epithet *rbt aṯrt ym* and the Meaning of KTU 1.4 ii 3-11

Athirat's epithet *rbt aṯrt ym* which is regularly repeated in the *Baal Cycle* provides an important support to the claim that she is a goddess of the sea, seafaring, fishing and fishermen. The messenger god Qudshu-wa-Amruru is designated in her own words as "Athirat's fisherman" (cf. in the message of Ba'lu to Kutharu-wa-Ḥasisu in KTU 1.3 vi 9-11). She hands him a huge net and commands him to cast it into the sea. Furthermore, according to the Epic of *Kirta*, the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon had temples dedicated to Athirat. Fishing was undoubtedly a matter of importance in a coastal city such as Ugarit and it is more than probable that its life was bound up with fishing and maritime trade. Athirat was also important for seafarers navigating at sea.

The stereotypical description of Athirat as a housewife performing feminine chores should be rejected. It is clear that the meaning of the word *npyn* – "sieve" or "sifter" – cannot be reconciled with this interpretation. Similarly, there is no justification for altering the sequence of the text. Rather, the text's original sequence may be retained while introducing a new verse division. It should also be considered that Athirat's *plk* may be an object that signifies a tool belonging to the fisherman's craft – the weaving of fishing nets, and hence that it too signifies one of her divine domains. The interpretation that Athirat's depicted actions are related to fishing and nourishment of the coastal city of Ugarit is surely plausible.

Thus, according to our text, Athirat is weaving a net with a special tool; this great net is actually her garment. Athirat trawled her net-like garment (perhaps a double garment) through the rivers and the sea, both of which are fishing sites, to raise fish in her net. Just as Athirat is called *rbt* – meaning "Great (Lady)" – her net, probably the same net that she hands to her fisherman Qudshu-wa-Amruru – is described by the same word (KTU 1.4, ii, 33, here used as an adjective "great"). This net is described as special – vast and expertly made (col. ii line 30-33). In other

63. Brody 1989: 26-30; Rich 2012: 21-23.

64. Cf. the painting on a Boetian pithos-amphora from Thebes, 680-670 BC. The painting describes Artemis with animals and a large fish in front of her dress. National Archaeological Museum Athens. See image in Radcliffe 1921: 127.

65. Dolphins and fish are portrayed on Punic funeral stelae as Tinnit's symbol. Aphrodite was a patron goddess of seafaring, and she received sacrifices and votive gifts from sailors and fishermen. Atargatis had life-giving and fertility aspects. A large pond with fish was part of her sanctuary at Hierapolis and other places; Artemis as goddess of fishing was worshiped in Arkadia. See Radcliffe 1921: 126; Graf 1999: 60; Drijvers 1999: 115; Brody 1989: 30-33 and 133-134 fig. 12, 14-15. See also Wachsmann 1998: 206-208.

66. The idea of a goddess equipped with a divine net which she throws into the sea is also known in Nordic mythology. The sea goddess Rán had an enormous net, with which she hunts men who go to sea. See Lindow 2002: 258. The use of hunting or fishing net imagery in the Bible and the Ancient Near East to describe divine action is common (Hab 1:14-17; Ez 12:12-13; 17: 20; 32: 3; Lam 1:13 and passim); Cp. *ANEP* nos. 298 and 307: 94 and 98; Goldstein 2005: 483-510; For a recent and thorough study of this theme see Yoder 2016.

words, it is divine, and like other divine objects that are described in *The Baal Cycle* – it is great in size or excellent⁶⁷. One can speculate that Athirat is responsible for the success of the fishermen's labors thanks to the net that was expertly woven. Therefore, the section in KTU 1.4 ii should be regarded as mythological in character. This reading provides a notably preferable solution to the difficulties presented by previous interpretations that would have Athirat launder her garment in salty sea water.

After Athirat drags her garment through the sea and the rivers like a sieve, the poet passes over the description of the catch being pulled out of the water and shifts directly to the moment at which the fish is roasted on coals; finally, he depicts an emblematic situation (rather than a banquet scene) in which Athirat satisfies Ilu. Athirat constantly nourishes and tends to Ilu the Beneficent, and the Creator of Creatures, presumably by roasting the catch on coals. She and Ilu are the supreme divine couple of Ugarit who look after the city and its inhabitants. In other words, this scene represents her symbolic role as the goddess who provisions the city.

Lastly, it is only to be expected that Athirat represented several aspects in the city's life.⁶⁸ She may represent women and their domestic labor; she is undoubtedly Ilu's consort, ruling alongside him as queen; and she is a partner in creating the gods. She should then be attributed another prominent aspect that concerns the city's socioeconomic life – a maritime aspect. This aspect elucidates both the narrative and her epithet *rbt atrt ym* – an epithet that should properly be translated as “The Great Lady, Athirat of the Sea” – goddess of fishermen and seafarers.

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67. Cf. in Ba'lu's victory feast (KTU 1.3 i 2-28) a goblet of wine is described as a large vessel “great to behold” (*ʿzm.ri*; line 12). The description of the cup's size extends over four bicolons (KTU 1.3 i 8-17). Kutharu-wa-Ḥasisu fashions a spectacular throne for Athirat, as well as a marvelous table replete with “figures of beasts of the earth's foundations” and a gigantic bowl covered with myriads of flocks and beasts (KTU 1.4 i 23-43). Ba'lu's throne is also of stupendous size, since Aṭtar's feet do not reach the footstool and his head does not reach the throne's top (KTU 1.6 i 56-65).

68. Cf. Brody 1989: 98; Rich 2012: 21.

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5. List of Abbreviations

<i>AEL</i>	<i>Ancient Egyptian Literature</i>
<i>ANEP</i>	<i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament</i>
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.</i>
<i>AOAT</i>	<i>Alter Orient und Altes Testament</i>
<i>BDB</i>	<i>The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic.</i>
<i>BibSem</i>	<i>The Biblical Seminar</i>
<i>CAD</i>	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i>
<i>CDA</i>	<i>A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian</i>
<i>COS</i>	<i>The Context of Scripture</i>
<i>CTA</i>	<i>Corpus des Tablettes en Cunéiformes Alphabétiques Découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939</i>
<i>DDD</i>	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i>
<i>DMWA</i>	<i>A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic</i>
<i>DULATA</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition</i>
<i>ErIsr</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
<i>FO</i>	<i>Folia Orientalia</i>
<i>HdO, I, NME</i>	<i>Handbuch der Orientalistik (Eng. Handbook of Oriental Studies), Section I, The Near and Middle East.</i>
<i>HSM</i>	<i>Harvard Semitic Monographs</i>
<i>ICAANE</i>	<i>International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series</i>
<i>KTU³</i>	<i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places</i>
<i>KWU</i>	<i>Kleines Wörterbuch des Ugaritischen</i>
<i>MRS</i>	<i>Mission de Ras Shamra</i>
<i>NABU</i>	<i>Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires</i>

OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLRBS	Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
UCOP	University of Cambridge Oriental Publications
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit Forschungen</i>
<i>UNP</i>	<i>Ugaritic Narrative Poetry.</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VTSup</i>	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
<i>WUS</i>	<i>Wörterbuch der Ugaritischen Sprache</i>