

Note: Readers may wish to leave out the Introduction and go straight to the story of Baal and Mot further on. They may then wish to come back to the Introduction and Iconographical Analysis to see how Baal was depicted in visual form, and how different stages of the myth were iconised. To avoid clutter I have taken out many footnote references: these can still be consulted in full on www.layish.co.uk (level 3) Catalogue C.

The Baal-Mot myth is a spectacular variation on the everlasting story of the death and resurrection of God which took many forms in the ancient Near East in the third to second millennia BC - from the Sumerian version of Tammuz and Inanna to the Egyptian Isis and Osiris - the final high-profile permutation being the account of the death and resurrection of Christ, mourned by the Three Marys. The 2M Syrian version has only comparatively recently been fully translated and integrated from newly identified fragments of clay tablet. The vividness of metaphor used to tell the story, and its horrendous viciousness mark the Syrian version as particularly riveting, with the final resurgence of Baal after being taken for dead outstandingly glorious. We have to thank Baruch Margalit¹ for the full and final translation and presentation of the end of the story, and our purpose in recounting it here is to take the account as a metaphor of hope for Syria in its current struggles with the monsters of death and destruction which, being less than divine, ultimately will not prevail. In the myth, the agonising length of time the Baal-Mot struggle ground on - a predecessor of the struggle of St George with the Dragon - finally resulted in the re-establishment of normality.



Fig- 1: Baal-El on the horned snake before his other half, Venus in her sprouting bower, on his return from the Underworld as Spring returns to Earth - (Seyrig Collection, Bibliothèque Nationale)

INTRODUCTION

I came across the Baal-Mot epic through my attempts to identify the figures on 2M Syrian cylinder seals (such as the one above) so I will begin with some pictorial analysis, move on to the general story as already known for some time, and then come back to further images on seals that refer to the second half of the story in all its detail, with its final joyous culmination.

¹ A Matter of 'Life' and 'Death': A Study of the Baal-Mot Epic (CTA 4/5/6) Neukirchen-Vluyn 1980

BAAL'S FATHER, EL

In Old Testament accounts of the time of Moses, Abu/El/Saturn is most often worshipped as a Bull, though his Uranian lineage has connotations of comparative invisibility (Anu the Sky - like Amun in Egypt - is beyond manifestation) so the Jewish form of El, Yaweh, is similarly known as invisible, of inexpressible Name, and not to be worshipped as a 'graven image'. But in the earliest 2M Levantine



Fig- 2: El with long beard followed by Baal as accreditors of 'the peak-capped ruler'

context overall, El in human form is differentiated on artefacts as a grand, patriarchal God (very much the prototype for Christianity's Old Testament visualisation of God with a long beard), as on the cylinder seal above, followed by a younger God. Why it is that Gods should approach a ruler (or high merchant) in this scene only makes sense if we see them as walking forward in a protective capacity, or to endow him with authority. Both are shown in human form, not mounted on bulls as they would have been on an Anatolian seal, but wearing bull-horns on their heads, and the small palm tree in front of Baal and the remains of what could be a crouching bull in front of El may be pictorial determinatives confirming their identity (in *Fig- 1* father and son are blended into one). They approach the man wearing robe and peaked cap seated on a raised stool (not a throne) with a tiny interceding attendant between, while behind him is a child on a pedestal with mother holding up cup and stick, the Sun in the Moon Crescent floating in the sky above. Bearing in mind Jacobsen's identification of a large female statue from Tell Asmar/Ešnunna as Abu's consort Ninḫursag due to the child carved on its base, we could identify her as El's consort Antum/Ki - literally backing up the ruler, probably representing the Moon, so crucial for the calendar.

ICONOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

THE NATURE OF THE GOD BAAL

In texts called ^{dingir}U² or ^{dingir}IM, in terms of seniority and planetary lineage, Baal as Jupiter is an outer planet like his father, El/Saturn - but he is also described in north Mesopotamian terms as the son of Dagan/Ea (God of Waters and Wisdom) - his filial status indicated in the Bible by his animal, the Golden *Calf*. In Elemental terms, in Mesopotamia he is thus the equivalent of Enlil, son of Ea (God of the Atmosphere), the power behind all phenomena that happen in Air - in particular the immediate climate and changing weather enveloping Earth/*Ki*. However, taking as read his dimensions as Weather God, Storm God or even Earthquake God³, we here focus on his astronomical

² The word *dingir* in Sumerian is a determinative to indicate a God or Goddess

³ A plausible addition to Baal's repertoire by R Dussaud presented in *Prélydiens, Hitties et Achéens* (Paris 1953) in which he imaginatively accounts for Baal's identity in terms of an Anatolian backdrop still today regularly riven by earthquakes.

character as a planetary God, which includes his central role in myth as the Levantine version of Tammūz, God of the dying and resurrected Year (his animal in 3M Sumer being both goat *and* bull).

It is a known astronomical fact that Jupiter spends a year in each Sign, taking twelve years to precess round the zodiac, a key factor, I believe, in the attention given to this planet during the Second Millennium in ancient Syria, and the gradual changeover to the twelve-fold division of the zodiac, superseding the Mesopotamian Venusian eight-fold division of the sky (analysed in **Chapter 19**) that had endured for centuries before. His planetary behaviour introduced a new method for regulating the calendar in the petty kingdoms of Syria, such that Baal-Jupiter became the new hero calibrator of groups of 12 years in relation to the luni-solar year, as Venus had previously for 8-year units. In astrology these two planets are regarded as the two benefics, both bringing good influences to bear on human life - as opposed to the restrictive, rule-dealing role of El/Saturn who started to lose his central importance at this time (Saturn returns of 29-30 years must have remained significant, but they are less clear-cut in duration). Thus metaphorically Baal and Ishtar were visualised as a human couple, between them in essence helping to mark out the passing of clusters of 8 or 12 Earth years as a double check on the solar and lunar years that never quite dovetailed exactly into each other (we usually see the Sun inside the Moon Crescent in the sky over the Baal/Ishtar figures on cylinder seals), so the start of the New Year could be better pinpointed.

There was a development under Hammurabi of Babylon - beyond Syria, in Mesopotamia itself - when during his reign Baal was 'rebranded' as Marduk, and described as the 'Bull-Calf of *Utu/Shamash*⁴, thus assigned a different parentage - that of the Sun-God - understandably so in the light of the new Jupiter-Sun interactive measures described in our previous paragraph. Set up as Babylon's City God, Marduk features as the hero of the then revamped cosmic myth of the time, **Enuma Elish**⁵, recited in full at the New Year celebrations, and describing Enlil/Marduk's struggle with the sea-monster Tiamat (*ti-amtum* - the word for Sea) represented by a fishy serpent with horns, upon which on Babylonian artefacts the God is shown standing, Hittite style (**Fig- 1**). We will follow below the genesis of how the animal attribute of Nergal/Mot the snake in the Syrian Baal struggle evolved into the *sirrush* dragon of Marduk, so well-known from Babylon's 1M tiled gates. It is the Syrian cylinder seals showing Baal standing on the horned viper (**Fig- 1**) or holding a dead snake showing he had conquered Death/*Mawt* (**Fig- 4**) that provided the prototype (changes of nomenclature being nothing more than differences of language). Outside Babylon, Baal's role as the principal god of the Levant continued to flourish independently under his own name, and we know from the many Old Testament references that Yahweh found it difficult to supplant loyalty to Baal in people's hearts - at times even taking over his thunder and lightning.

Where in the 3M Abu/El's varied manifestations such as Ninurta/Ningirsu/Imdugud were central to Sumerian seal and sculpture iconography, in the 2M Levant he was represented in his own right less

⁴ Some Mesopotamian astronomical texts equate Saturn and the Sun with each other.

⁵ In 'The Great Battle of the Mesopotamian Religious Year: the Conflict in the Akītu House' Iraq XXV 1969, 189-90, W Lambert gives the evidence for this conflict being imagined as taking place in the Akītu House, whether on the part of Aššur, Marduk or Bel/Baal (mentioned as "seated in the middle of the Sea/Tiamat in the Akītu"). There is evidence for a specially-built Akītu House - deemed to be positioned over the passage to the Underworld - going back to 4M Uruk itself (see K Szarzynska 'Some Remarks on the So-Called "Steingebäude" in Archaic Uruk-Warka' Akkadica XXIII May-Aug 1981, 45-9.

frequently. We are perhaps more familiar with the Greek version of the Saturn myth which relates how El usurped Uranus'⁶ position as head of the Gods - though his beardless son Enlil/Baal/Jupiter/Zeus, visualised as a mature man in his prime, in turn takes over from his father - often alluded to in abbreviated form by using some of his father's own attributes to indicate his lineage, most notably the spread-eagle at the top of his wand (which on the 3M Stela of Eannatum (**Fig- 3**) or the even earlier Abu statue-base was certainly a symbol of Ningirsu)⁷. Jacobsen neatly tracks the etymology of Baal's name IM to the same syllable in Imdugud, the lion-headed eagle, a word meaning 'thundercloud'. He also shows how the Sumerian predecessors of El - Abu, Imdugud, Anzu,

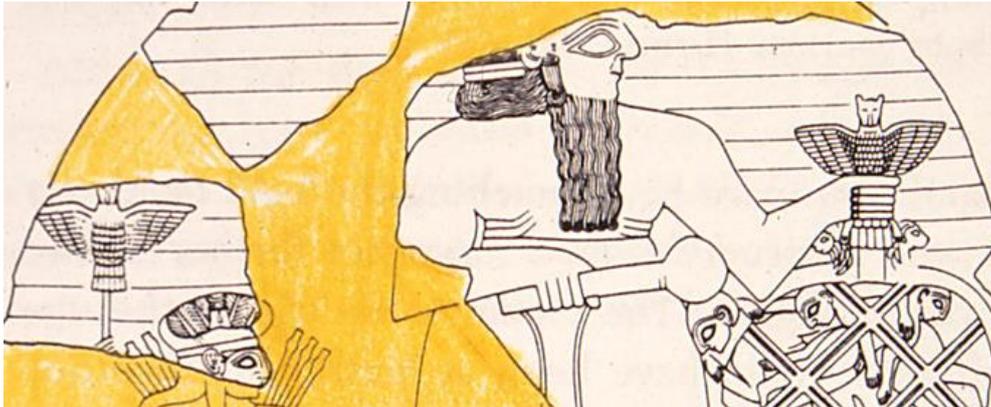


Fig- 3: Top fragments from one side of the 3M Sumerian Stela of the Vultures (erected by Eannatum) (c.f. Fig- 2) showing (left) Baal's Mesopotamian prototype, Enlil, in feathered crown with tiny bull face at its centre, holding an Imdugud standard. The piece on the right shows bearded Ningirsu himself with his Imdugud eagle in the fist clutching the net holding captive enemies - Louvre

Ninurta and Ningirsu were all versions of the same God. (Note the NIN (= LADY) component in two of the names, incorporating the Goddess into the male aspect which seems to have been a feature of the Baal-Ishtar relationship too.) On two details from the fragmentary Stela of the Vultures (above), not only does Imdugud appear as a visual determinative for both Ningirsu/El and Enlil behind him, but in the left detail we see also an early version of Enlil/Baal's horned crown at a stage on the way to the one Baal wears in **Fig- 4**. The eagle Anzu is described as having his home in the mountains to the east, hence the association with mountain fauna, especially wild goats (Jacobsen notes Ningirsu was served goat's milk daily in his temple at Girsu).

Ningirsu's own name is written ^{dingir}AB-U-MIN, and it is fascinating that these etymologies seem to weave in to words for the Sibitti god (the Seven-Star), cropping up in the later Hittite Omen literature that Kammenhuber looks into. The main Akkadian word for the Sibitti is ^{dingir}IMIN.IMIN^{bi}, sometimes written as ^{dingir}7^{bi}, often mentioned in texts next to MARGIDDA (in **Chapter 19**⁸ identified by us as Auriga the Chariot rather than the Great Bear) - given Baal is sometimes given seven thunderbolts rather than an axe, he seems to be just as much embedded in the Sibitti as Ishtar is (see *Cosmokrator Newsletter 2012*) probably due to both their calendrical roles. Probably transmitted to the Hittite world from the Babylonians by the Hurrians of Kizzuwatna, in omens the Sibitti are described as dedicated to Nergal, God of the Underworld - or listed between the Sun and

⁶ Note also an etymological link to the name of Orion.

⁷ Xianhua Wang *The Metamorphosis of Enlil in Early Mesopotamia* Münster 2011 discusses the etymology of Enlil, but stops short at the end of the Third Millennium

⁸ See www.layish.co.uk Level 2, bottom left box.

Teshub, the Hittite equivalent of Baal (in the corresponding Hittite myth he fights Kumarbi and Ullikummi (human giants) instead of Tiamat). The God list line from a text given by Kammenhuber juxtaposes this handful of Gods as follows, showing a sequence actually illustrated in **Fig- 4**:

*dingir*UTU-aš *dingir*IMIN.IMIN^{bi} *dingir*U-aš / the Sun; the Seven-God; Baal-Teshub

whilst another verse (with some words missing) also confirms the idea that the Sibitti are somehow inherent in the Weather God. Kammenhuber, referring to a contentious issue concerning what the ‘Singers of Kültepe’ sang about, believes the ritual and the Gods mentioned ‘gehören zu dem von diesem Sänger besungenen Götterkreis’. Looking back at the Ebla exorcism texts and how hailstorms and lightning are invoked as Baal’s destructive weapons, so too, it appears, the Sibitti could be seen as a further potent weapon at his disposal, much like Perseus’ scimitar in Mithraism. We have seen how on cylinder seals Venus is depicted using the Sibitti herself as a scimitar, and ritual texts describe how the couple swapped items of dress and weaponry to the point that it became hard to establish who the original owner was meant to be and what separate gender each had, so intermixed did they become. Amongst the many implications of the Sibitti, we could simply note that the choice of the seventh day at the end of the Moon’s first quarter to honour Nergal during the Feast of Ishtar perhaps points to the most common meaning of the Sibitti as simply standing for the seven-day week, the linch-pin of the entire calendar devised by the Sumerians and one of the most useful subdivision of day-to-day time measurement still followed by us today.

EARLY 2M ICONOGRAPHY OF BAAL-AND RELATED GODS (INCLUDING MOT) ON SYRIAN CYLINDER SEALS

We know from the records that there was a key temple to Baal/Adad in his own city on the lamhad/Aleppo acropolis whence survives an 18C BC text describing his battle (as Tišpak) with the sea⁹, the key lines running thus:

*Father, whose task is to act as barrier against the sea-waves, furious warrior, attack!
Father Tišpak, whose task is to be a barrier against the sea-waves, God, King of the Gods!*

This is taken by Durand to point to a coastal origin for the Amorites along the Levantine seaboard (*māt tamti*) (by the second half of the millennium the sea in Ugaritic texts is called Yam - either way, Yam is a distinct monster from the snake of Mot: in myth they each have a role, but in art they are often blended into one as the seals illustrated in this paper show. However, many hallmarks of the Amorites to me situate them in Arabia, explaining why to them the sea is alien.

There is a strong likelihood the peak-capped ruler seals often used as representative illustrations in this paper - which combine Anatolian with Mesopotamian iconographic traditions while using fine Egyptian standards of workmanship - originate in that Aleppo region in the same period. If we take as our centrepiece a second seal (below) in which the peak-capped ruler pays his respects to Shamash the Sun God on his lion Throne¹⁰ and his retinue of Gods, we see on the left Baal/Jupiter, atypically still bearded like his father (meaning it must be a very early 2M representation), walking

⁹ See J-M Durand ‘Le Mythologème du Combat entre le Dieu de l’Orage et la Mer en Mésopotamie’ **MARI** 7 1993 41-61 (he notes there is no Sumerian prototype for this myth in its literature, perhaps because they had more experience of rivers and canals than an active coast-line).

¹⁰ It is not clear whether it is his rays of light or Ea’s streams of water emanating from his shoulders, but the lion determinative makes us read it as Shamash, confirmed also by the squared Sun inside the Moon Crescent before his face.

up to Venus wearing a cap with trailing nomenclature, as she pulls her clinging drapery taut against her body as if her own skin, not simply displaying herself, but reminding him of her own Underworld

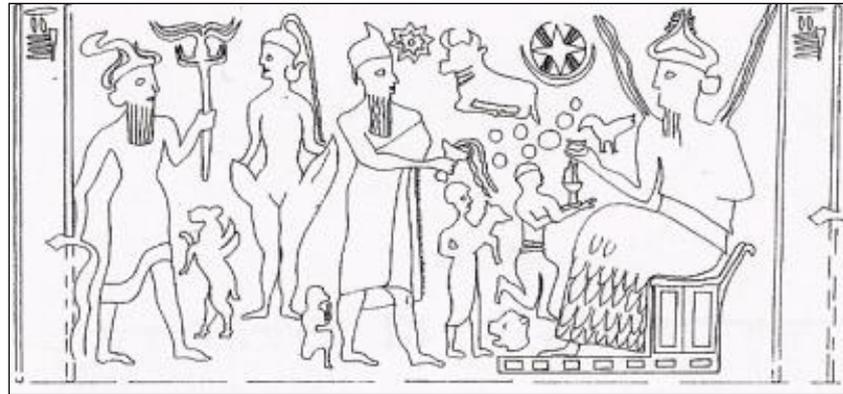


Fig- 4: More gods appear on this seal than at first obvious, since Baal, apart from holding his own eagle-palm standard and wearing a bull-horn plumed helmet, also holds the dead snake of the God Mot in his hand, whilst the planetary symbols in the sky refer to Venus, Sun and Moon and the 7-Star Sibitti - not forgetting the little monkey at Venus' feet, the Syrian version of the Egyptian Thoth/Mercury

Journey. The identity of the couple is confirmed by the eight-pointed star and crouching bull next to the quartered Sun of Shamash inside the Moon Crescent, with the Seven Stars of the Sibitti floating beneath them. Baal holds both the Serpent Mot of the Levantine tradition in one hand, and in the other El's eagle wings of the Mesopotamian mode atop his staff - a vestigial palm tree (Baal's own particular symbol)¹¹. He wears a bull horned helmet with plume - rather than the spiked helmet we might have expected from the very earliest Syrian examples (19C) discussed by Porada:

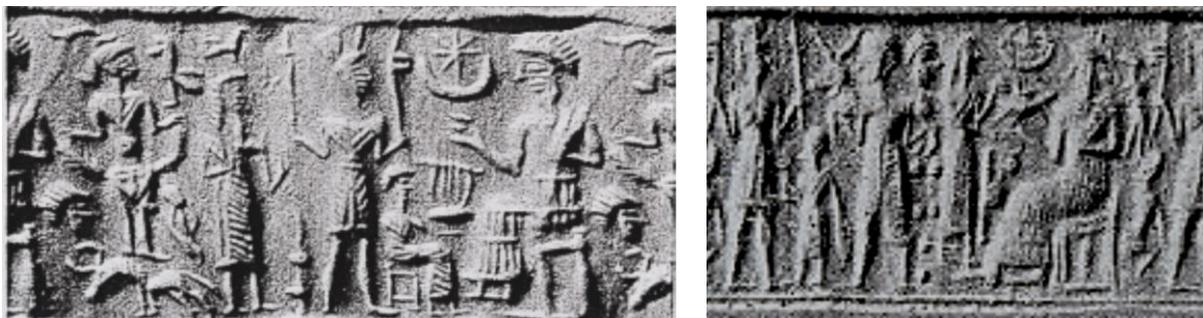


Fig- 5: (Left) Baal holding lance and axe - and wearing fanned headgear with spike - approaches Shamash to lyre music, followed by naked and clothed versions of Venus, while (right) Baal as warrior and Venus as the Seven-Star/Sibitti advance to pay respects to Shamash, ushering in clients, one offering a goat, interceded by an attendant priestess - from Porada

Back to the scene showing the peak-capped ruler (repeated top left in **Fig- 6** below, for ease of reference) below the heavenly bodies witnessing the ritual, two attendants, one with spouted pitcher, execute a libation ceremony on his behalf - another ritual that came to the fore in Syria at the start of the 2M, and originating in Anatolia according to Mellinck.

It is hard to explain the long tress both Venus and Baal sport from the centre of their head, which for Baal in this instance combines feather and spike - but for Venus is it hair, a meridian line, an animal tail (lion or bull) - or a snake too? Realising the snake refers to the Underworld, we must consider its significance as a pointer to Baal's Underworld journey: in the earlier version of the myth, his predecessor Tammuz' visit alternates with that of Inanna/Ishtar (they never go down

¹¹ The little upright griffin rearing before him requires explanation elsewhere (see the astronomical section of *Catalogue D*).

together, since one seeks to retrieve the other: as one goes down, the other comes up, though there is more emphasis on Inanna/Ishtar seeking Tammuz/Baal - mourning his loss and making the journey to fetch him back - than the other way round). Venus is naked, not to signify her sex, but rather her situation as she loses each item of clothing and jewellery during her descent to the Underworld, and she displays herself to Baal to remind him of their interdependence.

The couple appears again on a third seal (b/c/d below) backing up the Sun God Utu/Shamash on his throne. Again the peak-capped ruler¹² pays his respects to the God, this time preceded by twin-faced Usmu, messenger of Ea. Teissier's drawing of the seal (b) is for some reason incomplete - possibly because her graphic artist did not refer to the repeat of the image on the left part of the actual photo of the seal rolling as shown in the Özguç' photograph (c) - their no. 691 in the original 1949 Kültepe report - though she is generous with detail in the rest of the scene. Williams-Forte's¹³ combination drawing (d) is welcome in bringing out a complete rendition of the visual information for Baal and Venus from that rolling, giving all the *dramatis personae* in one general outline, though she only refers to the seal in passing, concentrating on Baal's attributes, and does not discuss the full scene, which we should look at now.

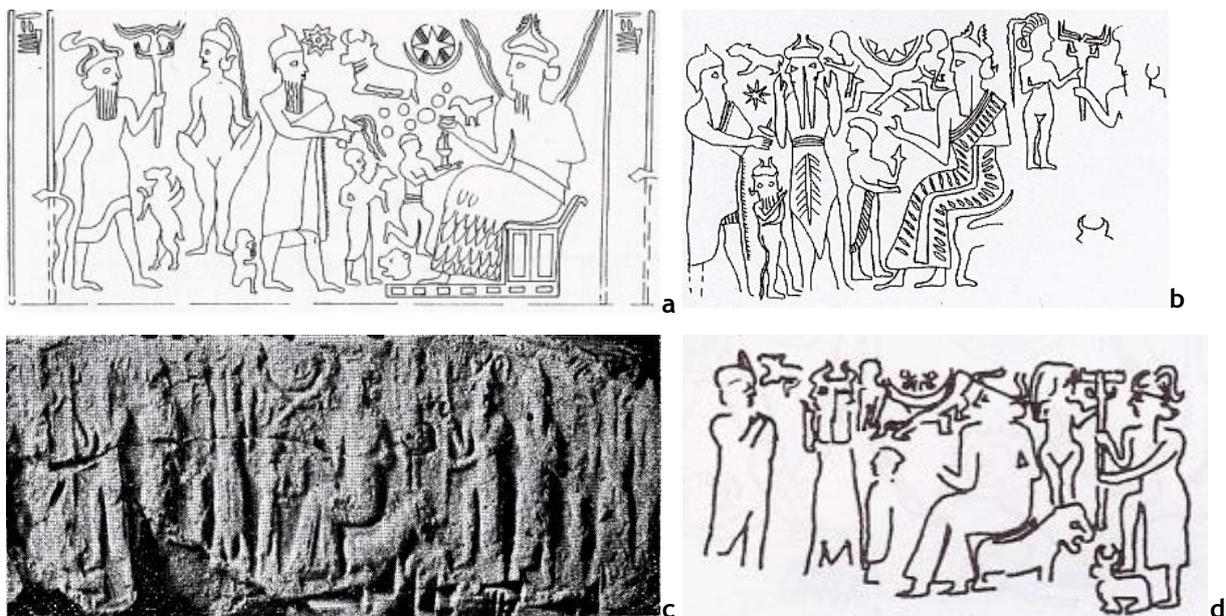


Fig- 6: The top left sealing (a) shows Baal and Venus together, as also on the sealing (b) which Williams-Forte (1983) (d) transcribed more fully by following the full rolling of seal 691 from Özguç (1953) (c) - where the repetition of the couple on either side gives a double opportunity to decipher their attributes

Baal steps up on his bull holding just his winged and sprouting lance, searing the same kind of headdress while next to him Venus actually stands on the lioness forming the throne of her brother Shamash - her headgear is also the same as in the previous seal. Remembering Jacobsen's observation¹⁴ that there seems at this point in time to have been an equal balance between the use

¹² Proto-Hittite Indo-Europeans appeared in Anatolia at first more or less bypassing Semitic Mesopotamia, perhaps because this region (what we now characterise as Turkish Kurdistan) was directly accessible to Central Asia and India (the peaked cap worn by the high merchant on our seals is a type of cap still used by dignitaries in Rajasthan, India, today). We have flagged up how a millennium later the *Cyropaedia* places Cyrus in that territory (then occupied by the Medes) when meeting up with allies travelling up from India. Today we have an Iran-related Hizbollah population in Lebanon infiltrating by the Central Asian route without the need to negotiate the Arab world at all.

¹³ In L Gorelick & Elizabeth Williams-Forte (eds) *Ancient Seals and the Bible* Malibu 1983

¹⁴ 'God or Worshipper?' in *Hélène Kantor Festschrift* 1989, 125-30/pls 20-22

of two pictorial modes to represent the Gods - animals and humans (so helpful to us for interpretation purposes) - Elizabeth Williams-Forte (*ibid.*) describes how it was at this precise period of 2000-1600 that the usual animal attribute of Baal/Enlil as a Bull (indeed the word is the same) on seals is placed *beneath* the God, standing on it in human form with all his other attributes. The pair of wrestlers beneath the Sun in Crescent underlines their role in representing the constant push and pull between Day and Night.

THE MYTH OF BAAL AND MOT

We will explore more explicitly the full story of Baal's two battles with Mot in relation to further seals later, once we have looked at the stages of the second half of the story in its fullest form. First we look at the myth in its shortest, most well-known version, looking at the run-up to the tremendous struggle of Baal with Mot. In the Ugaritic version of the story, most authentically Amorite in character, this battle is preceded by Baal (with the help of his sister Anat, a variation on Ishtar) successfully overcoming Yam (none other than Tiamat). Believing he can now relax, having attained the status of King, with the help of the Architect God Kothar he is now entitled to build a royal palace. A short, fragmentary text on both side of a small tablet (*RS 24.245*) describes on one side the point after that battle at which Baal calmly sits enthroned on Mount-Saphon which in turn rests on the coast with a view over a wide expanse of Sea, as he holds his lightning-tree of seven bolts and surveys the purview of his rule over land, sea and sky. Reviving waters pour through the clouds into a vase, refreshing the Earth. This rare moment of stasis is but the prelude to the terrible events that follow soon after as the nemesis for his pride, lasting the three days of his Journey to the Underworld commemorated during the Festival of Ishtar (whose rituals as enacted at Mari we will describe as next year's newsletter, as the predecessor to our Easter).

This text was separately translated and commented upon by Fisher and Knutson¹⁵, Lepinski¹⁶ - and by Pope¹⁷. The latter is more interesting from the point of view of statuary, and I put it aside in favour of what the other two authors offer. Lepinski's is the most readable translation, Fisher and Knutson's somewhat stilted but maybe more factually accurate. From the very fragmentary narrative that remains we learn how Baal's two horns shine brilliantly in the sky (much as Moses' horns are described when he comes down from Mount Sinai) - and one line has the remaining word, *Bull*. On the other side of the tablet his sister Anat, who aided him in his battle against Yam, washes her hands and re-adorns her breast with coral, taking up her lyre to sing of her love for the all-powerful Baal, also described as her consort.

Lepinski does not favour Fisher and Knutson's interpretation of the text as an enthronement ritual, appropriate for enactment by king and priestess at a supposed 2M enthronement ceremony possibly at the time of the Feast of Ishtar - the time of the Year when Cosmic Order is reset and Nature proceeds to flourish once more. But as Durand (*ibid.*) puts it, 'L'ordre politique du monde dépend uniquement des rapports avec [Baal]-Addu d'Alep!', pointing out that in Syria, just as the building

¹⁵ L R Fisher and F B Knutson 'An Enthronement Ritual at Ugarit' *JNES* XXVIII 157-67

¹⁶ E Lepinski 'Epiphanie de Baal-Haddu' *UF* III 1971 81-92

¹⁷ M Pope et al. 'A Description of Baal' *UF* III 1971 117-130

of a new palace in the myth was one hallmark of securing sovereignty, so in real life kings - whether Zimrilim or the later Assyrian kings - to secure their royal status performed a rite whereby they placed their sword or lance (as if the God's) in the Mediterranean waters in imitation of Baal's victory over Yam. As time moves on, in the palace correspondence we have a note of Baal's arms, whose home was in his temple at Iamhad, being sent to Zimrilim in acknowledgement of his rulership, obviating the need for him to travel to the coast to dip them in the water and enabling him to proceed with his anointment and coronation at Mari. In a well-known letter to the king, Sumu-ila writes that the arms of Adad of Aleppo had arrived, and were stored in the Temple of Baal's father Dagan, at Terqa. The king's naked body would be anointed (oiled all over as soldiers would be oiled in order to be able to fight, or wrestlers for mutual combat) and the coronation rite would proceed within that temple, endowing the king with his aura (*namrurrū*/'supernatural, awe-inspiring luminosity') associated, Durand says, with the unique royal capacity to frighten and subdue the enemy that Baal himself had.

Unfortunately as well as water, lightning and thunder coming through the clouds above his palace soon after its completion, as he sits on Mount Saphon surveying his kingdom, through that very gap Baal enables the entry of Mot, God of Death, who enters on stage to afflict Earth with death and barrenness. Mot's domain is described as underground between two mountains, his devouring mouth forming its entrance. Baal's two battles with Mot are far more serious than that with Yam and for a time he is even eaten by Mot and taken to the Underworld as dead, though on the lines of the original Tammūz-Inanna story, ultimately he returns to the land of the living. To anticipate the end of the story, given that Baal's iconography embodies the entire story cycle in one image - having eventually prevailed over Mot too - we should look further at Williams-Forte's conclusion that the snake he holds represents ultimate victory over that God.

BAAL'S SNAKE

In state government terms, Baal intervenes to aid royalty in its similar unceasing struggle to overcome the snake of Mot, bringing Cosmos to bear on Chaos. On the third of three seals published by Oztan¹⁸ an interesting version of Baal with combined snake that turns into a wand sprouting at the top¹⁹ (dating to c. 1750, below left) shows him standing before his father Ea, God of Waters enthroned on the Mountains of the East, which leaves his other hand free to hold a weapon. On the seal below right Baal - wearing a short kilt and spiked helmet fitted with horns pointing forward and trailing a lioness-tail down the nape of his neck - wields a mace in one hand and in the other a staff ending in a conifer sprout. (Fisher et al (*ibid.*) appropriately quote from Pritchard²⁰ the line. 'Baal smites thee with the cedar tree²¹ which is in his hand'). The sprouting staff is ambiguous enough in appearance to make one look closer to see whether the bristling leaves hold a snake at their core.

¹⁸ A Oztan 'Three Seals in Syrian Style at Sadberk Hanım Museum in Istanbul' in *Aspects of Art and Iconography: Anatolia and its Neighbors (Studies in Honor of Nimet Özguc)* Ankara 1993 503-6, pl.91

¹⁹ We are reminded of the Semitic root HYY/HWW, from which the words for snake (*Hayyat*) and Life (*Hayy*) (and Eve, *Hawā*) are derived.

²⁰ ANET p.249.

²¹ In the mountainous zones of the Lebanon the cedar appropriately replaces Baal's palm.



Fig- 7: (left) Baal before Ea enthroned - Oztan pl.94-3a, and (right) Williams-Forte (ibid.) pl.II,4, from the Seyrig Collection, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

That this might be a valid thought is borne out by looking at next example (below left) where clearly the snake rears up separately against Baal's lower leg under his elbow, revealing the separate, sprouting wand to be quite short. We note how he stands on two mountains (again represented by Bulls) matching descriptions of the serpent Mot's domain. Venus as usual displays before him, this time interestingly standing on a *donkey* (the association between the two crops up in evidence we have about the Festival of Ishtar later). Her pigeon also ratifies her, whilst the griffin - its meaning still unclear but possibly representing the zodiac - faces Baal, in the same way as it does in **Fig- 4**. The couple is flanked on one side by a *lamassu* with Sun-Moon standard and on the other by a lion-goat attack over a pair of lionesses on the other.

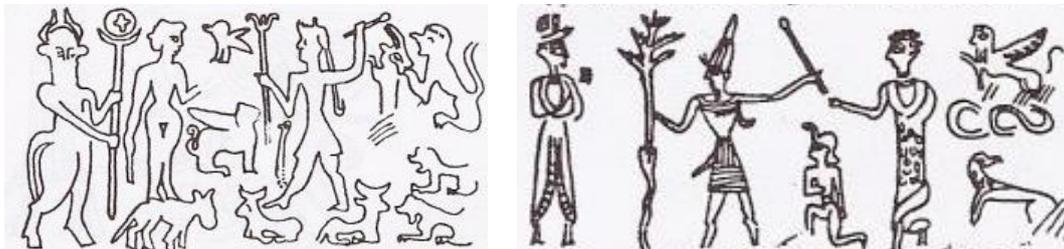


Fig- 8: Left, Williams-Forte's fig 6 (based on Ozgüç Kültepe 1b SealCat) and (right) her fig 8 showing the sprouting wand rammed into the snake's mouth (drawing by Edith Porada from BM seal ME89514)

Thanks to Williams-Forte's dogged pursuit of the theme of Baal's snake she tracked down further seals showing the normalisation of the sprout-snake wand imagery and found a rare example (above right) where without any ambiguity Baal's sprouting wand is stuffed into the dead snake's mouth.

Thus it is on the seals of rulers or traders from NW Syria between 2000 and 1600 that we come across the earliest representations of the Levantine form of Enlil/Baal, later monumentalised in the well-known Baal stela from Ugarit on which, Pope suggests, the wavy lines at Baal's feet represent Yam. Seals from other localities later in time vary the character of Baal, whose characterisation as Reshef the Storm God is more akin to the violent nature of Mars, his warrior persona accentuated by lightning and hail, mentioned specifically as weapons that batter 'the serpents' in exorcism texts from Ebla²² (one striking line given in Fronzaroli's paper runs '*May Haddad bring a glittering hail shower, wrapping it round him as his kilt!*').

²² See P Fronzaroli 'Les combats de Hadda dans les textes d'Ebla' *MARI* 8 1997 283-90

From a further pair of seals that Williams-Forte was able to close the circle and fix the identity of the snake Baal holds as Mot, God of Death in Ugaritic texts, since in these it is not only shown under Baal's feet, but on one or two seals actually issues from the two mountains on which Baal stands. On the seal on the right, the dolphin may be Yam, now under control as Baal turns to his battle with Mot next, aided by Anat behind him.



Fig- 9: Left, Williams-Forte's fig. 10 (drawing from a Seyrig Collection seal, Bibliothèque Nationale) and (right) her fig. 9 (drawing from Louvre seal A08918 by David Castriota) showing Mot issuing from under Baal's feet, Anat behind.

Relevant to the battle with the Snake is the way Baal on some seals is more closely identified with the destructive powers of Nergal/Mars of the Underworld (the Mesopotamian God equating to Egypt's Seth, or Canaan's Horon), absorbing their nature within him to become death-dealer himself, close to how we would characterise the Greek God of the Underworld, Pluto.

Although in Babylon Marduk takes over Baal/Enlil's role, killing the monster Tiamat in order to create Heaven and Earth, there is no doubt from the Ebla exorcism texts mentioned above that the story of a battle between Haddad and Tiamat originated in the lamhad/Aleppo area (Haddad/Baal's seven lances are described as combating seven serpents). A similar story was current even in 3M Mesopotamian texts describing an unnamed hero battling a seven-headed monster (see, below left, how his headdress resembles the early form of Baal's horned feathered (or leaved) crown:

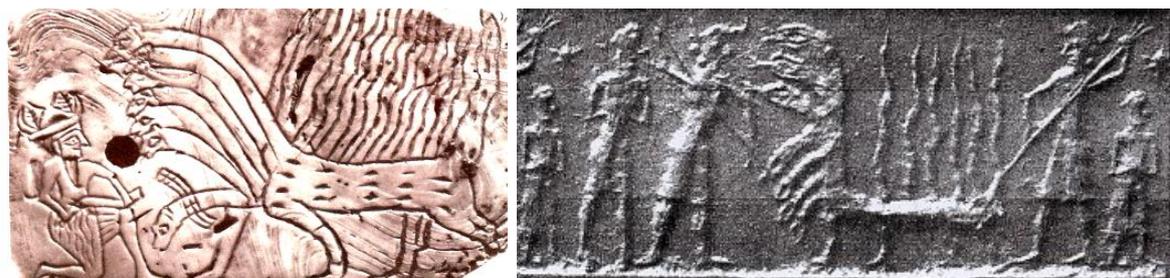


Fig- 10 (Left) 3M shell plaque (Sumerian, ED III period) with scene showing the seven-headed monster conquered by the divine hero later known as Baal/Marduk - LADDERS TO HEAVEN catalogue, Royal Ontario Museum 1981, fig. 28: c.f. (right) with an Akkadian seal from Tell Asmar (Frankfort SCSCat no. 478)

Thus some of the motifs from the source Mesopotamian traditions were merged with items from their own local traditions and elaborated upon and new ways of portraying them invented, giving them that Syrian 'look' that makes them so distinctive.

On Old Babylonian artefacts Marduk stands on a snake at times looking almost like a lizard (for the Neo-Babylonians it becomes the *Sirrush*, a composite zodiac animal) - but Amorite seals such as the one below with Baal standing on an ordinary snake, the mountains left out, were the prototypes. It is worth mentioning here in an aside about the way Venus seems to hold a rope in this seal that she



Fig- 11: Baal standing on the snake - Williams-Forte pl.1,3, Seyrig Collection, Bibliothèque Nationale

has been described as ‘the Goddess who holds the connecting link of all heaven and earth’ - a title originally associated with Tiamat, according to Francesca Rochberg²³ who looked into the significance of the phrase, ‘the bonds connecting Heaven and Earth’ which are put in place after Marduk has split Tiamat in two:

The cosmic bonds, imagined as ropes or cables, therefore tied down and controlled particularly the flow of waters (in the form of dew, rain, or clouds) from the heavens, and recall the image of the gates that locked in the waters of Tiamat. The cosmic cable was used as a linking device that could be held as a symbol of power in cosmological mythology. ...In a marvellous compounding of metaphors, the serretu, or lead-rope passed through the nose of an animal becomes synonymous with this cosmological feature because it too can be held by a deity as a symbol of control, or authority: “I [Ishtar] am in possession of the [symbols of] the divine offices; in my hands I hold the lead-rope of heaven”, or “Marduk made firm and took into his hands the lead-rope of the Igigi and Anunnaki, the connecting link between heaven and earth”.

This gives a much deeper meaning for Gods standing on animals holding them on leashes, as they appear on Anatolian seals, and how, strangely, Ishtar was sometimes interpreted as a later form of Tiamat, because of her hold on ‘the master-bond between Heaven and Earth’. In the same way Taweret the Hippo Goddess was understood as the form Isis takes at the start of Creation, as on Egyptian New Kingdom star ceilings where she holds the rudder of Heaven secured by a rope running up to Ursa Major (for Egyptians the hind leg of Taurus).

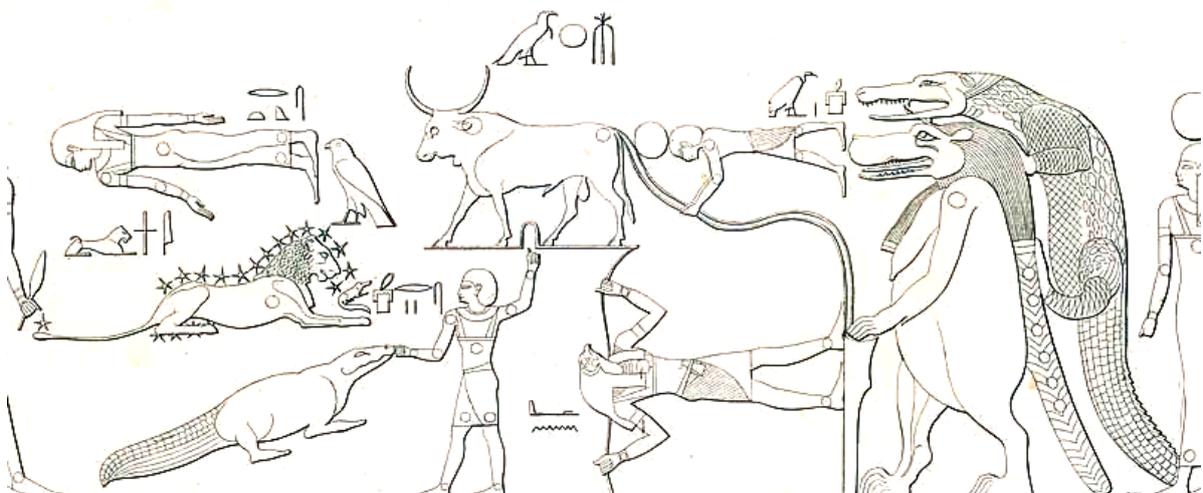


Fig- 12: Seti I Star Ceiling with Taweret at right, crocodile on her back

²³ ‘Heaven and Earth: Divine-Human Relations in Mesopotamian Celestial Divination’ in Scott Noegel et al. (eds) *Prayer, Magic and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World* Philadelphia 2003, 169-85

To sum up, Williams-Forte's idea that the snake Baal overcomes is Mot, rather than Yam (as others have suggested) is borne out by its links to the mountain(s) on which Baal stands, and from which it emerges, pointing to Baal's own journey to the Underworld and his particular battle to overcome Death, much as Gilgamesh's enemy turns out to be the snake that steals the plant of life from him, taking it back down under the Earth.

The reader should now be able to decipher one last seal featuring Baal and Ishtar without any help!

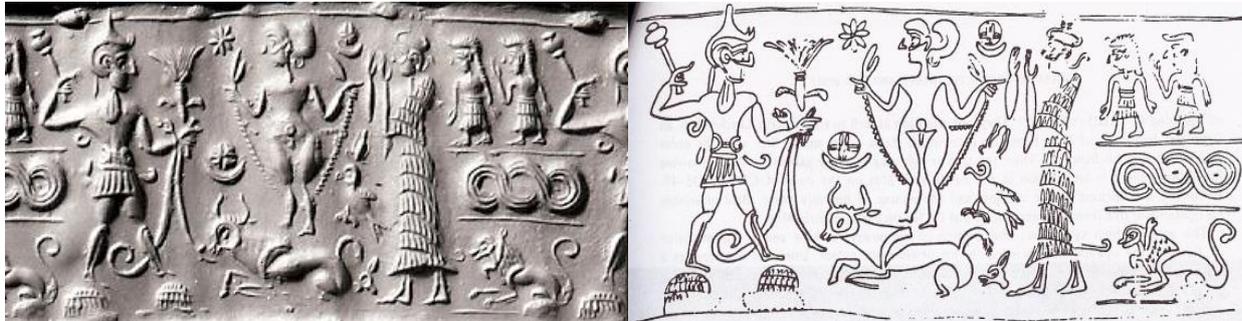


Fig- 13: Seal no. 967 in the Pierpoint Morgan Collection, and drawing of it by H Safadi

It is tempting to see the two snakes Baal holds as referring to both his battles with Yam and Mot, and note how, as in *Fig- 5*, Baal wears the variant spiked helmet, with Venus standing on his bull.

THE END-GAME BETWEEN BAAL AND MOT

In the Mari Festival of Ishtar, the bewailing of Baal's loss by Ishtar forms a central part of the event. From further papers and a book, we can add further details to the story. Earlier we discussed the content of a text on the small tablet describing Baal's enthronement - as dealt with by both Lipinski, and Fisher and Knutson (*ibid.*). Summing up the bond between Baal and Anat in only a few lines, in a rare moment of stasis we see them at a juncture in the story where Yam is conquered and Mot yet to come. Almost as an ominous prelude to what will then unfold, Baal enthroned contemplates everything under his purview as Anat puts her coral necklace back on and gets ready to sing, not in sorrow for her lost love, but in praise of his divine looks. The authors refer to T J Meek's idea²⁴ that the songs in the Bible's Song of Songs 'originated in the Tammuz cult - in its Palestinian manifestation', and is the liturgical reason for the Jewish tradition of reading the Canticles at Passover/Easter. They compare the two texts, pointing out that love songs of this period in praise of the male are rare, a strong clue to their original ritual nature in association with the cult of Tammuz and Inanna (the 3M Inanna myth describes his coral-red clothing as he plays a lapis lazuli flute whose haunting notes express her yearning).

So the real significance of why lamentations of longing for the Beloved are repeated annually is the initial mourning stage for Tammuz/Baal as he starts his journey of absence below Earth. What follows the throne scene emerges from a text analysed by John Gray²⁵ spelling out in a nutshell the nature of Baal's own journey to the Underworld during the saga of the two stages of his battle with Mot, portraying a lesser-known aspect of the Baal myth, not often given attention since written down separately from the main body of the story's central events. The text he discusses concerns

²⁴ 'The Song of Songs and the Fertility Cult' in *The Song of Songs* ed. W H Schoff Philadelphia 1924, 48-79

²⁵ 'Baal's Atonement' *UF III* 1971 62-70

the revenge taken on Baal - following seven years of successful rule after an initial victory over Mot - by the 'Devourers and Renders' who are demonic bulls with humps and bull-faces like Baal himself, intent on tearing him to pieces and pulling out his eye (a direct parallel to Seth pulling out the Eye of Horus, a primordial story about the struggle between Chaos and Cosmos). Baal undertakes to hunt them down but is felled like a dead bull by these vengeful predators and sentenced by El himself to seven years (with an eighth for good measure) in the Kingdom of Death - at which point 'The land ran headlong into waste: the watercourses of the fields were parched', very much reminiscent of the seven good years followed by the seven years of famine of the Joseph story in the Bible, and making the same association between Mot and the desert as made in Egypt between Seth and *deshret*.

A much fuller version of the downfall of Baal following the throne scene is graphically described in CTA 3-6, whose brilliant analysis by Baruch Margalit (*ibid.*) gives the full picture of the dark side of Baal/Tammuz' Journey, so often left out of the overall myth, from which we see that Baal's story does not end with his victory over Yam, nor does it even conclude with his initial victory over Mot, as also briefly shown by Gray's text. Where most versions of the story concentrate on the mainline events of Baal and Anat leading up to the victory over Yam and ending in the throne scene, Baruch's contents list alone sums up the terrible events that follow as written down in texts CTA 3-6 [their sequence slightly reordered by him] as follows:

- ♦ Gifts for the Lady Asherah
- ♦ The Feast of Shame [the orgy]
- ♦ The 'Windows Controversy'
- ♦ The Fall of Baal
- ♦ The Commission to the Netherworld
- ♦ The Execration of Leviathan
- ♦ Mot's Apologia
- ♦ The Descent to the Netherworld
- ♦ Baal and the Heifer
- ♦ The Elysian Fields in Hades
- ♦ The Lament for Baal
- ♦ The Recovery and Burial of Baal
- ♦ Baal *Redevitum*
- ♦ The Restoration
- ♦ The Finale

ACT I: EQUIVALENT TO GOOD FRIDAY

As the saying goes, 'Pride comes before a Fall': under the early headings belonging, as Margalit sees it, to *Act I* of the Baal Story, we need not again dwell at length on the aftermath of the Yam victory where, from the sense of pride Baal has in gaining his mountain palace, he gives extravagant gifts to Asherah fashioned by Kothar and engages in wild rutting activities with her maidens in an explosion of symbolically sexual power. The seeds of tragedy are sown with the

insertion of windows in his palace on the advice of Kothar, through which he can show off his bull-like bellowing voice of thunder - but as chinks in the sky they give Mot's serpents the entry to seize Baal. On the appearance of Mot and his agents, Baal is aware his days are numbered, for Mot's epithet is 'Beloved of El', being part of the divine plan, for El wants *his* usurper, his own son Baal, to be responsible for his own self-undoing. Those who find themselves even in Mot's vicinity know not to approach him 'lest he treat you like a lambling in his mouth, like a kid in the crunch of his fangs' but Mot gets through the windows in the sky and bites Baal fatally (as Margalit puts it, 'This... reading of the text is still not common knowledge'). *At this point, their leader mortally wounded, the Gods assembled in Baal's palace for celebration leave -- marking the end of Act I.*

In the Ishtar ritual texts enacting the story, there are 2-3 blank days - implicitly the darkness in space and time during which Baal now starts to go through many vicissitudes in his struggle to get free of Mot. This second three-day block in the Festival can be thought of as allowing for Baal/Nergal's journey to be commemorated at the palace of Mari - in mind if not in deed - just as Ishtar's is. We have apportioned Margalit's own division of the Baal drama into three Acts against each day - in a second period of what Gray calls 'temporary suspension of order' that twins with the first one presided over by Ishtar, and already played out in the first block of three days.

ACT II: EQUIVALENT TO EASTER SATURDAY

8 SEPTEMBER: SECOND DAY OF BAAL'S JOURNEY

Despite 'the day turning to darkness' at what Margalit deems the start of the Second Act, though Baal has already started to lose power after being bitten, in a vain attempt to maintain his rule over the Gods, he relents, stating he will pay tribute to Mot. He sees it is now his destiny to descend to the 'twin hills at the edge of Earth and 'be counted among the descenders to ... Mot's city' at the 'bottom of the Earth'. Try as he might, though, Baal cannot avoid the coils of poisonous Mot, as described in the following description (CTA 5:1, 1-9):

*Be crushed, coiled one, fleet serpent: be annihilated, tortuous serpent;
Whither seven-headed entwine: convulse, [... of the] sticky venom;
Thy [poisonous] prick I am ingesting: in groans and diaorrhea I expire.*

*Truly hast thou descended the throat of the divine-one, Mot: the gullet of El's beloved, Mot
Departed, never to return, is the God [Baal]!*

Margalit points out these lines are ambiguous, in that it is hard to separate what might be Baal's own words from 'an anonymous speaker pointing to and grieving for the dying storm-god', but the gist is clear. Mot compares himself to a wild lion or a large fish (the word is hard to translate - the English Bible uses the word 'Leviathan' - and could mean anything from whale to dolphin), and this perhaps makes sense of the captured dolphin shown on the right-hand seal of Fig- 9). The central feature of the monster is the gaping mouth from which there is no escape, described in the lines below as having one lip extending to heaven, another to earth, the tongue to the stars. Margalit brings in a side-text here which vividly describes Mot as usurping Baal's place '[enthroned] as a king, the sceptre of bereavement in one hand, the sceptre of widowhood in [the other]'. Back to the main text, Mot even speaks to Baal asking him to break bread with him as if with his kinsmen so

that 'I'll forget, Baal, that I'm to bite you!' - but Margalit explains that Mot is kind only when seated and sated, though for the time being he promises Baal that once swallowed he will not be harmed further. As the passage goes,

*He placed a lip to earth, a lip to heaven: a tongue to the stars
Baal entered his abdomen: down his mouth he went, like an olive pip.*

and at that point as far as Mother Earth is concerned, it looked as if 'the God had departed, never to return'. But there is a stay of total execution, and for a time Baal is treated well as he is placed in the Fields of the Plains of Death, coupling 77 and 88 times with a Heifer there - but this lasts only until Mot gets hungry again.

Meanwhile, up on Earth a lament goes up for Baal, a section of the story well-known in its annual re-enactment all over the ancient Near East. The lament for Baal is led by Ishtar herself at the Festival of Ishtar in her part of the Festival, and more important than the laments for different cities that have been laid waste by human agency in times of war. In the version studied by Margalit, the 'God of Mercy' leads the lament, gashing himself and wallowing in straw - very much along the lines of the wailing and self-mutilation still applied in the Shi'ite world at Muḥarram - as Anat looks for him in the Fields. In other words, at this stage Baal is condemned, but still alive.

ACT III: EQUIVALENT TO EASTER SUNDAY

9 SEPTEMBER: THIRD DAY OF BAAL'S JOURNEY

Anat finds Baal in the Fields of the Plains of Death and herself laments his death with exactly the same self-harming actions as the God of Mercy, saying, 'in Baal's footsteps I shall descend to Hades'. Her companion, Špš, a light-giving Goddess who shows the way

*'...lifted the puissant Baal; onto the shoulders of Anat she did place him.
She raised him up to the heights of Sapon, she bewept and buried him...'*

Anat then slaughters 70 each of buffalo, oxen, sheep, deer, goats and mules to feed the spirit of the dead Baal, in what we might regard as an ancestor rite at this, the first burial of Baal. At first she seeks a successor to Baal: Āsherah suggests Athtar, who tries out Baal's throne on Sapon and finds he does not have the stature to fill it - and Anat realises Baal is the only true ruler.

After some missing lines, we have Anat now seeking the restoration of Baal, 'like the heart of a cow for her calf' - and she grasps the hem of Mot's garment, beseeching him to give Baal back. Mot admits that Baal's spirit is no longer in the Fields of the Plains of Death, because as he got hungry again he decided to eat him up completely. In Dantesque terms, where before Baal was in Purgatory, now he has gone to Hell proper. But at this point Anat has the power to dismember Mot, utterly pulverising him, and Baal's corpse is recovered by Špš a second time and raised up for a second burial²⁶. As the right time of the Year arrives, Baal comes to life with the spring rains as the seeds sown in the furrows start to sprout. Lament turns to praise and thanksgiving at his return.

Coming back to continuity of tradition in Israel, Meek suggests in lines in the *Song of Songs* such as

*Arise, my love, and come away; for lo, the winter is past;
The rain is over and gone: the flowers appear on the earth. (Canticles 2, 10/11)*

²⁶ Think here in Christian art of Mary cradling Christ's dead body in her lap when taken off the cross (the Pietà). In some traditions before his resurrection Christ 'harrows' Hell.

we are looking at a song in remembrance and thanks for precisely this moment, when Earth is comes to life again on the return of Baal (almost the equivalent of the *dhikr* in the Islamic tradition sung to remind of and evoke the divine order - Turkish Sufi orders even talk of the divine flute singing through them). While the prosody of the *Song of Songs/Canticles* has ‘irregularities that bespeak its non-Hebraic origin’, it also uses a large number of Babylonian-Canaanite loan-words, even ‘loan-words from the Arabians, among whom we know the Tammuz cult had early sway’ so that overall the ‘book [uses] cult language, and manifestly cult language of the Tammuz liturgies’²⁷. As Meek suggests, ‘this interpretation of Canticles clears up a host of problems connected with the book’, explaining why it should be retained in the canonical scriptures. The book is sometimes called *The Song of Solomon*, of course, and Meek suggests this refers to ‘a later interpretation of the god name Shelem (i.e. Dod or Tammuz)’, since the bridegroom in other verses is called *Dodi* ‘in [which] we have none other than a survival of the god name Dod or Adad.... Dodi in the original liturgy... (citing Langdon) was a form of address quite like “my Damu” and “my Tammuz” which appear so often in the Tammuz liturgies’. It is ‘the power of the love of the goddess [that] win[s] the god back from the netherworld despite the floods and other obstacles that lay between this world and the next’. He adds, ‘It is rather striking, too, that the Syriac never translates *Dodi* but always transliterates it, just as if it were a proper name - in Jewish times the name was identified with Yahweh, whose consort would be Šala, and in *Canticles 7, 7* the bride, described as the groom’s sister, is called “the Shulamite” and associated in particular with the Lebanon, precisely ‘the mountain home of Adad and Šala’²⁸. He points out that in other contexts the term is applied to ‘the priestesses who yearly bewailed the death of vegetation typified by the sacrifice of Jephthah’s daughter’. Altogether, as Meek says, putting this book into the canonical scriptures of the Bible would be ‘utterly pointless [under] any other hypothesis’.

CODA: EQUIVALENT TO EASTER MONDAY

10 SEPTEMBER: AS THE ISHTAR FESTIVAL DRAWS TO A CLOSE, ALL THE GODS RETURN TO BAAL’S PALACE

The return of the assembly of Gods on the last day of the Ishtar Festival dovetails perfectly with the last scene in the grand finale of the Baal story as presented by Margalit. Baal *Redivivus* bludgeons the ‘arrogant’ and the ‘creeps’ who have gathered in the throne room in his absence and has his final battle with Mot, ‘eyes burning like coals’ after he unsuccessfully tried to occupy Baal’s throne himself. Baal now has the strength to match his, as ‘they butt like buffaloes’. Finally the wine of reconciliation is drunk, and the Gods come back as Baal reascends his rightful throne, ‘chair of his dominion’. Seven years later Mot still has the nerve to show up again and complain about his treatment, saying he couldn’t help his part in El’s plan.

The second feast closing off the Festival proper mirrors the complementarity of the two feasts within the Baal story on its own which Margalit sees as the symmetrical framework for the rise and fall of Baal, the second tuning in with the last day of the overarching Ishtar rites - to be explored in all its fascinating detail in our 2014 Newsletter!

²⁷ For this reason, ‘Instead of being one of the latest of Hebrew compositions it is one of the earliest’.

²⁸ Given the myth made sense ‘in the agricultural north rather than in the semi-nomadic south’, he says, it is not surprising that the place-names mentioned in the songs are those such as Sharon, Gilead, Heshbon and Damascus.