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Masculinities in the Cultural Constructs of Ancient Syria-Palestine (via the Ugaritic Literary Tradition)[1]

José Ángel Zamora López
ILC (Madrid) – EEHAR (Rome), CSIC

Abstract

The literary traditions of Syria and Palestine in the II millennium BCE, which are available to us thanks to the texts found at the site of Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit), allow us to know some of the cultural stereotypes that were a possible reflection of the societies that produced them and were definitely also a vehicle for propagating models in those societies. On the basis of these texts, therefore, we can study some of the constructs of gender that prevailed at that time. Some Ugaritic narratives even allow us to see those constructs that served to define the sphere of masculinity at an ideological level. The present essay is an attempt to study this topic, by focusing on the Ugaritic *Tale of Aqhat*. Therefore, it will not trace out the real situation or functions of males in ancient societies of Syria-Palestine as reflected in myth or epic. Instead, it will attempt to show how, in these stories, cultural patterns were constructed and disseminated to support the distinction, correlation and perception of gender – and, more specifically, the creation and ideological definition of masculinities.

Keywords

Gender, masculinities, Syria-Palestine, Canaanite world, Ugarit, Phoenicia.

Among the texts discovered in the site of Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit, which we know was the capital of a Syro-Palestinian kingdom that flourished in the second half of the II millennium BCE), the story of the legendary prince Aqhat (*KTU* 1.17-19) stands out because it is so well preserved. Undoubtedly it was a tale that was famous throughout the region (the Bible preserves the memory of the first protagonist of the story, Daniel, the prince's father) which includes this dialogue between the youth, Aqhat and the goddess

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[1] This text is a version of the lecture "Hijos y padres, cazadores y guerreros, reyes y héroes: Masculinidades en las construcciones culturales fenicio-púnicas (a través de la tradición literaria ugarítica)", given on the 7th of November, 2014 during the *Jornades d'Arqueologia Fenicio-púnica* organized by the *Museu Arqueològic d'Eivissa i Formentera* (see now ZAMORA 2016), a seminar focussed on matters relating to gender and death. It retains both the contents and tone of the original lecture. Some bibliographical references have been updated (to indicate the publication of works that were "in press" at the time the lecture was given or to add relevant works) but no attempt has been made to provide an extended bibliography nor to change the text accordingly. I am grateful to Wilfred G. E. Watson for his critical and linguistic revision of the manuscript. I would also like to thank the reviewers for their thoughtful comments.

Anat (the principal goddess in the "literary" Ugaritic texts[2]). The goddess, having taken a fancy to the hero's bow (an extraordinary gift from the artisan god Kothar), promises Aqhat, in exchange for his weapon, the following (*KTU* 1.17 VI 26-29):

> "Ask for life, oh Aqhat the Hero;
> ask for life, and I will give it to you,
> immortality and I will bestow it on you.
> I'll make you count the years with Baal,
> with the sons of El you shall count the months."

Even though, by typical divine anthropomorphism, the gods in these accounts think and act in the image and likeness of the human being who creates them, for the peoples who produced, heard and propagated these accounts, immortality was a defining attribute of divine beings. Accordingly, in the story, the youth Aqhat, aware of his human condition (and not without considerable arrogance) replies to the goddess as follows (*KTU* 1.17 VI 34-38):

> "Do not deceive me, oh virgin;
> for to a hero your lies are filth!
> As his ultimate fate, what does man get?
> What does a man get as his final lot?
> Glaze poured on his head,
> lime on top of his skull[3].
> The death of all, I will die;
> even I indeed will die".

This conversation (which contains obvious echoes of such famous ancient Near Eastern narratives as the adventures of Gilgamesh) will of course have a tragic outcome. The goddess will unleash her anger against an insolent mortal (a traditional theme also presented in these narratives) especially as the hero did not hold back and ended his reply as follows (*KTU* 1.17 VI 39-40):

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[2] For an introduction to Ugaritic research, see WATSON – WYATT 1999; for a presentation of Ugaritic poetry and the Ugaritic literary texts, see for example, in the same volume, WATSON 1999; GIBSON 1999; MARGALIT 1999; PITARD 1999 and, especially in this case, WYATT 1999a. Classic editions and translations of Ugaritic literature are CAQUOT – SZNYCER – HERDNER 1974 into French; XELLA 1983 into Italian; DIETRICH – LORETZ 1997 into German; DEL OLMO 1981 (see also DEL OLMO 1998a) into Spanish; and GIBSON 1978, DE MOOR 1987, Smith (in PARKER 1997), Pardee (in HALLO 1997), WYATT 1998, the two vols. of the "Baal Cycle": SMITH 1994; SMITH – PITARD 2009, and COOGAN – SMITH 2012 into English.

[3] The precise meanings of the substances poured are uncertain (specially the first one; see *DUL* 758; see also commentaries to the main editions, with references). When understood to mean "glaze", "enamel", the passage has even been seen as reflecting very ancient Syro-Palestinian mortuary rites, which involved modifying the skulls of the dead. Other interpretations understand it as laying a special offering alongside the head of the deceased; as some scholars consider the offering to be a glass or ceramic vessel, parallels in I millennium BCE Phoenician funerary rituals have also been proposed. On funerary practices and ideology in the Phoenician world, see e.g. RIBICHINI 1987; 2003; 2004; for Ugarit, see below.

"And one thing further I will say:
Bows are for warriors.
Do women hunt now?"

Cultural constructs of gender

This passage explicitly mentions differentiated gender roles. What began as a common cultural distinction between the human and the divine (by means of the opposition between the categories of mortality and immortality) ended with a differentiation (transversal to the former one, since it affected equally human and divine beings[4]) between what is masculine and what is feminine[5] (under the criterion of warfare and hunting, domains that are appropriate for men – warriors, hunters – and inappropriate for women[6]).

Therefore, knowledge of some of these literary (or, if preferred, mythico-epic) traditions that simultaneously include and extend the cultural stereotypes of the community that made them their own, gives us the possibility to study, based on texts, (even if not always as clearly as in the passage just discussed) some of the constructs of gender prevalent at that time and place. Stories like this even allow us to extract those that can be used to define, at the ideological level, the domain and features of the male, the characteristic forms of masculinity (the complex and discussed study of which, highly topical now[7], has already been extended to ancient Near Eastern disciplines[8]). So, we will try not

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4 The intersection between constructs of masculinity and other cultural or social differentiations of a different kind (including some that it would seem possible to identify, such as those relating to age) are difficult to study in Ugaritic literature, as it will be evident throughout this article. With respect to age, the preserved mythic and epic narratives almost always portray all their protagonists as acting like adults (including Aqhat, whom some have considered to be an adolescent, although he is not described or presented as one). The concept of "son" in these mythical and epic traditions did not invoke infancy (a son as a "child") but rather family and society (a son as an "heir"). The mythical references concerning the concept of age are much more relevant, although always limited.

5 As we shall see below. To begin with, the text does yet allow us to appreciate the existence of two contrasted genders – masculine and feminine – within the narrative, allowing us to use – not only as a functional starting-point but also as a potential *emic* concept – the concept of masculinity as a cultural category to be explored further in these sources. From this aspect, Ugaritic traditions are in agreement with what appears in the majority of ancient Near Eastern societies, which distinguish two genders (and two sexes) with rare exceptions (which have attracted attention: see e.g. the proceedings of the *Rencontres Assyriologiques* in 2002 or 2008). See now e.g. BUDIN 2015a; 2015b (esp. n. 9) with references.

6 Note how in the passage the roles and ways of being a male are defined *per se*, whereas female roles and acts are defined (indeed limited) in opposition to attributes and actions linked to masculinities. See below.

7 As a general introduction to studies on masculinities, see e.g. FLOOD et al. 2007 or KAHN 2009 (and, as examples of more specialized treatments, e.g. WHITEHEAD - BARRET 2001 and WHITEHEAD 2002; see also e.g. GILMORE 1990 for an extensive view of masculinities as cultural concepts; compare e.g. the contributions in BERGER et al. 1995 on their construction and problems; for more specialized bibliography, see e.g. FLOOD 2008). For masculinities in archaeology, see especially ALBERTI 2006 (and NELSON 2006 for the general of gender studies in archaeology; or BOLGER 2008 in ancient Near Eastern studies). See now ZSOLNAY 2017 for masculinities in the ancient world.

8 See for example, the workshop *The construction of masculinities in ancient Mesopotamia,* that was held in the "Sapienza" University of Rome the 5th of February, 2015 (shortly after this talk was presented, http://www.lettere.uniroma1.it/node/13353). The seminar included a discussion on ALBERTI 2006 (as well as a lecture on method by A. Garcia-Ventura, "Feminism, Gender Studies & Forms of Masculinity:

so much to sketch the *actual* situation or functions of men in the society being studied, but rather to understand the creation and ideological definition of masculinities in that society (in our case, in the Levantine society or, rather, societies) through the literary traditions that both reflect and are a model of the distinction, relation and perception of gender. Thus, we will always be dealing with cultural models, social constructs[9].

The context, bias and validity of information from Ugaritic literature

Apart from biblical texts, Ugaritic literature is the most suitable textual source from the ancient cultures of the coast of Syria and Palestine for conducting research on such a complex field as gender studies[10]. It opens the door to understanding the constructs of gender in the "Canaanite" world – otherwise difficult to study since, besides the texts from Ugarit and the Bible, the preserved writings produced by the ancient peoples of the Syro-Palestinian coast are mostly limited to inscriptions until classical times. Even worse, not very many inscriptions have been preserved, they vary little, and are often laconic and almost always formulaic. These are, for example, the fundamental characteristics of Phoenician epigraphy[11], which explain why initiative for the study of gender in this field has been shifted to specialists in material culture[12].

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some thoughts about their relationship"; about the same time, she published some other specific works, see GARCÍA-VENTURA 2014). Understandably, the first studies on gender in the ancient Near East did not focus on research into masculinities, but the subject was present early on (see e.g. the proceedings of the 47ème *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, PARPOLA – WHITING 2002, dedicated to "Sex and Gender", where there was a session on "Masculinities"). Nowadays, there have already been good examples of sophisticated approaches: see e.g. the intersection of studies on masculinities and "body studies" in BERLEJUNG et al. 2012; gender "otherness" in PELED 2016; or masculinities as negotiated constructs in ZSOLNAY 2017. See also NISSINEN 2014 (on biblical masculinities) and now the works of N'Shea (on masculinities in the Neo-Assyrian empire), e.g. N'SHEA 2016, 2018.

9 As is evident from its tone and scope, this work does not claim to be compared with the studies mentioned in previous notes (examples of a type of research that, as has been seen, require the careful use of specific methodologies) but instead intends to show, above all, the possibilities of Levantine literature as a basis for further and more specialised studies of this kind.

10 As happens, for example, in the not less complex discipline of the history of religions. In much the same way as in studies of the history of religions, in fact, in gender studies also, the Ugaritic texts are often used in combination with biblical texts, see e.g. MARSMAN 2003. See the following note.

11 Although, in spite of everything and by virtue of its nature as an internal source, Phoenician inscriptions would allow interesting approaches from a gender studies point of view. See e.g. AMADASI GUZZO 1988, who showed, in a pioneering way, the possibilities that inscriptions have of providing information about the women of Carthage (see now her article in this volume). Several years later, FERJAOUI 1999 followed the path. LANCELLOTTI 2003 also included these sources in a comprehensive study on Phoenician woman, noting the possibilities given by female personal names in the inscriptions and the family relationships that they revealed. Also JIMÉNEZ 2006 made partial use of epigraphy to examine the role of women in the Phoenician-Punic cult. In a similar way, see now FERRER – LAFRENZ 2016.

12 Of most importance are the studies by A. Delgado and M. Ferrer, who make extensive use of both (post)feminist and postcolonial criticism, instruments from the "theory of agency" and approaches from identity studies (frequently considering funerary practices, food culture or daily life, especially at the domestic and family levels): see e.g. DELGADO 2005; 2008; 2010; DELGADO – FERRER, 2007a; 2007b; 2011; 2012a; 2012b (see now also DELGADO 2016a; 2016b; DELGADO – RIVERA 2018; FERRER – LAFRENZ 2016). We must also mention the joint works by A. García-Ventura and M. López-Bertran, who incorporate similar perspectives (adding to the gender approach the application of embodiment

The entire *Tale of Aqhat*, preserved almost completely in several tablets, is especially suitable for a commentary from the perspective of gender[13]. Its content does not represent the mentality or the cultural constructs of a small social group at a very limited time and place. It is true that this text belongs to a group of narratives written down by a high official in the court of Ugarit (the scribe Ilimilku[14], possibly writing in the 14th cent. BCE[15]) reflecting the concerns peculiar to the Syro-Palestinian élites of that time. But they collected together what must have been earlier oral traditions, revised and reworked in various ways[16], that must have survived, in various versions, until very late on. The survival of these traditions over time is confirmed by the echoes of the story of Aqhat that can still be seen in the Hebrew Bible[17], which also proves there was knowledge of this narrative from north to south in the whole coastal area of Syria and Palestine[18].

This importance proves, also, that a story such as the Tale of Aqhat was not uniquely a royal court or a classroom composition that reflected and promoted the partial viewpoint

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theories, see e.g. GARCÍA-VENTURA – LÓPEZ-BERTRAN, 2013a) in a series of studies on Phoenician-Punic music: GARCÍA-VENTURA – LÓPEZ-BERTRAN 2008; 2009a; 2009b; 2012; 2013b; 2014; see now 2016; 2018. It is also worth noting other similar approaches to Punic material culture by López-Bertran, e.g. LÓPEZ-BERTRAN – ARANEGUI 2011; LÓPEZ-BERTRAN 2012 or 2014 (see now 2016; 2017). On García-Ventura's work on masculinities in the ancient Near East, see above n. 7. With a different approach, there has also been interest in women in Phoenician society (and also in their colonial and funerary bias) by A. Mª Jiménez Flores, as already mentioned: see JIMÉNEZ 2002; 2006; 2011 (also her collaborations with Mª C. Marín and Mª Belén, who have also studied the feminine dimension in Phoenician-Punic religion, see e.g. MARÍN et al. 2010).

13 Proof of that was the talk by S. L. Budin, "Gender in the «Tale of Aqhat»", in the congress *Gender, Methodology and the Ancient Near East* (held in Helsinki at almost the same time as this talk, 26th-28th of October 2014, as a continuation of the workshop held in Ghent during the *Rencontre Assyriologique* of 2013; the meeting was in its turn a further testimony of the vibrant activity on gender studies in recent ancient Near Eastern research, see now SVÄRD – GARCIA-VENTURA 2018; also BUDIN et al. 2018). Budin has published a great deal on gender in the ancient Near East (see recently e.g. BUDIN 2015b, where she already discusses some passages of the text of Aqhat, p. 40, and BUDIN 2015a, both cited above). During the final revision of these lines we were able to consult the abstract of Budin's lecture in the Helsinki meeting and include some quotes in this text (as BUDIN 2014); see now BUDIN 2018.

14 Who "signed" his transcription. It has been noted, not unreasonably, that this should make us speak of a "version by Ilimilku" of these narratives. See for example DE MOOR 1971 or WYATT 1998, who stress this in the very title of their editions and studies (see now WYATT 2015).

15 However, see the proposal by DALIX 1998 on a later date for some of the Ugaritic archives and for the tablets written by Ilimilku (even though this date is disputed: cf. e.g. FREU 2004 or 2006, esp. 60-61).

16 On the weight of orality or literacy on the myths of Ugarit, see e.g. already XELLA 1991a. On Ilimilku's role, between mere transcriber or editor and a real author, see e.g. KORPEL 1998 or now WYATT 2015. On Ugaritic scribes as inheritors and transformers also of their neighbouring literary traditions, see WATSON forthc.

17 A Daniel that has to be the one whom we have seen before, the father of Aqhat in the Ugaritic tale, appears in Ez. 14: 14, 20, with the same spelling as in Ugaritic, mentioned alongside Noah and Job as an example of a just man; in Ez. 28: 3 he reappears as an example of a wise man. Also, he seems to be mentioned in the Book of Jubilees (4: 20). This means that he was a famous ancestor in Syro-Levantine tradition. Interestingly enough, the passages in Ez. 14 suggest that he suffered for his offspring. See e.g. BORDREUIL 2007, with references.

18 An attempt has been made to see that wider geographical background in this very text; see e.g. MARGALIT 1981.

and exclusive ideology of the group governing at that time, a narrative as restricted and ephemeral as those rulers. Not that the tale was not, to use a technical term, largely "elitocentric" and, of course, markedly "androcentric": the story must have been especially popular in the courts of Syria and Palestine and, together with many other preserved compositions of similar content (written down by Ilimilku or other officials of the Ugaritic court) undoubtedly reflect the interests and preoccupations of their class (starting from their very selection as narratives deserving attention and to be preserved in writing). This is revealed by most of the themes that are evident in the main mythical and epical texts (power and its legitimacy, the king and the nature of the monarchy, dynastic continuity and social stability, the importance of the official and funerary cult) which introduces an obvious bias also from the perspective of gender (given the strict patriarchal mechanisms and order that, as we shall see, are easily observable in these societies). In other words: all these traditions reach us through a privileged minority that was mostly masculine. What this fact does not imply is the restriction of the narrations (especially as an active element in the creation of a group culture, in this case a gendered group culture) to the social privileged stratum, since undoubtedly knowledge of the stories that we are going to study openly transcended those limits of class (although possibly in somewhat different versions and alongside other narratives that are unknown to us). Therefore, they are a valid witness to some of the traditions shared by most of the people of Ugarit and, very probably, by a large part of the peoples of Syria-Palestine during the Late Bronze Age (around the second half of the II millennium BCE); and they are the immediate precedents of the traditions shared by their Levantine heirs in the Iron Age.

On the other hand, we should stress that the traditions collected in Ugaritic literature, in the myths and legends of Ugarit, are far from representing a complete picture of the beliefs and a reliable reflection of all the practices of the peoples of the area at that time. And not only because of what we said about its biased selection and formation or its fragmentary nature[19], but for its own character as a mythological account. This condition is especially important when we look more deeply into what we perceive as manifestations of religion – which, as in most cultures of antiquity, in reality permeated the whole life of an individual and his group in very different ways – since the mythology known and shared by the community was only one part of its collective view of the supernatural, related in a complex way with the actual ritual world and, in general, with the very diverse practices and beliefs simultaneously active in the whole of society. In other words, mythical literature (and the texts we sometimes classify as epic, which in Ugarit, however, was not intrinsically different) provides evidence of a particular sphere (the sphere of myth), different from what, for example, is seen in the cultic texts preserved in the city (reflecting a real and daily cult, but mostly official and connected especially

[19] Features that are common in ancient Near Eastern documentation in general, made worse by the usual lack of contextual information: the documents tend to take for granted the knowledge shared by the community, including the most basic which, therefore, often escape us – nor do we get any help from texts devoted to conceptual discussions or precise definitions on these matters, since they are unknown in the ancient Near East. These difficulties even apply in periods and places that have a large number of texts; see e.g. SUTER 2012. Incidentally, in her exploration of forms of masculinity in early Mesopotamia, this scholar makes use of one more source: the images produced by these cultures. Iconography, while complex (and beyond the scope of this article) is indeed fundamental in adding relevant material to these studies.

with the king[20]) or from what was characteristic of more ordinary people in their daily lives (common practices and beliefs for which there is much less evidence in the texts). This difference of spheres, documented unequally, must always be kept in mind in order to avoid, in particular, the knowledge of a tradition or viewpoint being taken as proof of a single existing reality – especially when we are moving in territory dominated by quite fluid concepts, where superpositions and contradictions are not rare, not to mention the coexistence of various points of view and alternative responses[21].

In any case, all this does not diminish the value of these traditions in the type of study we are now undertaking. The weight of myth as a basis of culture and the resulting formative value of its transmission make extremely relevant what these texts display about the construction and extension of gender stereotypes in the societies of the Levant at that time – a crucial space and time in the formation of ideas and cultural forms of perception in part still operative.

Masculinity as paternity: the importance of being a father (of sons)

In fact, right from its beginning, the story of Aqhat reveals a fundamental aspect in the characterisation of a particular model of masculinity. It is an idea that fulfils what we have just said: although especially important for the royal protagonist of the first part of the story (king Daniel) it is not portrayed as a simple model for royalty or for a specific social class. Rather, it appears as an ideal with a universal vocation that must have been shared, by most of those forming part of society at the time, affecting at least those who, as the text shows, were or wished to be heads of a house or family group. It concerns the extreme importance accorded to the fact of being a father. More specifically: the importance given to the fact of being a father, within the story, by the male protagonist himself. An importance that even causes him, in the absence of progeny, the utter anguish that constitutes the motivation of Daniel's character in his story. As in many highly patriarchal societies[22], in these ancient Syro-Palestinian traditions also, one of the

[20] In reality, the so-called Ugaritic cultic texts (or "rituals", in its broad sense) form a not entirely homogeneous group of texts connected with the official liturgy, divination technics and other specific practices (see the relevant chapters in WATSON – WYATT 1999, especially MERLO – XELLA 1999). See the classic translations by Caquot and de Tarragon into French (CAQUOT – TARRAGON – CUNCHILLOS 1989); by XELLA 1981 into Italian; by DIETRICH – LORETZ 1988; 2001 into German; by DEL OLMO 1992 into Spanish (with an English version: DEL OLMO 1999; see now 2014) and the translation by PARDEE 2002 in English – it is worth pointing out also its French version, PARDEE 2000, which, together with PARDEE 1988, forms the modern official edition of the texts.

[21] That was typical of the strong creative dynamism of these polytheistic societies (whose pantheon and mythology were also a reflection of the complexity, specialisation and stratification of their communities, whose implications affect obliquely the whole set of cultural constructs). On this see e.g. BRELICH 1966 (esp. 25-28). On the specific problem of the study of Ugaritic religion, see XELLA 2007; for guidance in this topic, see again the various relevant chapters in WATSON – WYATT 1999 (especially WYATT 1999b); for its contextualization in the region, see e.g. DEL OLMO 1998b (a thoroughly updated version of DEL OLMO 1995, in Spanish).

[22] Remaining aware how patriarchal (and androcentric) our own modern western society still is and that our own cultural constructions (including stereotypes of gender and concepts of masculinity) are still part, as in the societies that we are studying, of the ideological framework supporting it, it is worth taking great care in not projecting or perceiving current models (even less stereotypes taken as "universals") in the object being studied. On this see, in archaeology, e.g. SKOGSTRAND 2011 (already SKOGSTRAND 2010) as well as ALBERTI 2006.

fundamental ways (almost the obligatory way) to conform correctly to a suitable model of masculinity and to affirm one's individual identity in this respect (since it affects how the character actually feels, suffering directly the frustration of not matching the model)[23] was for its male characters to become fathers.

Of course, this does not mean that to produce progeny was perceived exclusively by men as an imperative. Here there is no model of behaviour based on contrast: the story, quite simply, starts off from a marked masculine perspective[24] (as well as a court setting). In fact, the protagonist at the beginning of the story of Aqhat is a man, a king without descendants, who implores the gods to grant him one. It is not by chance that the other great Ugaritic story with a "human" protagonist, the Legend of king Kirta (which is therefore sometimes considered, alongside the text of Aqhat, to be an example of Canaanite "epic", although this does not mean that in fact there is any difference in their composition, devices and tone from the "mythical" literature in which it is usually included) also has the same motive at the beginning: the search for progeny by the protagonist[25]. Daniel and Kirta share the same conflict, the same necessity: they need a son. The story adopts their point of view (and consequently a masculine perspective that was typical of relevant men within their communities).

And then, undoubtedly, such a desired child had to be a son, a male descendant: if the very way in which this is stated was not clear enough, we shall see how, further on in the story, a daughter of king Daniel will appear who, in spite of her virtues, does not fill in any way the vacuum created by the absence of a son[26]. This essential chain, from father to son, from male to male, seems to be expressed (by means of a formal parallelism, but with implied content that is significant in the final term) in a curious passage in the story of Kirta in which, in a description of the king's offspring, the males are called "sons of Kirta" (i.e.: of their father) and the females "daughters of Hurray" (i.e.: of their mother)[27].

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[23] Although, of course, we will not deal with the real problems of combining the concepts of identity and gender, nor the additional problems of sexuality and gender, we shall see how the text studied here lends itself to explore all of them. As an introduction to these matters, see e.g. MESKELL 2001; JOYCE 2004; GELLER 2009.

[24] The perception of this perspective and its changing nature throughout the account (moving from masculine to feminine control, to the interaction of both and its final synthesis?) seems to form, as per her abstract, the nucleus of the study by BUDIN 2014. See now BUDIN 2018.

[25] It has been suggested that in the passages in which Kirta recounts his problems in obtaining descendants (KTU 1.14 I 10-30) there is some sort of parallelism between the ideas of "wife" and of "mother" (MARSMAN 2003: 208) which would imply that a wife *had* to be a mother in order to be considered as such. Although this interpretation of the terms is not clear, in any case it would not be a symmetrical equivalence between the concept of "male as a father"; once again, in its utilitarian definition, it would exhibit a markedly male perspective. On the other hand, the text could reflect the existence of several royal wives in courts at that time, or at least the existence of concubines, for whom there seems to be evidence also in the Phoenician world (*CIS* I 6011). However, in the Phoenician period and perhaps also earlier, monogamy must have been the norm among ordinary people.

[26] It is not clear whether this daughter, Pughat, had already been born when Daniel asked for progeny at the start of the narrative; but it is clear that she existed when the King's son died and that her presence did not prevent her father from despairing.

[27] *KTU* 1.15 III 23-24. In spite of what has been said, it is not worth using too broad a brush. Here the formal parallelism seems to rely on an ideological background that clearly discriminates the feminine element in the line of succession (i.e. with patrilineality assumed); however, only slightly earlier in the tale, as a narrative device, the account anticipated a fact of the story (the final protagonism of Kirta's

This confirms the society presented in the tale (and so the one behind the text) as being strictly patrilinear and strongly patriarchal, from the very bases of family order and hierarchy. It is clear that the presence of a male heir was particularly necessary for the royal house, for the ruling dynasty; but it is also obvious that it was no less necessary for any house or family, for any father in Daniel's situation. This direct presence of house and family in references of this type also reveals the strong link that existed in these communities between individual identity –in this case, the identity built on the male paternity of males – and the identity of the group – the identity of the family or home that accepts and incorporates the individual.

The presence of an heir being understood as essential for any home or family is immediately obvious in the story since Daniel explicitly states why he needs a son, what a father was hoping for from a future descendant. These requirements are not presented as particularly royal or dynastic duties, but as social obligations valid for any heir, for every future head of a family. A father needs a son (*KTU* 1.17 I 26-33 and par.):

> "to set up a stela for his divine ancestor,
> in the sanctuary the emblem of his clan;
> to send his spirit into the earth,
> to protect his tomb from the dust;
> to shut the jaws of his detractors,
> to drive away those who turn against him;
> to hold his hand in drunkenness,
> to carry him when he is full of wine;
> to eat his share in the temple of Baal,
> and his portion in the temple of El;
> to plaster his roof on a muddy day,
> to wash his clothes on a filthy day."

In this description (which sometimes has been called a portrait of "the ideal son", or of "filial piety") it is evident, in a clear and direct way, that the reasons for such a need for progeny are related, at the ideological level, to the social presence and continuity of the family. A son is needed to carry out an obligatory series of duties: he is responsible for family rites and symbols, the care of his father's possessions and the remains of father and its ancestors, of the good name of them all… In effect, they form a condensed and representative expression of the cultic and funerary obligations of the group, of the household as an integral part of society. Some of these "social functions" of a good son may seem somewhat shocking, such as the one saying that he must hold his father's hand and support him when he is drunk. However, through other texts (from both Ugarit and the neighbouring Levant) we know that this refers to specific communal ceremonies[28] in which the head of the family had to consume the required amount of wine, until he

youngest daughter, after the bad behaviour of her brothers) in apparently the opposite way: the god El seems to affirm that he would end by giving primogeniture to the youngest of the king's daughters (*KTU* 1.15 III 16). The conserved text does not allow us to see what really happened at the end and what the real implications of El's words were.

[28] It is probably the famous *marzeaḥ,* as vocalized in biblical texts, repeatedly the subject of controversial research, see e.g. ZAMORA 2009; in general, see ZAMORA 2005, with references. See now AMADASI GUZZO – ZAMORA 2018.

reached a ritualized drunken state. Therefore, the "good son" had to assist his father in such ceremonies (and, in turn, perform them when he took his place) so that it was a serious omission not to perform them correctly (as, in a complex but still evident way, seems to be reflected in the famous biblical episode of Noah's inebriation with the later curse against Cham, the father of Canaan, and against his descendants[29]). In this way, also, a series of references is evoked that endorse the need to respect and obey one's father, and which therefore reaffirm his authority.

This direct and obligatory (and therefore hierarchical) relationship of the son to his father strongly supports, as we have said, the patrilineal basis of the continuity of the family – and the resulting patriarchal structure of the whole of society. Given its important function in the service of continuity, it is an extremely conservative and persistent construct, which is why it is not surprising that it survived among the Phoenicians of the I millennium, whose inscriptions often reveal the ostentation of long chains of filiations[30] almost entirely patrilineal[31]. As we shall now see, this ideology of the father-son

[29] Gen 9: 18-27. Although the crime committed by Cham, in the final version of the story, is often interpreted sexually (at least in terms of modesty, although it has even been taken as a reference to incest), his unusual statement, the connection with Canaan and the shared theme and motifs with preserved extrabiblical examples indicate a possible original reference to the failure to care for his father in his drunken state according to Canaanite traditions. See e.g. ZAMORA 2005, with references.

[30] In Phoenician royal inscriptions, it sometimes seems that the existence of an especially important ancestor leads to extending filiations so that they are mentioned (more than likely for reasons of legitimacy). This is noticeable in Sidonian (votive and funerary) inscriptions of what is therefore called the "Dynasty of Eshmunazar" (*KAI* 13-16, 6th-5th cent. BCE) since they go right back to that ancestor. One of its kings, Bodashtart, does so by showing off his relationship with Eshmunazar as his grandson – without mentioning his father, who was probably not the first-born and therefore was not a king – and in a series of inscriptions insisting on the "legitimacy" of his own son (a peculiarity that shows both the need and the desire to conform to the patrilineal ideal as well as the problems of legitimacy that not doing so entailed). When inscriptions occur singly, it is not always clear if there was a similar intention of showing off links with a relevant ancestor, but the sheer length of some family chains seems to suggest this; for example, another document from the area of Sidon, the so-called Baalshillem inscription (*KAI* 281, 5th cent. BCE.) is almost entirely composed of a patrilineal succession of four generations of kings. (On these documents, see e.g. ZAMORA 2008, with references). Displays of similar sequences outside the royal families are easily found in the Phoenician West, especially where there is a large number of votive inscriptions, as in the *tophet* of Carthage (the sanctuary notorious for its infant sacrifices); in the names of those making offerings, some chains of filiation seem to go back, in a similar way, to ancestors who held public office – even if others simply seem to display the memory of family generations, their antiquity and their members. (See for example the inscriptions related to the office of the *miqim elim*, ZAMORA 2017).

[31] The large amount of documents from the *tophet* allows us to appreciate the appearance of exceptions or unusual features in strictly standard patrilineality: occasionally, mothers are mentioned in the chains of filiations. The assumption that this is rare has led to the explanation of this use of the matronymic as a sign of the lack of a recognised father: such women would be illegitimate, or even the result of sacred prostitution (which is, of course, an outdated approach, see e.g. BUDIN 2008); see e.g. the summary by LANCELLOTI 2003. Instead, it is taken as normal that the patronymic was replaced by mention of the husband in very many funerary inscriptions when the dead person is a woman – which therefore gives her an identity as a wife rather than a daughter. This fact, habitual in patriarchal societies, is here consistent with its context since, in this way, the identity of the dead woman's family was expressed: in effect, her genealogy makes her appear as perfectly integrated into her group, into her husband's household (since, otherwise, her belonging to her father's family would have been emphasized; in the strict application of this formula, women with a patronymic would therefore still be unmarried).

relationship, the root of patriarchal society, rested on solid personal (or psychological if you wish) bases since for the individual it supposed the only hope for alleviating and overcoming the terror of death.

The male as responsible for the family (its ancestors and its patrilineal continuation)

Particularly prominent in this list of filial duties (which, let us not forget, are those that, in these traditions, justify the imperative need for having male heirs) is the presence of actions that a son has to perform not only during his father's lifetime, but also, after his death. In fact, it is possible to understand them all as funerary or in connection with that sphere[32]. This is clear in some cases (the references to the father's remains) and possible in others (it has been proposed, for example, that the final parallelism does not allude to the father's house and clothes but to his tomb and shroud). Even in the less obvious references, some have tried to see a funerary aspect in the ceremonies mentioning the ritual consumption of wine (whose drinking participants, in another mythical story, once they were intoxicated, seem to be compared with the dead, with those who descend into the earth). Furthermore, some of the other actions mentioned could be funerary, such as the consumption of food in sacred contexts, which has been compared with the Mesopotamian custom of feeding the dead. Indeed, in ancient Near Eastern societies at that time there seems to have been quite a widespread idea of death as a transition to a sad and filthy subexistence (which was spent, as is often envisaged in societies that bury their dead, in a dusty and muddy, dark and foul-smelling underworld) where the dead suffer hunger and thirst. These needs had to be satisfied, at least in most of Mesopotamia and Syria, by libations and offerings of food made by their descendants[33]. Their absence or their neglect (hence the importance given to remembering ancestors, preserved in the bosom of the family) meant condemning the individual to eternal suffering or utter annihilation. Thus, personal anguish was redirected to the protection and survival of the family group, uniting in the continuity of the household all forms of a prolonged existence *post mortem*. Although it is not entirely clear how some of these practices operated in Syria and Palestine in the II millennium and how exactly they continued into the I millennium, the fundamental lines of this ideology can be clearly seen in the material and textual displays peculiar to the mortuary and funerary rituals in the area in both periods[34].

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[32] Which has made this passage (and its intertextual relations) a favourite topic of research (and also often of polemic); see e.g. HEALEY 1979; POPE 1981; DE MOOR 1985; LEWIS 1989: 53-71; or HUSSER 1995. For its relationship also with the *marzeaḥ* (already mentioned), cf. e.g. PARDEE 1996. For further details and bibliography, see e.g. ZAMORA 2005, 2009; 2011.

[33] On this type of offering in Mesopotamia, see e.g. TSUKIMOTO 1985. These practices are usually also interpreted as the particular manifestation of a fairly common anthropological response: the attempt to keep the dead person in his world, satisfied and therefore appeased, preventing his return to the world of the living. However, it should be noted that in Ugarit, this tendency is counteracted by a series of positive values ascribed to dead relatives and for a general closeness and familiarity with the ancestors that resulted in including them in the life of the group. See e.g. XELLA 1987b: 132-133, 136-137. On the positive or negative condition of ancestors, see the classic study by NEWELL 1976. On the problem of the Rephaim see below.

[34] Some prove to be excellent examples of how a different material culture could reflect an essential ideological continuity. The burials in Ugarit in the Bronze Age correspond to an inhumation ritual. The dead (at least in the city) were deposited in collective family vaults, requiring a lengthy process of

To summarise: the literary tradition accepted and perpetuated a masculine construct, the central element of which consisted in perpetuating oneself and one's house through a male heir. This element was firmly based on the search for attenuating and overcoming the inevitable mortal destiny of an individual. This manifested itself in the fulfilment of a series of social (cultic, funerary) obligations connected in turn with the family, which the males, in a hierarchical structure, dominated and represented in succession. In this way, the group (and with it, the whole of society) retained its ideal structure along rigid parental lines that were strictly patriarchal (always at the ideological level, but evidently with its roots in social life at that time).

Conception as the fruit of masculine action

Once again, the Legend of Aqhat allows us to continue investigating further this vision of gender, since it ascribes in various ways prerogatives of differentiated action – continuing the pronounced male point of view already noted. In the story, the actual granting of the desired son is left to two male gods: the god El and, as a mediator, the god Baal. That is: a masculine heir at the hand of the father and creator god (as also happens in the story of Kirta) and thanks to the god at the head of the pantheon and the personal patron of the male petitioner (in case there remained any doubts about their credentials and the mechanism in which they worked). The certainty of the arrival of a son happened after various ceremonies were carried out (which seem to include an incubation or ritual dream by Daniel) with absolutely no fecundity or fertility ritual that would involve the mother or other women (or at least introduce the mere concept of maternity). Neither, at this moment is there any intervention or mention of goddesses[35], who only feature in the final part of the process (when the Kotharot finally appear, protective deities of pregnancy

preparing the corpse, with later manipulations of its remains and the collection and transfer of its bones inside the vaults. These vaults showed a close relationship of the living with the dead, since the houses of the living were built over the tombs of the dead, forming a whole to which both sets belonged as part of the same domestic space (since they were part of the same household) which made it easy for the livings to make frequent visits and tend the funerary space and its occupants, and for the dead to communicate with the living and protect them (see, again, ZAMORA 2011). Phoenician burials, even in periods and sites where cremation was prevalent, show the same care in handling, collecting and deposition of the remains of a dead person. Even if burials were individual, tombs and necropolis sometimes show groupings and relocations of the remains, which seem to indicate, on the one hand, the existence of family spaces, used in continuity; and on the other hand, care and respect for ancestors, remembered by the group. The remains of offerings related to the burial ritual (and, in some cases, to later visits) also show the same close relationship with the dead (sometimes a relationship that seems to be domestic in nature; see DELGADO – FERRER 2011).

[35] The absence of the goddess Anat is not surprising (in the light of how she is depicted in the account and generally in Ugaritic mythology) but one should consider a possible intervention by Athirat, the mother of the gods, who exhibits her condition of being a mother in other narratives – including the legend of Kirta – but in this context has absolutely no role. Her condition as a mother appears in these texts especially as pregnant and breast-feeding, not as conceiving (see e.g. BUDIN 2015b) whereas her spouse El (as already noted by MARSMAN 2003: 208) is assigned the real ability of creating a new human being. The famous text of "The Gracious and Beautiful Gods" (*KTU* 1.23) shows this division of functions quite clearly (which, in turn, corresponds to a specific perception of fecundity and the reproductive process that we will consider next).

and childbirth[36]). Even the materialization of the wish granted is effected under the action of the male protagonist: the god El grants Daniel strength and vigour, appetite and drive, in order to be the active agent who causes conception in his spouse[37].

In reality, this presentation of reproduction as a prevalently masculine act should not be particularly surprising: as we know, the relationship of fecundity, fertility and generation with a specific gender is an entirely cultural matter (and so variable, both between cultures and within a single culture, both over time and in the same period)[38]. Of interest is that the preference in the story of Aqhat for presenting, through the narrative, such an important protagonism of the masculine sphere in the process of obtaining offspring is in perfect agreement with an ideology that is easily noticeable in many other ancient Near Eastern sources[39]. This is based on a fairly specific division of roles: in the reproductive process, man is the creator, the source of procreation, the active and primordial agent (in the sense of first and principal) for he impregnates in the same way as sees are sown: his seed will be his descendants, his progeny (as is quite clear from the vocabulary used in the area[40]). In this perception of events, the woman is responsible for the role of receiving new life, of making it grow and feeding it (a mother, above all, endures pregnancy and nourishes). This explains why the general ability to create new life is often associated only with the man (unloading onto him also any problems of infertility in the form of impotence, lack of masculine vigour – and so multiplying his possible social worries). Instead, references to complete human reproduction almost always include the woman (adding her potential responsibility in the lack of progeny under the form of sterility – that is, of unproductive barrenness – or an inability to make the life that has been sown grow– with an equivalent frustration and social anguish that is often more difficult to perceive in our sources). What the story of Aqhat basically does is to favour the presentation of what appears to be the genuine creative, seminal process; and devalue everything else (so provoking the – almost – complete disappearance of the feminine element in the reproductive process described).

In this context, therefore, the divine protagonists are not so unusual, since both Baal and El, in their interventions as mediator and creator, fulfil functions consistent with those they have in the other mythical stories, that fit in with the view of the reproductive process

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[36] *KTU* 1.17 II 26-42. Here there occurred, following BUDIN 2014 (see now BUDIN 2018), one of the changes of viewpoint in the story, towards the feminine, a change of perspective that may have continued in the lacunae that then interrupt the text (see also the brief summary of the story and her argumentation in BUDIN 2015b: 40; see now BUDIN 2018). The scholar also notes how unusual it is that the goddesses of childbirth appear, apparently, to bless the sexual union, very much earlier than the actual birth. However, the interpretation of the passage is not clear and, in any case, in terms of structure, it assigns them a much more important role in childbirth (and probably care of the new-born).

[37] *KTU* 1.17 I 33-39. It has been noted that the root in this passage (*mr(r)*; see *DUL*: 569-570) indicating the special blessing that grants a male the strength for conception, is also used in other Semitic languages in connection with combative force (KUTLER 1984: 118) in agreement with a typical expression of ancient Near Eastern masculinity as valour in battle and the ability to reproduce; again, see MARSMAN 2003: 209 (already HOFFNER 1966: 327). See below.

[38] Contemporary research has indeed changed its view regarding the ascription of gender in the sphere of fertility and reproduction (which so many *a priori* concepts tend to entail) in recent years, see BUDIN 2015b: 30ff.

[39] See especially BUDIN 2015b with references.

[40] The same also applies in the Phoenician world, see *DNWSI*: 341-342, *zrʿ*. See below.

already described. They also fit in with the royal theme of the story: note the protection by both gods of king Daniel (and king Kirta, who was also protected by El and Baal) showing among his beneficial abilities the very important one of awarding progeny (ultimately exclusive to El, Baal being an intercessor as he was a more direct royal patron). This mythical relationship certainly reflected and nourished the actual relations of the city of Ugarit and the Ugaritic monarchy with both deities (who were the titulars of the two great temples of the acropolis of the town and were the protagonists in the official dynastic cults). Moreover, the story seems to reflect the real protagonist of the god El as a source of fecundity, since different mythical-ritual texts and specifically ritual texts portray him also actually having that function (therefore, hardly the passivity of an "otiose god" that was sometimes attributed to him, based on his consideration as a minor protagonist in mythical narrative and on an oversimplistic reconstruction of the story in Levantine pantheons).

In any case, it is worth repeating what we stated at the beginning: in these stories we are in the sphere of myth, which is far from providing and representing an accurate and complete picture of the beliefs and practices (even less, everyday practices) of all the people in the region of Ugarit. Already the deities that appear in mythical narratives and the ones that emerge in ritual texts are often portrayed with differing importance or functions. Nor do the deities that feature in personal names (i.e. in the names that families imposed on their members at birth, which to some extent reveal what is sometimes called "popular" or "family" religion) present the same picture. Therefore, in daily life – and especially in less official and more ordinary life – other deities and other rites must undoubtedly have been connected with obtaining progeny. What in any case remains likely is that they did so without subverting the view of the reproductive process (and its distinctive attribution of functions by gender) as presented in the traditional narratives somehow present in the preserved mythical texts.

Competitiveness and masculine social activity: hunting and warfare

Daniel finally knows that his wife's pregnancy will give him an heir, which calms his anxieties (*KTU* 1.17 II 12-14):

> "Now I can sit down and be at ease
> and my soul can rest in my breast"

an expression that is also echoed in biblical texts (cf. Isaiah 9: 5). Although, as we have seen, the intensity of these worries was justified by the transcendent necessity to overcome death in some way, the text also allows us to see in this respect an indication of competition between equals, of rivalry (with at least the need to be equal) with the other members of the family. Joy arrives (*KTU* 1.17 II 14-15):

> "for a son is to be born to me like my brothers
> offspring, like my kinsmen".

Although this competition with other males of the clan or of the whole group is not too obvious, expressions such as this, together with the themes and tone of other mythical texts (above all, the struggle for royalty in the so-called "Baal Cycle", but also several scenes of conflict in other narratives) suggest that, as in other ancient societies, the

psychology of the men at that time was strongly conditioned by a competitive impulse against their counterparts here seen as channelled and expressed through comparison with one's own progeny. So, for a man in the ancient Levant, the absence of a male heir must have been not only worrying for himself and for his family, but also humiliating in front of his family and his group (especially since the responsibility for the act of conception was attributed to him[41] and its failure was a clear sign of the lack of masculine strength).

Next, the poem of Aqhat will show us two spheres of action as exclusively masculine, in which this competitive element seems to be present. Once the son of Daniel, the heir Aqhat, is born, he grows up until he becomes the young prototype of the Levantine hunting hero. As we saw, he practises his abilities with a magnificent bow, the gift of the craft god Kothar. That weapon would provoke the envy (and then the anger) of the goddess Anat, whose promise of immortality is spurned with the lapidary phrase that we have already seen (*KTU* 1.17 VI 39-40):

> "Bows are for warriors.
> Do women hunt now?"

War and hunting were, then, in the imagination of the group (as was the case in so many other patriarchal societies[42]), spheres of activity exclusive to men. There, as we have seen, the ancient Near Eastern masculine ideal could be satisfied by demonstrating manly strength in the same way that it was shown by conceiving descendants, almost like two sides of the same coin. Once again it is not accidental that the two conserved "epic" stories of Ugarit present their heroic protagonists as practising hunting (Aqhat) and warfare (Kirta, who is in command of an army[43] in order to lay siege to the city of Udum

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41 Again, see BUDIN 2015b: 42ff.; see also pp. 45-47, where the author correctly points out that feminine anxiety about the lack of progeny, which is much less evident in ancient Near Eastern sources, must have been no less frustrating or worrying, since the stigma of a woman's barrenness (which for the male, instead, was a socially acceptable way of justifying his lack of progeny) could entail her being replaced and probably marginalized. On the other hand, ancient Near Eastern texts also show how difficult and dangerous pregnancy and childbirth were, with no recognition by themselves or by others of any merit for women (who, if they could avoid it, did not make maternity a preferred element of identity or status).

42 These activities (as is well known; see e.g. HOPKINSON 2007) are central to the construction of certain masculinities (both symbolic and practical) in a large number of ancient patriarchal societies (and also in modern patriarchal societies, either literally or in reinterpretations that often are not very sophisticated). The model of man as warrior and hunter (usually corresponding to the model of woman as defenceless and dependent) serves to emphasize the aggressive and predatory "nature" of the male – and the condition of prey of his opponents: animals in the hunt, enemies in war and women in society. Hence the relevance, for these strongly patriarchal societies, of having a sanction and confirmation in the mythical sphere of such a construct of masculine exclusivity and of extending this construct together with these stories, since this way it took root in the most important ideological bases of the community. On the importance of warriors and warrior culture in the literature of ancient Near Eastern societies (and in particular of the early biblical world) see now SMITH 2014.

43 In the case of Kirta, commanding the army was also one of his basic duties as sovereign, alongside dispensing justice and mediating with the deities. As we have said, royal legitimacy is one of the key themes of the Kirta story, to the point that the very conflict with which the narrative begins, the lack of descendants (even if it was, as we have said, a more extended need and worry) becomes connected (more clearly than in the story of Daniel) with the requisite ability of a monarch to produce an heir and guarantee the continuity of the dynasty (and the stability of the kingdom). Incidentally, note how much

and so get hold of princess Hurray, his future wife –and therefore his instrument to obtain offspring). The rhetorical (and, one could say, already sarcastic in origin) question that closes Aqhat's reply emphasized this (and, being part of a mythical narrative, the fact was also powerfully sanctioned and confirmed to its audience, to the community). Yet again, we do not know whether or not in actual daily life, Ugaritic women practised forms of hunting (the definition and limits of which, furthermore, would be very fluid) or whether they could participate in battles at that time. However, we clearly know that the mythical-epical literature included and transmitted the idea of hunting and warfare as belonging to the masculine sphere within the society which made it its own.

It is worth noting that to link hunting and fighting with males constitutes an independent, active and positive way to define a gender role, a male role. This link being exclusive (in a two-gender culture), it becomes a dependent, passive and negative way to define the other gender's role, the role of females. Their sphere is thus determined and demarcated (basically limited) in opposition to the attributes and actions connected to masculinities.

However, once again, we have to be aware of the complexity of these types of cultural constructs. Notice the paradox in the character whom Aqhat is addressing: Anat, the warrior and hunting goddess by antonomasia. She is the most important female in the Ugaritic mythological pantheon, but she embodies best (better than any other deity in these myths) the essence of warfare and hunting. Also evident is her strong character, often imperious and violent (even the father of the gods is intimidated by her, allowing her to finish off the hero Aqhat) and, to some extent, the tale suggests her competitive nature (when presenting her coveting the hero's bow). However, it seems difficult to consider here, directly, that this is the construction of a model of feminine action. In such cases the exceptional nature of the example of Anat is usually brought up, not only because of her special divine nature – in an argument something like "the (divine) exception proves the (human) rule" – but also by the complex nature of her character, whose inversions of the norm of gender could reflect specific patterns and functions[44].

Alongside all that, in any case, it is also worth remembering the complexity inherent in these types of cultural constructs. When they become distinctive (frequently by the articulation of contrasting categories, as we have seen), they also become perception filters and mental models, which generate their own solutions to difficult cases (increasing its already firm capacity to persist). The presence of features peculiar to one category (in this case, males) in individuals perceived as belonging to another (in this case, females) does not suppose the dissolution or collapse of the systems of oppositions for those undergoing or applying it. Quite the contrary, the system itself helps, in various ways, to understand such cases, preserving criteria and stereotypes.

In other words: the attribution to a feminine character of certain values that are always associated with manliness (strength and command, aggressiveness and competitiveness) would not necessarily constitute the construction of a feminine model that would include them (in this case making the spheres of confrontation and competition possibly part of a women's accepted way of being a female). Rather, they cause the female character to be

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the king values, in a material way, obtaining a wife who would make it possible "to bear offspring for Kirta / a boy for the servant of El": he rejects silver and gold, land and slaves, horses and chariots, in exchange for the young girl Hurray (*KTU* 1.14 VI 16-34).

44 See e.g. SMITH 2013.

seen as having masculine features (since this is how they continued to be perceived) or else as characterised by the same features, but perceived and considered in a different way (by applying a biased viewpoint), thus preserving the stereotype. This mechanism, habitual also in the contemporary world (and therefore also in the androcentric perspectives of modern research) could also apply in the community that shared these traditions. If that were the case, then the mythical character of Anat did not contribute to the construction of a model of feminine behaviour, still less did it reflect it. Very probably, either the goddess was considered as a female who (characteristically and exceptionally) had masculine traits and acted like a male (without being one); or else she was considered under completely different categories. In any case, "Anat's transcendence of this fundamental [gender] boundary is part of the complexity of her character and theology"[45].

Command and government: the (masculine) ideal of a monarch

Anat's the imperious character, her fighting abilities, her immensely aggressive nature, are especially evident in what is called the "Baal Cycle" (also preserved largely by the hand of Ilimilku), which besides its rich content and meanings, largely revolves around a story of theomachy, a struggle between the gods to gain divine royalty. However: in these struggles, Anat, like the other goddesses, takes no part, since domination over families, over a kingdom (even the kingdom of the gods) has to be in hands of a man. The various candidates who confront each other (Baal himself, the ultimate winner; Yam, the god of the sea; although his character and motivations are different, we could even add Mot, the personification of death) or who merely put themselves forward (Athtar, the god discarded because, significantly, he has no wife[46] – and, therefore, not even the possibility of having offspring) are all male deities. Divine royalty (as the ideal of human royalty, which it projects) is therefore male patrimony – peculiar to males with male heirs or the possibility of having them.

As we have already said, this does not exclude that in the actual Levantine courts (and families) there were female characters who actively exercised notorious power: there is evidence for them both in Ugarit and in Phoenician cities[47]. But, at the ideological level, they are queens since they are either the mothers or wives of kings; they never actually acceded to power as such, since the ideal monarchy (the royal ideology) conceived the rule of the kingdom (equal to the rule of the family and the community, implicit in the king's function) as a masculine monopoly.

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45 WYATT 1998: 276, n. 117.

46 To make matters worse, this lack is again expressed in terms comparing him with his equals, overloading the competitive nature of the context: "You have no wife like the (other) gods / nor a maiden like the (other) saints" (*KTU* 1.2 III 23). Shortly before this passage (lines 17-18) certainly a topical expression is used on the removal from office of an unlawful king (who would see his throne overturned and his sceptre broken) which also appears in the famous Phoenician inscription on the sarcophagus of Ahirom of Byblos (*KAI* 1).

47 For example, in Ugarit, we know of the case of Ahatmilku, the powerful wife (and widow) of king Niqmepa, mother of king Ammithtamru II (see e.g. LIPIŃSKI 1981); in Phoenicia, we know the case of Emiashtart (also a powerful widow), both mother and regent of the youthful king Eshmunazar of Sidon (see *KAI* 14). Similar examples can be found in other ancient Near Eastern sources, see MARSMAN 2003.

Heroization of the (male) dead

The story of Aqhat continues with the death of the prince. In line with what was said above on its connection with hunting, Anat finishes him off in the same way that a vengeful huntsman would have: launching over his skull Yatipan, a minor god whom she compares to a raptor and uses like an arrow. In very graphic detail, the story is a "live" retelling of the assassination of the hero, wounded on his head while he is eating, incidentally allowing us to see the peculiar way of understanding the transition towards death reflected in the text: "his soul went out like a gust / like saliva his spirit / like smoke from his nostrils"[48]. The story, which has a new thematic twist and opens to a new female protagonist, describes (after the obligatory scenes of worry, discovery and mourning) the revenge of Pughat, the hero's sister. She is a complex character and there is an intriguing episode which we cannot consider here, since it lies beyond the topic of this paper. We shall only note a couple of more than interesting passages: in order to exact her revenge (to "smite her brother's smiter / kill her sibling's killer", *KTU* 1.19 IV 35) the sister requires the same "vigour" that Daniel had needed to conceive (*KTU* 1.19 IV 32-33), this vigour that, as we saw[49], matched the conceiving and bellicose action of the male. Pughat wishes to receive from her father, through a blessing, the strength that, as we have seen, configures two key elements of the masculine construction. This is possibly why, when she leaves to carry out her violent revenge, she cross-dresses and puts on a disguise (*KTU* 1.19 IV 44-46):

> "Underneath she put on a warrior's clothes,
> she put a knife in its sheath,
> a sword put in its scabbard,
> and on top she put on women's clothes".

Pughat's reception of manly power and her dressing up as a man would then be necessary to perform the direct aggressive actions up to now presented as typical of men. She had to carry them out with clothing and accessories (weapons, instruments therefore of warfare and the hunt) appropriate to the masculine sphere (as Aqhat himself would have said) but retaining her female identity and outward appearance. Even so the passage has given rise to several interpretations[50] which could well be alternatives or simultaneously valid.

The story is interrupted quite abruptly, at the very moment when it seems that Pughat would carry out her revenge with the assassination of Yatipan – probably with the "manly" use of weapons, after having given him drink and leaving him inebriated or unconscious (which connects Pughat with the biblical heroines Jael and, especially,

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[48] *KTU* 1.18 IV 36-37. On how death and afterlife were imagined in these societies, see again XELLA 1987b; 2000.

[49] See above note 37.

[50] Various explanations have been proposed at the strict narrative level as to how Pughat is trying to emulate or disguise herself as Anat (incidentally, the only female figure in the myths to whom the stereotype of warfare/hunting as exclusively masculine does not apply, as we have seen) or making magical preparations; also ideological and compositional interpretations (like the one that BUDIN 2014 seems to propose, seeing in final part of the narrative the "collapse" of male or female perspectives that, until then had alternated or were interrelated in the account). See now BUDIN 2018.

Judith). We do not know what the later destiny of the prince was, which should not have ended with his death. The text had previous narrated her father's concern for recovering his remains because, as we have seen, it was fundamental to give the corpse a proper burial and protect its remains (which in these texts is presented as the direct responsibility of the male heir)[51]. Even more so in this case, since the presentation of Aqhat as a "hero", his description as an extraordinary prince, his intrinsic condition as a character of tradition, entail a special status which such characters acquired after their death and the mortuary rituals.

Indeed, once the prescribed rituals had been performed, the dead who had been important figures for the group (the kingdom, the house) joined a particular community among the dead in the Syria-Palestine of the II millennium BCE: the group of the Rephaim[52]. It has even been proposed that a famous Ugaritic text that invokes them is a sort of epilogue to the story of Aqhat[53]. Although that is not clear, Ugaritic literature provides certain links between joining the Rephaim in the afterlife and having a male descendant. If it were not already evident that to acquire this destiny a man needed a male heir to give continuity to the household and to be responsible for ritual acts, there is more revealing evidence in the story of Kirta. When we finally know that the king would have (masculine) offspring, it states that he could be exalted "among the Rephaim of the earth"[54]. In this way, the king's destiny is anticipated, again insisting on what we have already said: the necessary relationship between the existence of a male heir – entrusted with the mortuary rituals and the funerary cult of his father, keeping and defending the memory of him and his ancestors– and overcoming death. In this case, it acquires an intensity and an added meaning, since the Rephaim seem to have, in fact, a special status among the dead. They are not gods, but are divine beings in some way; they do not enjoy temples or worship like the deities of the standard pantheon, but receive ritual attention and as well as petitions and invocations; they do not appear as omnipotent forces, but perform actions and exert influence beneficial to the living. Ultimately, they are beings whose status is between mortals and gods and so, both by their character and the manner

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[51] In the account, in which the hero's death inverts the ideal sequence of events, it is not the son who deals with his father but the father, Daniel, who sees to preparing his heir's corpse and burying it: "and he took Aqhat from them [= the vultures who had fed on the corpse of the hero] … he wept and buried him…" (*KTU* 1.19: III: 39-40). His sister Pughat, already active in this section of the narrative, does not take care of it. However, her very presence (and also the presence of Thitmanat, Kirta's daughter, at a point in the narrative when the king is close to death) proves that in the moment of passing away, and during the mortuary rites, women played a part, somehow reflected in the literary texts (where in any case, mourning women, for example, appear, *KTU* 1.19 IV 21-22). This is in line with what we know about the actual funerary practices of the period which, as ceremonies of the family group, certainly included the participation of the women of the house. The insistence in the literary traditions on the role of the male heir in the mortuary and funerary sphere seems to be, above all, an additional way of stressing (under the androcentric biases that we have noted) his role as ultimately responsible for the material and ideological survival of the household.

[52] For an overall account of the complex topic of the Rephaim, see e.g. SMITH 1992 or ROUILLARD-BONRAISIN 1999.

[53] *KTU* 1.20-22. For some scholars, the text was actually part of the Tale of Aqhat. It would reveal the funerary rituals intended to include the dead hero among the Rephaim, See e.g. XELLA 1983, 1987b.

[54] That is to say, of the netherworld, *KTU* 1.15 III 13-14. Also, Aqhat was buried "in the cave of the earth-gods" (i.e. the infernal gods), *KTU* 1.19 III 35.

in which they gained it, they are close to the figure of the classical hero, the heroized humans of the Greek world (with whom some scholars have connected them historically)[55].

Accordingly, in the period of these narratives, the community of the Rephaim seems to be composed of dead kings, great warriors (mythical or historical, known or anonymous), characters who were important for the group. Thus, for the community they were heroes, for the family, ancestors. Their memory was preserved and they were turned to (since, if invoked correctly, they would approach out of their dwelling in the netherworld) given their potentially beneficial nature, which is clear from the texts of Ugarit (where their name means, literally, "healers") and therefore in the tradition revealed by these texts[56]. All these heroized ancestors, in their capacities as fathers and forefathers of the group, as rulers and heads of the community and the family, as defenders and benefactors of both, seem to be exclusively males. The few documents in which they appear explicitly (especially the text about the Rephaim mentioned above, also belonging to mythical literature[57]) describe them as kings and warriors, harnessing chariots and horses which they used to leave their infernal dwelling, with various elements once again typical of male stereotypes.

Outside this exclusive club there is almost total obscurity. The absence of textual documentation concerning the relations established by the living with the community of the dead (both, in any case, very near each other and in close contact, since they shared the domestic space as members of the household, in continual intimate communication) prevents us from finding out more about gender in this area[58].

Masculinity and death among the Phoenicians and Punics

It is also difficult, interesting as it may be, to reconstruct the later situation regarding relations between the views of masculinity and of death. Phoenician texts show obvious signs of continuity, in those ideological aspects directly related to social situations that

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[55] Both figures having their roots deep in the Western Mediterranean *koiné* of the Late Bronze Age; see e.g. MERLO – XELLA 2005. For a comparison of the various conceptions of the afterlife in this region, see the various contributions in XELLA 1987a.

[56] Unlike the one pictured in the Old Testament, for example. The problem of the Rephaim and their character in Ugarit (and generally in the Canaanite world of the II millennium), in Phoenicia (i.e. in the Canaanite world of the I millennium) and in the Hebrew Bible is a fundamental element in the discussion concerning the historical existence and gradual change, over time, in either culture, of the idea of a "beatific" afterlife and of a community of the dead that received a cult or were invoked. See already for example POPE 1981 and especially SPRONK 1986 (cf. SMITH – BLOCH-SMITH 1988); also e.g. DIETRICH – LORETZ 1991; VAN DER TOORN 1991; SCHMIDT 1994; XELLA 2000; FISCHER 2005 or the contributions in BERLEJUNG – JANOWSKI 2009.

[57] Or mythico-ritual, as *KTU* 1.20-22 is sometimes described. The text is usually connected with *KTU* 1.108 and 1.161, which supposedly would be their cultic parallels.

[58] Which some have already seen as productive where the textual sources allow it: see for example SCHIAVO 2020, based on Egyptian "letters to the dead", a useful example of explicit communication between the living and the dead (apparently preserving much the same kind of relationship, broadly speaking, that seems to have existed between the living and the dead in Ugarit). In the Egyptian letters, both men and women could be the dead to whom these letters were addressed and the living who sent them (see e.g. SCHIAVO 2013a; 2013b).

also show continuity. As the rigid patriarchal structure remained essentially unchanged, it is not surprising that the inscriptions show that in the Levant occupied by the Phoenicians and in their colonies, there persisted during the I millennium the same concern for descendance and its same relationship with the funerary sphere – with the implicit masculine connection that we have been noting.

A concrete element of continuity is the appearance of the Rephaim, since the term at least continued in use with a meaning somehow similar to the one it had before. Various Phoenician inscriptions on royal sarcophagi (already in the Persian period) include a curse against anyone who might disturb the repose of the dead king (i.e. one who would violate his remains, with the tragic dispersion and resulting oblivion that it could entail[59]), the threat that the desecrator would have neither progeny among the living nor (therefore) a place among the Rephaim, and would (therefore) face the horrible fate that awaits the dead who have not been the object of mortuary rites and have not been given a place of rest[60]. All these epigraphs are royal inscriptions, but in them the kings address anyone, of any status, who might profane the tombs, not only possible equals who might try to usurp their hypogea or re-use the royal sarcophagi. Already in mid-millennium, any man could in consequence become part of the Rephaim (since he risked, with the curse, not doing so). Half a millennium later, in a fairly standard North African mausoleum, the Rephaim are seen to be equivalent to the Latin *manes*[61]. In fact, it is not easy for us to understand what those still speaking Punic in the Roman period in North Africa meant and understood by either term. However, it is evident that, on the one hand the idea persisted that a divine community existed, formed by the dead of the community. On the other, the precise concept of them had to have (and seems to have) varied in the course of the almost one millennium and a half separating the first and final mentions of the Rephaim. The name no longer defines an élite group peculiar to Canaanite societies in the Bronze Age

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[59] Also as a sign of continuity, the same desire to preserve memory of the dead remains, as some funerary inscriptions explicitly state; see e.g. the famous Phoenician inscription found in Athens (*KAI* 53, 5th-4th cent. BCE) which opens by stating that it is a "stela of memory among the living". In fact, the function of funerary stelae (even of those uninscribed) seems to be to memorialize the resting place and the very existence of the dead person – the same function that funerary inscriptions have, which in some famous cases (e.g. *KAI* 1, already cited) warn that they should not be erased (thus preventing oblivion). The references to the memory of a family member, his good name, the memory of his actions, appear in a few other inscriptions. See the textual references e.g. in *DNWSI*: 329 (and 321ss), *skr* (sub *zkr*). On death in the Phoenician-Punic world, see again e.g. RIBICHINI 1987, 2003 or 2004.

[60] In the Sidonian inscription of Tabnit (*KAI* 13, 6th-5th cent. BCE) the curse reads e.g. as follows: "May you not have progeny among the living under the sun nor rest with the Rephaim"; the inscription of his son Eshmunazar (*KAI* 14) insists that violators of the sarcophagus "may have no repose with the Rephaim, may not be buried in a tomb, may have neither sons nor progeny after them". In the inscription of Yehawmilk from Byblos (*KAI* 10, from the mid-5th cent. BCE) the profaner is only threatened with death, but his descendants are also included – which is therefore tantamount to preventing the presence of the dead among the Rephaim, a group that, however, is never actually named (possibly because the inscription is not funerary, but votive, and explicit mention of them would be inappropriate in this context). Note that the word that we translated as "progeny" refers, as we mentioned already, to "seed" and the semantic field of sowing (see *DNWSI*: 341-342, *zrʿ*) in agreement with the concept of reproduction discussed above.

[61] In the mausoleum of El-Amruni (Libya, *KAI* 117, 1st cent. CE), in which there is a text written in Punic and other in Latin; where the Latin inscription says *D(is) M(anibus) SAC(rum),* the Punic text invokes the "divine Rephaim".

(at least as defined in its literary and cultic texts). Instead, it refers to something possibly more extended and diverse, that must have suited the situation of those North African peoples incorporated into the Roman Empire. It is possible that these changes also affected gender relations and roles in funerary ideology. However, it is hard to see how the retention of the patriarchal structure in families and communities would allow a significant reduction of the strong male protagonism (always at the ideological level) that we noted in the cultural constructs of its predecessors.

In order to understand this whole series of historical processes, due to its nature and limitations, the Phoenician and Punic documents available do not seem to allow an approach from gender studies as directly and productively as Ugaritic literature seems to. However, as we have seen, Phoenician inscriptions provide several possibilities to be explored – that will become clearer in the light of what we can extract from the documentation that preceded them. Therefore, the combined study of both sets of sources with the same objective (while aware of their respective limitations), carefully related in historical terms, seems to be a promising path that should be taken, also by specialists in gender studies.

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