RAS SHAMRA NOTES IV:
THE CONFLICT OF BAAL AND THE WATERS

JAMES A. MONTGOMERY
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

(1) The Text

In Syria XVI. 29-45, M. Virolleaud has published a fresh Hebrew text from Ras Shamra. Of the tablet, which is incomplete, he presents but one face containing a single column of text, and in deferring the publication of the reverse states that the subjects it treats are very different from those on the published face. The editor expresses the gist of this new epical fragment, as he interprets it, by the title “La révolte de Košer contre Baal.”

The text may be divided into three acts on both literary and dramatic account. Lines 1-10 present a dialogue between the divine hero and Kuthar; ll. 11-27 pictures in Homeric fashion the combat between the hero and his opponents; ll. 28 ff. constitute an epilogue in which, after a couplet describing the victor’s triumph, Athtart takes the role.

The accompanying plate presents, in Hebrew transliteration, parts one and three in running form. But part two is a specimen of highly developed poetic, perhaps choric, art the most remarkable that has yet appeared in these texts. And accordingly I have attempted to present the at once metrical and dramatic style in tabular form of lines and columns. This exhibit will, I trust, explain itself; the lines are to be read one after the other, the columnar lines being applied to collate the parallel recurrent phrases.

1 Cf. Z. S. Harris’s article in this Journal, 1934, 80 ff., and for parallels in the Hebrew Bible (studied independently of these texts), the several illuminating articles Principal Slotki, e.g. AJSL of Oct., 1933, Journal Manchester Eg. and Or. Soc., XVIII, in both of which the writer lists his earlier titles. In similar vein is the article by Walker and Lund on “The Literary Structure of the Book of Habakkuk,” JBL 1935, 355 ff.

2 Cf. the writer’s Notes III, supra 89 ff., for a similar presentation. For citation of the earlier epical texts I use the following sigilla: A = Syria XII. 193 ff.; B = XIII. 113 ff.; C = XIV. 125 ff.; D = XV. 307 ff. I have again to thank my colleague Dr. Harris for his kind aid in preparing the final copy for the plate.
Some few remarks may be made on this graphic form. By the arrangement proposed the poem divides into two equal strophes of 12 lines each; and the forms are almost wholly correspondent. I had earlier thought of supplying in B 2 the plus contained in B 14, as a clerical omission; but I have avoided the heroic treatment by my attempt at interpretation. Similarly I have speculated whether C 3 should not be supplied before D 15; it must be supplied in thought before the following choric expression. I might compare the actually unsyntactical repetition at Ps. 18:14 from v. 13, of the phrase "hailstones and coals of fire." Also there is unequal balancing of form between the two strophes; C 3 and G 10 stand sole, but their quantum is made up by the parallelistic J 19 and 23, which have no parallel in the first strophe. There is a similar phenomenon in the poetical passage treated by Dr. Harris in his article cited above.

In respect to literary form the variations in this poem constitute an interesting phenomenon. Under E there is the alternation of subjects of the verb, with accompanying grammatical change in gender. Under F there is the progress of action on part of the berserker hero, from "smiting the shoulder" and "the chest" of his two antagonists, to his "smashing the head" of the one and "the forehead" of the other, this along with alternation of verbal tense. I 12 with its introductory precative particle I- is a demand; the parallel simple impf. at l. 20 is statement of fact, the result demanded.

(2) The Myth

The myth is that of the rebellion of the waters personified in the Sea and the River. The genius of the former is Zebûl-Yam, Abode-of-the-Sea, of the latter Tâpiṭ-nahar, Ruler (the Biblical "judge")-of-the-River. The River is the fabulous water-supply

* "Abode," i.e. temple, etc., is a surrogate for the divine name as here and in the earlier texts, Zebûl-Baal; cf. later Hebrew maqâm, etc.

[A striking parallel to the River-Judge is reflected by the legal provisions in cuneiform law whereby disputed cases are presented to the "River-god" for decision by ordeal; cf. e.g., Assyrian Laws, KVI. 1. §§ 17, 24, 25. By an interesting coincidence, the same issue of Syria in which the present text is published illustrates a statuette from Mari inscribed with the name of Idî-dNârum (Pl. ix), with the Sumerian and Akkadian equivalents for "river." The date of the Mari statuettes is Early Dynastic, i.e., cir. 3000 B. C.—E. A. S.]
of the earth; cf. “the River” which “went forth to water the earth” in the Eden story (see Skinner, Genesis, 62 ff.). The myth is similar to that in the first of the Babylonian Seven Tablets of Creation, of the war waged against the gods by Tiamat and her associates; it is not the Biblical story of the Noachian deluge. Compare also the myth of the rebellious Sons of God in Gen. 6, and its later counterpart in Enoch, cc. 6 ff. But the present myth has its independence and serves to illustrate much mythological language of the Hebrew Bible.

Such reminiscences are the following: Ps. 29:3, “The voice of Y. is upon the waters,” and v. 10, “Y. took his seat on the Flood, and Y. sits a king forever.” Ps. 93 is a brief commentary on our myth: “Established is thy throne from eld. . . . The rivers of Y. lift up, they lift up their voice, the rivers lift up their . . . [pounding?] More than the voice of many waters, more glorious than the breakers of the sea, glorious in the height is Y.” Compare the reminiscences of such a divine conflict at Ps. 18:14 ff., e.g.: “thundered in heaven Y., and the Highest gave his voice. . . . And he sent his arrows and scattered them [no immediate antecedent!], and lightnings he shot [?], and confounded them. And were seen the channels of the waters . . . at thy chiding, O Y.” A similar case is found at Is. 17:12 f., where mythological language is inserted into the historical prospect, with an inimitable alliteration and syntax like instances in the Ras Shamra texts:

Ah, the roar of many peoples,
like the roar of seas they roar,
And clash of nations like clash
of mighty waters a-clashing,
Nations like the clash of many waters a-clashing.—
And He scolds it and it flees afar.

Again the singular “it,” perhaps better “him,” without antecedent. (I have followed the Hebrew text, pace the critics, whose classical taste is offended by the repetitions.) Further there is the striking literary reminiscence of the epical 1. 12 at Is. 57:20:

A similar passage of singularly alliterative character appears at Ps. 46:3 f.
The action and the *dramatis personae* of the myth are at first sight obscure, this largely owing to the broken condition of the first four lines. M. Virolleaud, as his title proposes, discovers a contest between the highest Baal and the well known genius of these tablets Kuthar (also with the composite name Kuthar-and-Hasis, as earlier, and with a new epithet Kuthar-şmdm), with Aleyan-Baal arrayed on the latter’s side. But the identity of the unnamed divine speaker in the opening lines is revealed in the response made to him by Kuthar in ll. 7 ff. (as I interpret): “I say to thee [not “go,” with Vir.], to Zebûl-Baal, I repeat to the Cloud-Rider: Thy enemies the Baals thou shalt smash...thou shalt take thy everlasting sovereignty.” Now Zebûl-Baal is no other than Aleyan as the parallelism in A i. 14; iii. 3, proves, while “Cloud-Rider” is also epithet of Aleyan, with B iii. 11, 18; iv. 122; D ii. 7. On the other hand the named opponents are Yam “Sea,” l. 13—Zebûl-Yam, l. 14 etc., and Nahar “River,” ll. 13, 20—Ruler-of-the-River, ll. 15 etc. The former deity is also addressed as ‘z ūm, “Mighty-One-of-the-Sea,” l. 17. It is their waters which “surge up to the throne and seat” of Aleyan Baal, ll. 12, 20. For another name given to this deity in the “scolding of names,” l. 19, see notes below.4

There arises the problem of the identity of the “Baal’s” who are spoken of as “thy (Aleyan’s) enemies,” ll. 8 ff., and whose “death” is referred to at ll. 32, 34, 36. They can be no other than the deities of the deep and their associates whom Aleyan “smashed”; they are not the whole pantheon. Indeed in the combat Baal has his cortège of followers, expressed in parallel phrases, ll. 13, 21 and ll. 15, 23 (for the terms see below).

The third act, ll. 28 ff., with the introduction of Athtart and her “scolding” of Aleyan and crying “shame” on him, raises yet another problem. That goddess has appeared hitherto only in the smaller Tablets, except for a case of disputed spelling (‘ttrt for ‘ttrt?), B ii. 13. Why her umbrage here is not obvious. I can only compare Ishtar’s dismay and rage over the flood in the Gilgamesh Epic, in truly feminine passion. Athtart’s motive may

---

4 Virolleaud, p. 29, discussing the alleged enmity of Kuthar towards Baal makes the point that he is called “Son of the Sea” at B vii. 15; but the interpretation is doubtful, and in any case we can hardly expect logic in these erratic deities.
probably be explained thus: Her complaint, ll. 29 f., is that the destruction of the Sea involves that of the River; it is the fate of the latter that outrages her. I can but suppose that the myth involved lies in the problem facing nature, of which Athtart as goddess of fertility was the peculiar patroness, if the River, i.e. the rivers, are suppressed equally with the Sea. Their punishment and restraint equally with the Sea was necessary in view of the destructive spates, sails, of Syria and Arabia. Their equality is expressed at Ps. 24: 2, “He has founded it [the earth] upon the seas, establishes it on the rivers.” (N. b. the variation of tense just as in the present poem.) Again Ps. 74: 15, “Thou hast dried up ever-running rivers”; for the “drying up” cf. our text at l. 28. The indeterminate noun “river,” whose “channels rejoice the City of God” (a paradisaic expression), Ps. 46: 5, may be the River of our myth. To Athtart’s mind the destruction of the Baals of the deep might also involve the destruction of many, or all, Baals, and lead to the tyranny of one God. This notion may underlie the phrase “a day for the death of Baals,” ll. 32, 34. The Phoenician myths as retailed by Sanchuniathon are full of the envies and contentions of the deities for supremacy.

In the following translation fragmentary vocables will be avoided to be discussed below in the Notes.

(3) Translation

... (5) To the earth will fall my despisers, and to the dust the braves of Ay. (6) From his mouth a word surely came forth, with his lips he addressed him [?]: “And do thou announce (?) - under the throne of Zebûl-of-the-Sea.” And answered Kuthar-and-Hasis: “Surely I speak (8) to thee, to Zebûl-Baal, I repeat to the Cloud-Rider. Behold, thy enemies (9) the Baals, behold, thy enemies thou shalt smite, behold, shalt destroy thy foes. (10) Thou shalt take thy everlasting kingdom, thy rule that is for ages and ages.”

(11) Kuthar-of-the-Bands [?] descends and scolds them by name [liit. their names]: “Thy name, thou!”

(12) Surges, surges the surge of the Sea, the surge of the Sea to his throne, (13) the River to the seat of his rule.

Advances the congregation of Baal. Like an eagle with his fist [fingers] (14) he smote the shoulder of Zebûl-of-the-Sea, on the breast (15) the Ruler-of-the-River.
Advances the band of the congregation of Baal. Like an eagle (16) with his fist he smites the shoulder of Zebûl-of-the-Sea, on the breast the Ruler-of(17)-the-River. “Potentate of the Sea, let its _ _ _ ” [two jussive verbs with subjects].

(18) Kuthar-of-the-Bands descends and scolds them by name: (19) “Thy name, thou, is Aymr, Aymr, Lord [mr]-of-the-Sea, Lord of the Sea.”

(20) To his throne the River, to the seat of his rule! Advances (21) the congregation of Baal. Like an eagle with his fist he smote the skull of (22) Zebûl-of-the-Sea, on the forehead the Ruler-of-the-River. And he suppresses the Sea, (23) raises the earth.

And advances the band of the congregation of Baal. (24) Like an eagle with his fist he smites the skull of Zebûl-of-the-Sea, (25) on the forehead the Ruler-of-the-River. He suppresses the Sea, he raises (26) the earth _ _ _ _ [passage as at l. 17, but verbs in indicative].

(27) Baal collects and dries up the Sea, he dispatches the Ruler-of-the-River. (28) By name Athтart scolds him: “Shame on Aleyan Baal, (29) shame on the Cloud-Rider. Like the conquest [or captivity] of (30) Zebûl-of-the-Sea is the conquest of the Ruler-of-the-River._ _ _ (31) Puts us to shame [?] Aleyan Baal and the Cloud-Rider. (32) A day for the death of Baals _ _ _ ” (34) He answers: “A day for the death of _ _ _ (36) Baals he slew _ _ _ (38) on his head _ _ _ ” (4) He answered her _ _ _

(4) Notes

1. mtt, ḫy appear to represent the verbs “to die,” “to live.”
2. vašši’hm: “let me destroy them,” or “save them”; the latter meaning is supported by Akk. ušēši and Bibl. Aram., the former by Targumic šēši, and this appears more suitable to the theme. [But Shafel from iç should be *ušašti! Do we have here a (secondary?) root ššʔ? E. A. S.]
3. bym mnḥ l’abd: Vir.: “in the sea an asylum for the wanderer.”
   — amr: Vir. offers several choices, of which the verb “to speak” is most likely, cf. B i. 42.
4-5. ḫrbm ṣ ŭm (with parallel unintelligible verbs): if the for-
mer is "sword," with suffix, the latter may be explained from the possible interpretation of 'ēt habbarzel, 2 Ki. 6:5, as "the iron head" of the ax, here used as term of a weapon; see GB Lex. and Stade ad loc. for opposite views.

5. āln(y)(?): "my despisers"; is it to be connected with ʿll, Arab. ʿll?; cf Ps. 10:13, of God's despisers. 'dm ʿay: understanding the second much disputed radical as ʿd, I propose the ppl. of the Heb. root ʿšm, "to be strong." The following vocable is the divine name found below in ʿaymr, the adversary of Baal.

7. ʿyxr: as in other cases of its occurrence (also in ll. 18, 26 below), the value of the second radical is wholly obscure. Vir. interprets as proper name of some "being who receives a mission." But a verb is required, doubtless in the impf. For the balance of the phrase cf. Ps. 29:10, "Y. sits enthroned on the Flood."

8. ʿtn: Vir. as an unknown name. But it is the verb ʿtny, otherwise used in parallelism with verbs "to speak," e.g. B viii. 31.


For the root ʿmṭ cf. Ps. 18:41 (Hif.), with object "enemies" as here.

ṣrtk (ignored by Vir.) as ʿṭbʿk must have the same meaning, "foes," and is identical with Heb. śar; for the fem. abstract cf. ʿebāti, "my enemies," Mic. 7:8, 10.

10. ʿlm as "eternity" also B iv. 42, distinct from ʿlmk at D ii. 12. For "his ʿlm" cf. Eccles. 12:5, used of man. The late hymn in Dan. 5:31 recalls this ancient expression of the divine eternity. N.b. supply of the unessential particle ʿṭ on metrical grounds.

11. ḥṭr ṣdmn ynhṭ: Vir., "K. soumet (ses) attellages," or in variant form, "K. attelle ses coursiers," understanding ṣdm of the horses yoked to the chariot. But in comparison with ṣmd bd at l. 15 (see note there) I take the word here in sense of "bands, troops," either as object to the verb; or preferably (n. b. position) in construct with "K.", thus giving him an epithet. Compare the בֵּנוֹי in Kalamuwa inscr. l. 15.

ypʿr etc.: Vir., "il prononce leurs noms [of the horses] (en disant): 'Ton nom (à) toi, c'est Ygrš, Ygrš!'," from which interpretation I totally dissent. I would take the verb ʿpr in the poetical Arab. sense of "scolding," the defiance by name and epithet of the opponent, as in early Arabian saʾf. Then the following
"thy name, thou" must be understood as exclamation or interrogation, the name being actually pronounced at l. 19.

12-13a. The rhetoric of the passage is evident, even if the syntax be obscure. The advance of the stormy waters of the Sea and the River against Baal is presented in fine epic style.

13b. Vir. is puzzled over the conflict of genders between trtkš here and yrtkš at l. 15. The conflict is resolved by recognizing that the respective subjects must vary in gender. The first verb is construed with the noun bd, which must be fem., the second with sd, which must be masc. This grammatical interpretation denies Vir.'s treatment of bd b'l as proper name of "a personage who runs to the aid of B.," comparing the element bd in Phoen. nn. pr., e.g. Bod-Ashtart. The element is indeed that Phoen. word, obscure in origin, used here as in the phrase "the bd of the Sidonians" (Piraeus inscr., Cooke, NSI. no. 38), in the sense of "clientèle of the Sidonians." The present would then be the earliest occurrence of this interesting word. With Vir., the verb is the Arab. rqz, Aram. rq̄d, "to move, dance," here used of the rhythmical surging of the waters.

"Like an eagle": the same simile of divine action at Jer. 48:40.

14. hlm = l. 26 || to the impf. ylm ll. 16, 24: with Vir. the root must mean "to smite," but must be Hif. of a root lm, perhaps aboriginal to Heb. hlm.

15. sd bd varies with bd above, of which it is only an amplification; cf. Syr. use of the root in sense of "assembly," etc.

"Between the hands": i.e. "on the breast"; as Vir. notes, the same expression is found at Zech. 13:6. Note below the parallel "between the eyes."

17-18a. 'z ym, etc.: as argued above I take the sentence as vocative. For 'z cf. the Akk. divine epithet ezu, and Heb. 'izzūz, epithet of God, Ps. 78:4. For the following phrase cf. the parallel at l. 26. The verbs are jussive here, indicative there; they are respectively fem. and masc. with following subjects of identical gender; and the pronominal suffix -h affixed to each must refer here to the antecedent "thy sea," and below to antecedent "the earth." Vir. translates: "pour que se calment (?) ses vagues," and suggests Heb. pinnōt, "pinnacles, crests." I hazard the guess that pnt means "surface," as "face," and tmn is the Akkad. tēmennu, "foundation."
19. The obvious proper name 'aymr is composite, the first element having been used alone in l. 5. Have we a foreign word, e.g. Aya—Ea the Bab. god of waters? The second element is best explained as identical with the following repeated mār [yam], "lord of [the sea]" (so the spelling of this word also in Phoen. nn. pr.). There is evident alliterative play upon the vocables of the whole phrase. I confess my skepticism as to interpretation. Parallelism requires ym as subject, then mr as verb—but with what meaning?

22. ypřh: I had thought of Arab. paršaha, "to extend," but Vir. does better by comparison with Akk. pulasuḫu, "to tread down." He takes it as a middle, "elle s'effaîssee," but the gender of the verb and its parallel ykêl, which cannot have 'ars (infra) as subject, requires a masc. subject, i.e. Baal. The parallel is then to be explained from the root kîl, and as Hif., in the sense "to levitate, raise"; cf. Arab. yakala in the latter sense. N. b. the acc. with the prep. l, as frequent in these texts.

27. ykêl: to be explained from Arab. root kêt, "to collect," which probably is to be related to Heb. kēš, as generally understood at Zeph. 2:1. The same may be root of the name of the river Kishon, whose floods are notorious since the days of Deborah.

ykêt ym yk'ly ĭpt nhr: for the first sentence Vir. translates, "sets the sea in its place," with which might be compared Ps. 104:9, "thou hast set a bound " [to the waters]. But parallelism with the following verb, which appears at D i. 2, of the "dispatching of the Serpent," suggests the unique and rare Heb. root nîl "to dry up," cf. Is. 19:5, where again epical language (e.g. "River") is employed. The many references to the drying up of the Red Sea in Biblical poetry are generally regarded as having a mythological background; see Gunkel, Schöpfung und Chaos, 90 ff.

28. bšm tg'rm: Vir. avoids translation of the first word; I have no doubt that it means "by name." He questions the suffix -m of the verb, whether as plural "them" (but no plural antecedent appears), or as the Akk. conjunctival particle -ma, found elsewhere in these texts. As "name" is in the sing. (vs. ll. 11, 18), and only Aleyan is "scolded," we may best regard -m as sing., "him," as found in Phoen. and in Heb. -êmô (see Ges.-Kautzsch. HG, § 58, g, § 103, f, note). The root g'r is constantly used in Biblical poetry of the divine activity, e.g. Ps. 9:6; 104:7; Is. 17:3 (cited just above).
Baal and the Waters

bt "shame": cf. root bht in same construction, D ii. 11, 19; the roots vary as in Heb. and Aram.

29b-30. kṣbyn (bis): Vir. as verb, "as we have conquered," but Athtart’s implication of herself in the contest which she denounces is unlikely; it is preferable to assume a noun in -ān. The root may be understood from the Heb. "to take captive."

30. ybt nn: Vir. finds a single verbal form, "is ashamed [Aleyan]"; but nn is apparently suffix, "[shames] me," or "us."

31. ṣrr = Heb. šôrēr, "enemy"?

Postscript: There has come to hand, since the above article was in press, fasc. 2 of Syria, 1935, containing a study by M. Dussaud, pp. 190-204, upon the same text.