The Ancient Word

BAAL AND THE POLITICS OF POETRY

Aaron Tugendhaft

Baal and the Politics of Poetry

"Aaron Tugendhaft's book comes as a very welcome contribution. For he means to overturn the standard interpretation of the well-known ancient Ugaritic poem about the god Baal, which sees it as a myth establishing the kingship of Baal in heaven, bringing cosmic order by defeating the enemy deities who would disrupt it. For Tugendhaft, rather, the poem is a meditation on kingship, divine as well as human, and its limitations; it has an open ending, leaving the establishment of a firm sovereignty, whether of Baal or another deity, up in the air. Tugendhaft makes a compelling case, which should provoke serious discussion. Based on an insightful scrutiny of the ancient evidence, it is a case that, as he shows, is relevant on a much wider scale as well: indeed, for the very nature of myth in modern as well as ancient culture."

Peter Machinist, Harvard University, USA

Baal and the Politics of Poetry provides a thoroughly new interpretation of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle that simultaneously inaugurates an innovative approach to studying ancient Near Eastern literature within the political context of its production. The book argues that the poem, written in the last decades of the Bronze Age, takes aim at the reigning political-theological norms of its day and uses the depiction of a divine world to educate its audience about the nature of human politics. By attuning ourselves to the specific historical context of this one poem, we can develop a more nuanced appreciation of how poetry, politics, and religion have interacted – in antiquity and beyond.

Aaron Tugendhaft is Collegiate Assistant Professor of the Humanities and Harper Fellow in the Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts at the University of Chicago, Illinois, USA.

The Ancient Word
Series editor: Seth Sanders
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Baal and the Politics of Poetry

Aaron Tugendhaft

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Series editor's preface

Aaron Tugenfhaft's *Baal and the Politics of Poetry* asks no less a question than why ancient Near Eastern literature is worth reading, beyond its interest as "background" to the Bible or history. He first places the Ugaritic Baal Epic in the history of scholarship to show how it was mistakenly consigned, alongside most other ancient Near Eastern art, to the far side of a radical break with myth that supposedly brought us Western civilization. But as we are constantly forced to relearn, there has been no radical break: our politics is still driven by imagination. And the Baal epic addresses the relationship between the two: both in its artistic techniques and contents, it was critically engaged with the politics of its time. Like Francesca Rochberg, who shows the profound significance of Babylonian science for understanding science more broadly precisely by setting it in its radically non-western context, Tugendhaft's careful historical study reveals the Baal epic's broader political relevance by demonstrating its intense engagement with the Late Bronze Age.

The book's lesson is that politics is often in a vital way conducted mythologically and poetically; beyond simply a political discourse ("ideology in narrative form" in Bruce Lincoln's reduction), myth has often been the deployment of poetry in contests over power: definitions of order and who participates in it. As philosophers like Martha Nussbaum have argued that rational thought must take profound cues from emotion, Tugendhaft shows that political critique must be conducted mythologically and poetically, as well as practically and theoretically, to be most effective.

Professor Seth Sanders
University of California Davis, USA

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Portions of this study have appeared in print as "On *ym* and ^{d}a.ab.ba at Ugarit," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 42 (2010 [2011]): 697–712; "Politics and Time in the Baal

Cycle," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 12 (2012): 145–57; "Unsettling Sovereignty: Politics and Poetics in the Baal Cycle," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 132 (2012): 367–84; and "How to Become a Brother in the Bronze Age: An Inquiry into the Representation of Politics in Ugaritic Myth," *Fragments* 2 (2012): 89–104. I am grateful to the publishers for permission to draw from these publications in this book.

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Abbreviations

Bibliographic abbreviations and other sigla accord with those employed in *Archiv für Orientforschung*, with the following additions and changes:

COS	*The Context of Scripture*. Edited by William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2003.
DULAT	Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín. *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*. Second Revised Edition. 2 vols. Translated by Wilfred G. E. Watson. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
KTU	*The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places*. Third, enlarged edition. Edited by Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín. AOAT 360. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013.
LAPO 16	Jean-Marie Durand. *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari*. Vol. 1. LAPO 16. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997.
LAPO 18	Jean-Marie Durand. *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari*. Vol. 3. LAPO 18. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2000.
RSO VI	*Arts et industries de la pierre*. Edited by Marguerite Yon. Ras-Shamra Ougarit VI. Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1991.
RSO VII	*Une bibliothèque au sud de la Ville*. Edited by Pierre Bordreuil. Ras Shamra-Ougarit VII. Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1991.
RSO XIV	*Études ougaritiques: I. Travaux 1985–1995*. Edited by Maguerrite Yon and Daniel Arnaud. Ras Shamra-Ougarit XIV. Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 2001.
RSO XVIII	*Une Bibliothèque au sud de la ville***. Textes 1994–2002 en cunéiforme alphabétique de la maison d'Ourtenou*. Edited by Pierre Bordreuil and Dennis Pardee, with Robert Hawley. Lyon: Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée, 2012.

RSO XXIII	*Lettres en Akkadien de la* "*Maison d'Urtēnu*." *Fouilles de 1994*. Edited by Sylvie Lackenbacher and Florence Malbran-Labat. Leuven: Peeters, 2016.
UBC 1	Mark S. Smith. *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*. Vol. 1: *Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1–1.2*. VTSup 55. Leiden: Brill, 1994.
UBC 2	Mark S. Smith and Wayne Pitard. *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*. Vol. 2: *Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU/CAT 1.3–1.4*. VTSup 114. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
UNP	*Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*. Edited by Simon B. Parker. SBLWAW 9. Atlanta: Scholars, 1997.

Late Bronze Age Kings

Egypt	*Amurru*	*Ugarit*	*Assyria*	*Hatti*
Amenhotep III 1390–1352	Abdi-Ashirta	Ammistamru I ? – ca. 1350		
Akhenaten 1352–1336	Aziru	Niqmaddu II ca. 1350–1315	Assur-uballit 1353–1318	Suppiluliuma I ca. 1344–1322
Tutenkhamen 1336–1327				
				Arnuwanda II 1322–1321
Horemheb 1323–1295		Ar-Halba ca. 1315–1313		Mursili II 1321–1295
		Niqmepa ca. 1313–1260		
	Benteshina		Adad-nirari I 1295–1264	Muwatalli II 1295–1272
Ramses II 1279–1213	Shabili			Mursili III (Urhi-Teshub) ca. 1272–1267
	Benteshina			Hattusili III 1267–1237
		Ammistamru II ca. 1260–1235	Shalmaneser I 1263–1234	
	Shaushgamuwa	Ibiranu ca. 1235–1225/20	Tukulti-Ninurta 1233–1197	Tudhaliya IV 1237–1209
		Niqmaddu III ca. 1225/20–1215		
Merneptah 1213–1203	Mahaza	Ammurapi ca. 1215–1190/85		Arnuwanda III 1209–1207
Ramses III 1184–1153				Suppiluliuma II 1207–1178

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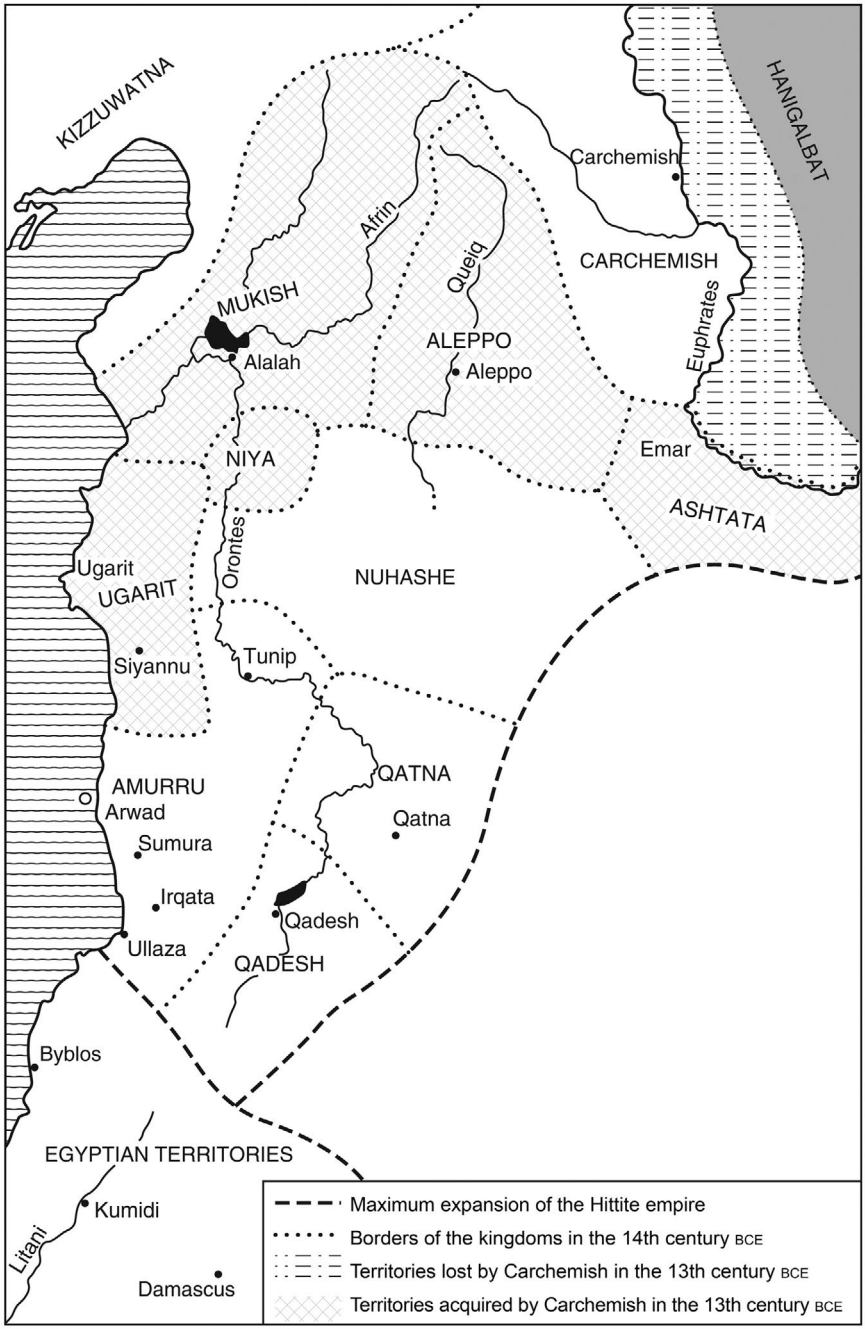
Map 1 The near East in the Late Bronze Age

Adapted from Trevor Bryce, *Letters of the Great Kings* (Routledge), Map 1.



Map 2 Hittite territories in Syria, ca. 1350–1190 BCE

From M. Liverani, *The Ancient Near East* (Routledge 2014), Figure 19.5.