The Ugaritian Poets: 
Inheritors, Transmitters, Transformers or Innovators?

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Outline
1. General principles
2. A case study: the roof ritual in poetry
3. Other examples
4. Factors in transmission, transformation etc.
5. Conclusions

Sample texts
(1) Babylonian (Gilgamesh III 37-45)
Ninsun went seven times into the bath-house,
[she cleansed] herself in water (perfumed with) tamarisk and soapwort.
[She dressed in] a fine garment, the adornment of her body...
[. . .] . . . the adornment of her breast.
[. . .] . . . the harlots . . . the ground.
She leapt [up] the staircase, she climbed onto the roof,
she climbed onto the roof,
she set up a censer before Shamash
she scattered incense before Shamash, she lifted up her arms:
“As for him, place him in the care of the watches of the night....

(2) Greek (Odyssey 4.759-767)
Come, bathe and dress your loveliness afresh,
and go up to the upper rooms with all your maids
to ask help from Athena, Zeus’s daughter.
The Lady Penelope arose and bathed,
dressing her body in her freshest linen.
Filled a basket with barley
and led her maids to the upper room,
where she besought Athena.

(3) Ugaritic (Legend of Kirta : KTU 1.14)
He washed himself and rouged himself,
he poured out wine from a silver rhyton,
he washed his hands to the elbow,
honeyed wine from a rhyton of gold.
his fingers to the shoulder.
He entered the darkness of the tent shrine:
He went to the top of the tower,
He took a sacrificial lamb in his hand,
he mounted up to the summit of the wall.
a suckling lamb in them both.
He lifted up his hands to heaven:
He took the appointed portion of his
he sacrificed to Bull his father, El.
offering-bread,
He served Baal with his sacrifice,
dreg-free wine as a drink-offering;
the Son of Dagan with his food.

(4) Hittite (Hittite Prayer).
If some problem burdens a man, he makes a plea to the gods: He places on the roof, facing the
Sun, two covered wickerwork tables: He places one table for the Sun-goddess of Arinna, and for
the male gods one table. On them are: 35 thick breads of a handful of moist flour, a thin bowl of
honey mixed with fine oil, a full pot of fat-bread, a full bowl of groats, 30 pitchers of wine. When he
prepares these, the king goes up to the roof and bows before the Sun-god of Heaven. He says as
follows: “Sun-god of Heaven and Sun-goddess of Arinna etc. etc. Now gods, listen to me, to the
word and my plea ....
(5) Various rituals

- On the seventh day, as the sun declines, the day is desacralised: at sunset, the king is desacralised. When the king shall offer a sacrifice to Pirigal-ṣaqrānu on the roof, on which stand four and four dwellings of cut branches, a ram as a holocaust, an ox and a ram as communion sacrifices. Seven times, with all his heart, the king shall speak. As the sun declines the day is desacralised; at sunset, the king is desacralised. And they shall array him in fine clothes and shall was his face. They shall return to his palace and when he is there, he shall raise his hands to heaven. (Ugaritic ritual text)

- He should speak as follows before the stars: “... place me on top of my evil enemy”. He should climb onto the roof and he should say...
  (Ugaritic)

- You bring up (censers) onto the roof and you offer herbs (šammē) on the roof
  (Babylonian)

- Then the administrator hands water to the queen and the queen moistens herself. She [burns incense] for the deity, pure... She pours wine and [drinks in honour of] the god Manari...
  (Hittite 14th cent. BCE)

(6) Other parallels

**ANE**

- Telepinu took the Sea’s daughter for brideship....
  So the Storm God gave him a thousand of each: he gave him one thousand cattle and one thousand sheep.
  (Hittite: Myth)

- Baal will hit you with the pine-tree in his hand. He will treat you with the pinewood spears that are in his hand!
  (Egyptian: Papyrus Leiden)

- The destiny of life is yours to ordain, the destiny of life is yours to draw up: your spell is life, your utterance well-being, your speech is life.
  (Babylonian Prayer to Ea, Shamash, Asalluḫi)

- My handmaiden shamed me before the rabble
  (Babylonian: *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* I 89-90)

**Ugaritian poetry**

- I shall give her dowry to her father: One thousand (shekels) of silver and ten thousand (shekels) of gold (KTU 1.24).

- Baal spoke: the axe in his left he brandished, the cedar in his right hand
  (KTU 1.4 vii 40-41)

- Your word, Ilu, is wise, you are everlastingly wise, a life of well-being is your word.
  (KTU 1.3 v 30-31)

- For two sacrifices Baal abhors, three the Charioteer of the Clouds: a sacrifice of shame and a sacrifice of whoredom, and a sacrifice of debauched handmaidens
  (KTU 1.4 iii 17-22)
Patterns of the “Roof Ritual”

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