CHAPTER SEVEN

THE UGARITIC CULTIC TEXTS

1 The Rituals

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1.1 The problem of the ritual documents

The Ugaritic texts which can be classed as ritual texts or have a ritual background did not at first attract the attention of scholars to the same extent as the mythological texts, on which an enormous bibliography has emerged. The very formal characteristics of these documents have contributed to discouraging any approach to them. They are mostly schematic texts, written in a concise and technical language which proceeds by allusions, using an accurate and precise liturgical vocabulary which cannot be studied with the help of, for example, the parallelism characteristic of poetry. In addition, there is the frequent use of stereotyped formulae, the understanding of which depends on actually identifying the rites to which they allude. Lastly, the focus of the syntax is extremely difficult because ‘prescriptive’ rubrics and ‘descriptive’ sections alternate with no obvious criteria and are accompanied by long lists of gods followed (often asyndetically) by the victims or offerings intended for them.

A good stimulus to the study of ritual texts, which have been neglected for so many years (apart perhaps from a couple of specific contributions)\textsuperscript{1} came from the article by Levine\textsuperscript{2} on the possibility of identifying prescriptive and descriptive rituals, even if this distinction now seems applicable only to a limited extent. This is either because

\textsuperscript{1} De Guglielmo 1955. Cf. also Urie 1959.

\textsuperscript{2} Levine 1963. The distinction he proposes between ‘prescriptive’ rituals and ‘descriptive’ rituals is only acceptable in broad outline since it is clear that even a description is significantly prescriptive in nature (libretto for ceremonies; cf. the use of the imperfect/future). It is, thus, a spurious problem. Cf. also Levine 1965; 1974, 8ff. and 1983.
several texts do not, strictly speaking, belong to either of the two categories or else because the descriptive texts are also standard and are also often devised and written down as memoranda.

However, the situation has improved markedly over the last twenty years, which have seen the first monographs on these documents as well as a series of minor studies devoted to analysing the lexicon, structure and function of the various texts, their implications for the history of religions, the divinities involved in the rites, the typology of the rites, etc. If we limit ourselves here only to wide-ranging works, first of all comes the publication in 1979 of a long and excellent comprehensive treatment of the ritual texts in the *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible* written by Caquot.\(^3\) Then, at the beginning of the eighties, there appeared the first monographs on the topic by de Tarragon\(^4\) (which is more discursive) and by Xella\(^5\) (which is more systematic). Besides a large number of other minor studies (which appeared chiefly in *Ugarit-Forschungen*), a new wide-ranging contribution appeared in the section written by de Tarragon in the book edited by Caquot, de Tarragon himself and Cunchillos (*TO 2*) which was published in 1989 (although written a few years earlier) even though it did not provide any remarkable new interpretations (in a few rare instances even marking a regression). With del Olmo Lete’s monograph,\(^6\) substantial progress has been achieved in spite of the way the author has chosen to present the material (in practice it is a comprehensive study of the religion of Ugarit). In this survey can also be noted the translations made by Dietrich and Loretz of a certain number of ritual texts in the collection *TUAT* and elsewhere\(^7\) as well as the inclusion of several cultic documents in the anthology of de Moor\(^8\) and in the study by Pardee of texts which he curiously called ‘para-mythological’.\(^9\)

1.2 *Classifications of form and content*

The ritual texts supply direct and extremely valuable information about religious practices (chiefly but not exclusively royal and pub-

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\(^3\) Caquot 1979.  
\(^4\) De Tarragon 1980.  
\(^5\) Xella 1981.  
\(^7\) Dietrich – Loretz 1988b, 1990a.  
\(^8\) De Moor 1987.  
\(^9\) Pardee 1988b.