1. Introduction

The sacred landscape of Indo-European Hispania was analysed by F. Marco Simón (Marco Simón 1999) in a recent paper. Beyond the specific traits of that particular geocultural setting, the author noted the existence of certain common attitudes towards landscape present in a great number of traditional societies. This shows, as Frazer or Eliade had already pointed out, the existence of anthropological structures of the imaginary common to a certain extent among different cultures. Along this same line, the perception of landscape, its shapes, and its various elements as supernatural ones is a recurrent pattern. Certain realities were deemed worthy of expressing divine presence, were perceived as alive, animated, and often granted anthropomorphic traits.

This paper aims at analyzing how this sacred conception of landscape was expressed in the Ugaritic world. Our main sources for this study are the literary and ritual texts recovered from various archives of the city. However it is toponomy which will allow us to observe a set of attitudes and beliefs concerning landscape which have left no trace in the ‘official’ literature, and which evoke a deeper level of Ugaritic religion.

2. Sacred landscape

Our review begins with the forest, a space traditionally perceived as sacred, whose mystery either hid the invisible presence of the divine or was identified with it. A passage from the myth of Baal confirms this perception of the forest as the favoured abode of divine characters in Ugarit:
“The enemies of Baal grasp hold of (the trees of) the forest.”

Sacralization of the forest also focused on trees, probably as signs of both fertility and protection. We find the best example of it in an incantation against snakes and scorpions recently found in Ugarit. In this incantation, the practitioner of therapeutic magic states ‘I will shake pieces of sacred tree’ (amrmrn’s qd$) in order to avoid the attack of snakes and scorpions, in what we regard as a clear reference to the protecting and healing character attributed to the sacred tree. In fact, certain trees such as tamarisk were repeatedly used in Ugaritic magical practice. In one of the paramythological texts, the attributes of tamarisk are referred to as determinant elements invoked to fight the poisonous bite of the serpent. Another extremely interesting case is recorded in a reference to a child’s healing:

“Take (a bunch of) tamarisk(?) and put it in the child’s house and it will bring his illness to a head.”

The translation of but as tamarisk, from the Akkadian bniu, poses certain problems in this context. In ritual and magical texts, the word used for tamarisk is ‘r’r. It is possible, then, that the actual meaning of but here is ‘figurine’ (Sanmartín 1978). Del Olmo Lete (Del Olmo Lete 1992: 210 n. 63) has combined both possibilities bringing attention to the habit of burying figurines made precisely of tamarisk in the palace: a well attested procedure of apotropaic magic (Beaulieu 1990: 121). This reconstruction certainly reaffirms the importance granted to sacred trees, and particularly tamarisks, in certain rituals of white magic, as the previous example shows.

The existence of a cult dedicated to trees is well attested in the Canaanite sphere, thanks to the Hebrew Bible and to various classical sources related to the Phoenician world. Such cults are sometimes linked to goddess Aserah. There are some data beyond the

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1 RS 2.08+ (=KTU 1.4):VII 35f.
3 RS 24.244 (=KTU 1.100):64.
5 Deuteronomy 16:21; Joshua 24:26s; Judges 6:25; Isaiah 1:29; Hosea 4:13, etc.