THE NUMBER SEVEN IN UGARITIC TEXTS

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In his "Ugaritic Literature" Cyrus H. GORDON sums up about Baal: "Baal is a fertility but not a seasonal god; on only one occasion (67:II) do we know he was killed, later to be revived (49:III); the recorded droughts and famines associated with Baal's misfortune or hostility are calamities lasting seven years, plainly ruling out a yearly cycle of Baal's death and revival" 1).

GORDON bases his conclusion on two features which he emphasizes. 1. According to him "the widespread notion that the year in Canaan is divided into a fertile and a sterile season is false". 2. "Moreover, drought and famine are regularly represented as seven-year scourges in the Ugaritic texts". GORDON maintains that the seven-year cycle is dominating in the Ugaritic texts, which is to a certain extent right, but the implications of this fact are not rightly interpreted by him.

GORDON was followed in his interpretation by G. R. DRIVER 2) and A. F. RAINEY 3), who both, a little astonishingly, repeat the rather worthless argument of GORDON that "the texts tell us nothing of any annual death and revival of Baal". Texts do not normally give that kind of information, you have to find it out from the context and the use of the texts (Sitz im Leben).

With the importance that GORDON ascribes to the seven-year cycle it must be considered a necessary task to study this cycle somewhat in detail and also to have a look at the use of the number seven (and eight, not to be forgotten) in Ugaritic texts. The number seven is used so often in the texts that we cannot see a supposed seven-year cycle isolated, it must be seen in a "seven-context".

As is well known the number seven is a holy number in the ancient

2) Canaanite Myths and Legends, p. 20.
Near East and simply a round number 1). An example of the round use, among many others, can be found in the Book of Job, where it is told that Job had seven sons, three daughters, seven thousand sheep etc., 2. Seven is here the number of completeness. So it is also in the opening of the Krt text, where seven sons are mentioned, before they disappear, one after another. (14:8, GORDON Krt:3).

That the number here really denotes completeness and a round number may easily be seen from what follows: "eight sons of a mother". This is a way of expression frequently used in the Ugaritic texts, and usually the numbers seven and eight are chosen for this use 2).

So is the case also in the Baal texts, where it is e.g. told that El, the Bull, lifted up his voice from the seven chambers, from the eight openings (3:V:19 f., 34 f, GORDON 'nt:V: 19 f., 34 f.). That does not mean that El spoke from an apartment with exactly seven rooms, but it paints El speaking from his palace, with numerous chambers.

The angry goddess Anat cried out that she had smitten Yam, the slippery serpent, the tyrant with seven heads (3:III:39, GORDON 'nr:III:39). Also here seven is most probably a round number, indicating the might of Yam.

Baal seized seventy-seven towns and called the seventy sons of the goddess Athirat to his great temple feast (4:VI:46, VII:10, GORDON 51:VI:46, VII:10). Mot had seven portions cut up for Baal (5:I:20, GORDON 67:1:20). When Baal went into the earth, he brought with him his seven servitors and his eight boars (5:V:7 f.). Seven and seventy times he loved a heifer by the edge of the strand of death (5:V:20), eight and eighty times. There is reason to emphasize that the mysterious number seven is repeatedly used when it is told of Baal and what happened to him when he had to go into the earth.

1) See M. H. POPE, articles "Number" and "Seven" in IDB, and Helmer RINGGREN's article "Tal" in Svenskt Biblishkt Uppslagsverk.

2) See M. H. POPE in IDB, vol. 4, p. 564. The passage about the seven sons in the KRT text is badly in need of a reinterpretation. GORDON sees the numbers here, with the prefix m-, as fractions, in a maqtilat-formation. Fractions are, however, without meaning in the context. It is closer at hand to see the prefixed m- as a prefix denoting a person (male?), the number thus being an ordinal. CASSUTO tried this solution, applying it to Keret's wives (BASOR 119, 1950, p. 19). The author of this article has tended to understand the prefixed numbers as ordinals, counting Keret's sons, but as with CASSUTO's interpretation here are certain difficulties with the following plurals. John GRAY, like AISTLEITNER in his Wörterbuch, sees the numbers as passive participles of the intensive of verbs and referring to the age of Keret's family, "at three years old" etc. (Legacy, 2nd ed., p. 133, note 2). In any case and with whatever interpretation the numbers reach their zenith in number seven.