**The Role and Significance of Mot in the Vine Ritual of KTU 1.23:8-11**

1. Introduction

*KTU* 1.23, also known as “The Feast of the Goodly Gods,” is traditionally considered a ritual text.[[1]](#footnote-2) Its first part is instructional, divided with horizontal lines into nine sections and opening with an invitation to the Goodly Gods to participate in a feast, attended by the royal family and other participants. Its second part is narrative, containing an erotic description of El, his two wives, their pregnancies, and their omnivorous offspring, the Goodly Gods of the first part. The second part concludes with a description of a feast.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Although the precise purpose of the ritual as a whole remains unclear, scholars agree that its most prominent theme is fertility. Some also emphasize the viticultural aspects of the text, relating to the relatively numerous references to the grapevine and its fruit.[[3]](#footnote-4) The so-called vine ritual, the focus of the present article, takes place in the second section of the instructional part.

During this performance, it is said that the vine pruners are pruning (or are ordered to prune) a divine figure, binding it, and throwing its tendrils to the ground. The text reads as follows (ll. 8–11):[[4]](#footnote-5)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Mt-wšr* sits; | 8*Mt-wšr yṯb* |  |  |  |
| in his (one) hand a staff of bereavement,  in his (other) hand a staff of widowhood. | *bdh ḫṭ ṯkl*  *bdh* 9*ḫṭ ˀṭ* |  |  |  |
| The vine pruners prune him; | *yzrbnn zbrm gpn* |  |  |  |
| The vine binders bind him;[[5]](#footnote-6) | 10*yṣmdnn ṣmdm gpn* |  |  |  |
| They throw his tendrils like a vine.[[6]](#footnote-7) | *yšql šdmth* 11*km gpn* |  |  |  |

The closing line of this section (l. 12) prescribes that these lines be recited seven times.[[7]](#footnote-8)

To better understand the significance of this performance, scholars have searched for analogous magical ceremonies in the Bible as well as in the cultures of premodern societies.[[8]](#footnote-9) Such analogies are, however, unnecessary. The magical acts described in the Ugaritic ritual are chiefly agricultural in nature and should be understood in the context of viticulture. The pruning of tendrils is required (then as today) to wake the vine from its dormancy, enabling it to direct its energy to ripening fruit rather than growing longer vines, and to synchronize the ripening of its grape clusters. After being pruned, the tendrils must be removed in order to let the fresh, young twigs grow, and to reduce the risk of disease. The remaining tendrils are attached to supports which they climb, further contributing to an increase in the vine’s yield, as well as preventing decay and insect infestation.[[9]](#footnote-10) The Ugaritic performance cited above thus seems to relate, in the form of a ritual, to well-known viticultural activities that are designed to improve annual yield. Rather than a deity associated with fertility, however, the god upon whom these viticultural acts are performed during the feast is Mot, the terrifying lord of the underworld.

In order to explain the unexpected appearance of Mot in this context, two different interpretations have been suggested. Since the protagonist is referred to using a hapax, the dual name *Mt-wšr*, some scholars have suggested that the reference is not to Mot at all. Rather, they argue, the word should be read as the noun *mutu*, “a man,” combined with a title *šr* “ruler” (root *š-r-r*) or “singer” (root *š-y-r*). While *mutu* could possibly refer to an anonymous figure, it is often thought—in this context—to represent El, the protagonist of the narrative part who is described as having a staff—a metaphor for his penis (ll. 37–48).[[10]](#footnote-11) Although this explanation resolves the issue of Mot’s incongruous appearance, it does not account for the description of a divine figure with *two* staffs. Likewise, the fact that the themes of widowhood and bereavement, here attributed to the divine figure’s staffs, are never associated with El in any way is problematic. This explanation therefore cannot be accepted.

For this reason, other scholars long ago suggested that the lexeme *mt* refers to Mot, while *šr* functions as his epithet.[[11]](#footnote-12) According to this reading, the agricultural acts are designed to banish Mot from the sown and fertile land (Ugaritic *mdrˁ*). While this suggestion fits better with the description of Mot and his terrible staffs, it is still incomplete. Why would the destructive force of Death be invoked in a fertility rite simply to prevent him from taking part? Furthermore, why is Mot specifically associated with a grapevine in this context?

Comparison with other ancient Near Eastern agricultural rituals, performances and literary metaphors based on such rituals only compound the enigma. In general, the gods associated with violent agricultural acts are fertility deities whose identities are closely bound up with life and death. No scholar suggests that chopping these gods to the ground, burying, dismembering, or burning them symbolizes their expulsion. To the contrary, this harsh treatment symbolizes the cycle of the agricultural year: as the god and crops perish, so they will rise again.

1. Examples of ancient Near Eastern agricultural rituals

In what follows, are examples from ancient Egypt (1–2), Mesopotamia (3–4) and the Levant (5), demonstrating what was claimed in the last paragraph – that agricultural acts are often associated with a fertility god, whose biography is characterized by death and regeneration, as opposed to a god entrusted with meeting out death.

1. A spell from the second-millennium BCE Egyptian Coffin Texts, which is said to be a speech of the grain-god Neper, identifies him—and emmer itself—with the life and death of Osiris (CT 330, IV 168–169):

I live and I die, I am Osiris (*ˁnḫ(=i) mt=i ink Wsir*)… I have gotten fat through you (*ḏd3.n=i im=k*), I have flourished through you (*rd.n=i im=k*), I have fallen through you (*ḫr.n=i im=k*), I have fallen on my side (*ḫr.n=i ḥr gs=i*), the gods live on me (*ˁnḫ nṯr.w im=i*). I live and grow as Neper (*ˁnḫ(=i) rd=i m Npr*)… I live and I die, for I am emmer (*ˁnḫ(=i) mt=i ink bdt*). [[12]](#footnote-13)

Here, the agricultural cycle of the wheat—from its growth to its ripening (“I live” / “I have flourished through you”) and the spread of its seeds on the ground following its ripening (“and I die” / “I have fallen through you”)—is framed in terms of the myth of Osiris (“I am Osiris”), who was murdered and dismembered by his brother Seth and became lord of the underworld.[[13]](#footnote-14) The falling of seeds to the ground, just before the emmer’s withering, is depicted by the phrase “falling on its side” which is often used in conjunction with Osiris’ violent murder (cf. the Pyramid Texts spells 412; 442; 478; 482; 485; 576; 637).[[14]](#footnote-15)

2. An Egyptian ritual from the same period, recorded in the *Egyptian Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus*, compares Osiris’ dismemberment with the harvest (cols. 29–33).[[15]](#footnote-16) After the grain is brought to the threshing floor where it is threshed by oxen and donkeys, Horus turns to Seth’s followers and asks: “Who is it who beats my father? (*m ḥwi it(=i) (i)ptn*);” The reply states: “Beating Osiris (*ḥwi(t) Wsir*), chopping of the god (*ḫb3 nṯr*): barley (*it*).” The text continues to explain that the oxen used to thresh the grain represent Seth’s followers, while the donkeys represent Seth himself.

We should note here that Osiris, despite his role as the lord of the underworld—one shared by the Ugaritic Mot and the Mesopotamian Ereškigal—was neither in charge of pain and death, nor the cause of it. Quite the opposite, he was a symbol of regeneration and rejuvenation in the underworld.[[16]](#footnote-17) In this respect, he resembles the West-Asian deities to be discussed next, who, despite suffering violent deaths, never became lords of the underworld, their stay there being considered something temporary (at least in some traditions).[[17]](#footnote-18)

3. An Old Babylonian text (CT 58.21), classified by its editors as a harvest ritual, describes workers’ families leaving for the steppe to gather crops.[[18]](#footnote-19) They are taken there by boat—where they sing and provide offerings to Summer and Winter. They then pile up the crops “in the reed huts of Arali (é-gi-sig-ga a-ra-li-šè)… at the place where the herald caught the lad (ki-ğurus li-bi-re dab5-ba-šè).” Immediately after this, the narrator appears to speak in the voice of a young, dying god: “My head you covered with the garment (sağ-mu-a túg bí-e-dul); my body you recovered with my new garment (bar-mu túg-gibil-mà <bí->e-gi4); my eyes (i-bí-mu)… (ll. 28–35).”

Arali is known as the place where Dumuzi the lad tended his flock and was eventually trapped by the demons of the underworld.[[19]](#footnote-20) His words here reference the Mesopotamian funerary custom of dressing the corpse in clean clothes.[[20]](#footnote-21) As argued by its editors, the text as a whole seems to describe a ritual associated with Dumuzi’s death, symbolized by the harvest.

4. A much later Neo-Assyrian text (SAA 3:38, rev. 6–7) compares Dumuzi’s death with the grinding of grain: “His [de]ath ([*mū*]*ssu*) is the roasted barley (*qalâte*) which they throw on behalf of Dumuzi (*ša ina muḫḫi Dumuzi inaddû*) when they grind him with stone (*ina abnī kī iqamûšu*)…”[[21]](#footnote-22)

A similar ritual is attested in medieval Haran, as recorded by a Muslim author. Despite its very late date, the pagans in Iraq preserved many elements and beliefs of Dumuzi’s cult and therefore this text bears mentioning:

[The month of] Tammūz: In the middle of this [month] there is the feast of al-Būqāt, that is, of the weeping women. It is the Tāwuz, a feast dedicated to the god Tāwuz. The women weep for him because of how his master killed him and ground his bones in the hand-mill and then winnowed them to the wind. The woman do not eat nothing ground in a hand-mill; they only eat moistened wheat, chick-peas, dates, raisins and other similar things.[[22]](#footnote-23)

5. Lastly, Origen (ca. 185–253 CE) and Jerome (ca. 345–419 CE)—who both lived in Palestine, and therefore were quite familiar with the practices of the local communities—cite a “modern” example of a mourning ceremony that parallels the one described in Ezekiel 8:14. According to their reports, pagans believed that the seeds buried in the earth represented the death of Adonis, while the crops, the rebirth of the dead seeds, represent the god’s resurrection.[[23]](#footnote-24) Thus, Origen states in his *Notes on Ezekiel* (*Selecta in Ezechielem* VIII):

The one whom the Greeks call Adonis, is called Tammouz by the Hebrews and the Syrians, as they say… It seems that they perform a sort of rite every year: first they mourn him as dead, second they rejoice for him as if he had risen from the dead… Those who understand the principle of the Greek myths… say that Adonis is a symbol of the fruits of the earth (τὸν Ἄδωνιν σύμβολον εἶναι τῶν τῆς γῆς καρπῶν), which are mourned when they [i.e., the farmers] sow (θρηνουμένων μὲν ὅτε σπείρονται), but which rise from the dead, and therefore give joy to the farmers when they [i.e., the crops] grow (καὶ διὰ τοῦτο χαίρειν ποιούντων τοὺς γεωργοὺς ὅτε φύονται).[[24]](#footnote-25)

In his *Commentary on the Prophet Ezekiel* (*Commentariorum in Ezechielem prophetam* III), Jerome similarly comments:

What we have translated as Adonis,[[25]](#footnote-26) both Hebrew and Syrian speech calls Thamuz… They celebrate a solemn anniversary festival to him, in which women mourn for him as a dead man, and after he comes back to life, they sing of him and praise him… Paganism of this sort… honors the death and resurrection of Adonis by mourning and rejoicing, the former of which is shown in seeds that die in the earth (*quorum alterum in seminibus, quae moriuntur in terra*), the latter in the harvest that the dead seed are reborn (*alterum in segetibus, quibus mortua semina renascuntur*).[[26]](#footnote-27)

Traces of this rite may also appear Ps 126:5–6, which describes the weeping of workers during the sowing season and their songs during the harvest: “Those who sow in tears (הזרעים בדמעה) do reap with songs of joy (ברנה יקצרו). The one who carries the seed-bag weeps as he goes (הלך ילך ובכה נשא משך הזרע); the one who carries his sheaves comes with songs of joy (בא יבא ברנה נשא אלמתיו).”[[27]](#footnote-28)

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In all these rituals and texts—which vary in date and location—the death and/or resurrection of a god symbolizes the agricultural cycle and vice versa. All the tasks associated with agriculture—sowing, harvesting, grinding, burning, etc.—are interpreted as divine deaths, while the subsequent growth of crops symbolizes divine resurrection. This raises the question: is it possible that Mot was also associated with a death-rebirth cycle, thus accounting for his appearance in the agricultural ritual recorded in *KTU* 1.23?

1. The features of Mot in Ugaritic texts

In the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, Mot is typically represented as a terrifying god of the underworld who consumes the flesh of human beings and gods alike, echoing the process of death. Thus, Mot is described by the poet as follows: “[A lip to ea]rth, a lip to heaven, [he (= Mot) set] a tongue to the stars ([*špt lˀa*]*rṣ špt lšmm* [*yšt*] *lšn lkbkbm*). Baal will enter his innards (*yˁrb Bˁl bkbdh*), into his mouth he will descend like a dried olive, produce of the earth and fruit of the trees” (*KTU* 1.5 II, 1’–6’). The poet presents Mot’s own words as follows: “I went hunting… [but] there were no humans for me to swallow, no multitudes of earth for me to swallow (*npš ḫsrt bn nšm npš hmlt ˀarṣ*)… [Then] I approached Baal, I took him (*ˁdbnn ˀank*) like a lamb in my mouth, like a kid he was crushed in the opening of my throat (*b ṯbrn q*<*n*>*y* <*n*>*ḫtuˀ hw*)” (1.6 II, 15’–23’; cf. 1.4 VIII, 14–20). Traces of this tradition can be found in biblical texts as well, demonstrating that this was the typical image of Mot/Sheol: “Which like the underworld he widened his throat (אשר הרחיב כשאול נפשו), and like Death is never satisfied (והוא כמות ולא ישבע)” (Hab 2:5); “Therefore the underworld gapes her throat (לכן הרחיבה שאול נפשה), opening wide her mouth” (Isa. 5:14). A similar description also appears in the narrative part of *KTU* 1.23, here in relation to El’s omnivorous offspring: “They set a lip to earth, a lip to heaven (*št špt lˀarṣ špt lšmm*). Then enter their mouth (*wyˁrb bphm*) fowl of the sky and fish from the sea” (*KTU* 1.23, 61–63). This represents one of the numerous affinities between the ritual’s two parts, linking the hunger of Mot to the hunger of the “Goodly Gods.”[[28]](#footnote-29)

However, alongside these typical features, Mot is also invested with another set of qualities in Ugaritic literature, with no parallel in either the biblical or Mesopotamian descriptions of the lords of the underworld. In two episodes of the Baal Cycle, Mot seems to be depicted as a passive and regenerated god, described with verbs generally associated with agriculture.[[29]](#footnote-30) According to *KTU* 1.6 II 31–36, when Anat searches for the dead Baal, she finds Mot instead. She proceeds to dismember him with a sword (*bḥrb tbqˁnn*), winnow him with a sieve (*bḫṯr tdrynn*), burn him in fire (*bˀišt tšrpnn*), grind him with millstones (*brḥm tṭḥnn*), and sow him in the field (*bšd tdrˁnn*). The birds are unable to consume his body (*šˀirh l tˀikl ˁṣrm mnth l tkly npr*[*m*]),[[30]](#footnote-31) and the mutilated limbs begin calling out to each other (*šˀir lšˀir yṣḥ*). This, it seems, is the first part of a description of Mot’s reassembly (the following ca. 40 lines are broken).

A similar description appears in the fifth column, taking place seven years after Mot’s violent dismemberment and reassembly.[[31]](#footnote-32) Here, Mot himself speaks (ll. 11–19):

[Day]s turn into months, months turn to years.

Then, in the seventh year, Mot… raised his voice and declared:

“On account of you, Baal, I experienced abasement (*ˁlk Bˁlm pht qlt*);

On account of you, I experienced winnowing with a sword (*ˁlk pht dry bḥrb*);

On account of you, I experienced burning with fire (*ˁlk pht šrp bˀišt*);

On account of you, [I experienced grin]ding with millstones (*ˁlk* [*pht ṭḥ*]*n brḥm*);

O[n account of you], I experienced [winno]wing with a sifter (*ˁ*[*lk*] *pht*[ *dr*]*y bkbrt*);

On account of you, I experienced withering in the field (*ˁlk pht ġly bšdm*) ;

On account of you, I experienced sowing in the sea (*ˁlk pht drˁ bym*).”

These episodes suggest that the Ugaritic Mot was more complex a divinity than is usually assumed. In addition to his assertive role as the god who consumed Baal—in accordance with his terrifying nature as the lord of the underworld—he was also thought to be a passive deity, a dying god, whose corpse was dismembered by Anat and then reassembled. Were we to take the description of Mot’s death in the Baal Cycle on its own, the divine protagonist would be the passive Mot, whom Anat dismembered on behalf of Baal. It is this aspect of Mot—closely associated with agriculture—which best corresponds to his role as a “pruned” god whose tendrils are thrown to the ground in the vine ritual of *KTU* 1.23.

These two contradictory aspects of Mot—the terrifying lord of the underworld who consumes (i.e., kills) humans and gods on one hand, and the passive, dying god associated with agriculture on the other—are evident in both the Baal Cycle and *KTU* 1.23. They thus were familiar themes in the Ugaritic literature of the Late Bronze age. In terms of mythopoesis, however, these two aspects of Mot appear to have distinct origins. In light of Mot’s name and attributes in Ugaritic and biblical literature, his characteristics of passivity and regeneration seem to be only secondary, late features. They thus might originate in a different culture in which the lord of the underworld is *primarily* associated with such attributes, one that exerted a significant influence on Ugarit during the Bronze Age. Of all the cultures surrounding Ugarit, Egypt is the most likely candidate.

1. Egyptian sources and their relation to Mot’s portrayal in Ugaritic literature

The heavy influence of Egyptian culture upon Ugarit is well attested. While it is most prominently seen in visual representations, cultural influence is almost never restricted to one medium.[[32]](#footnote-33) We may thus surmise with some confidence that—despite the lack of substantial evidence—the Ugaritic myth could have assimilated mythological elements from both visual and oral Egyptian sources.[[33]](#footnote-34)

The story of Osiris, the Egyptian lord of the underworld, is documented in funerary and other ritual texts from the Old Kingdom onwards. According to these texts, unlike Dumuzi and other Mesopotamian dying gods who were forced to descend to the underworld by its wicked emissaries, Osiris – like Mot – had been beaten and murdered by his rival. It was when his dismembered limbs were reunited that he became lord of the underworld.[[34]](#footnote-35) While the complete (extant) account of the Osiris myth was only composed in later periods, it is attested in a wide range of Egyptian genres—spells, hymns, and visual art and practices—that go back to the third millennium BCE. This indicates the myth circulated among all strata of Egyptian society through millennia. Elsewhere I have dealt with the relationship between the Egyptian texts and the account of Mot’s death, so I will only cite a few texts relevant to the Osiris mytheme in this context.[[35]](#footnote-36)

Of the Pyramid Texts, Osiris’ death, reassembly, and resurrection are alluded to, for example, in the following spell: “Your elder sister, who collected your flesh (*s3q.t if=k*)… who sought you and found you on your side on the river-bank of *Ndit*” (PT 482, pyr. 1008b–c); similarly in the following: “Stand up for me, Osiris! This is me, I am your son, I am Horus. I have come for you… that I might revive you (*sˁnḫ(=i) ṯw*), assemble your bones for you (*inq(=i) n=k qs.w=k*), collect your swimming parts for you (*s3q(=i) n=k nbit=k*), assemble your dismembered parts for you (*inq*(*=i) n=k dm3.wt=k*)”. (PT 606, pyr. 1683–1684).[[36]](#footnote-37)

In the Coffin Texts: “I join the members of Osiris (*dmḏ=i ˁ.wt Wsir*), I collect his bones (*s3q=i qs.w=f*), I make his seed flourish (*srwḏ=i mt.wt=f*), I make his flesh hale (*sw3ḏ=i ḥˁ.w=f*)” (CT 80 II 38); “‘My sister,’ says Isis to Nephtys, ‘This is our brother. Come, that we might raise his head (*mi ṯs=n tp=f*). Come, that we might assemble his bones (*mi inq=n qs.w=f*). Come, that we might arrange his members (*mi ḥn=n ˁ.wt=f*)’” (CT 74 I 306–307).[[37]](#footnote-38)

Seth’s violent murder of Osiris is explicated in non-funerary rituals, as well. Thus, the *Calendar of Lucky and Unlucky Days*, for example, identifies the thirteenth day of the third month of Inundation (*III 3ḫt*) as the day when Seth scattered (*sr*) Osiris’ limbs.[[38]](#footnote-39) Likewise, a passage in pLouvre 3239, paraphrased in four parallel texts, indicates that Seth immersed (*mḥi=f*) Osiris’ mutilated organs ([*ḥ*]*ˁ.wt =f nb.t pš.t*) in the water of *ḏ3t*.[[39]](#footnote-40)

As has been shown above, from the Middle Kingdom onwards, the association of Osiris with crops is also well attested. During the New Kingdom, Osiris was even believed to be responsible for “creat[ing] the barley and emmer to revive the gods as well as the cattle [i.e., mankind] after the gods (*ḫr iw ink ir it bdt r sˁnḫ nṯr.w mi n3 i3wt ḥr-s3 nṯr.w*)” (14:12).[[40]](#footnote-41) In this role, he was closely associated with the grain-beds and grain-mummies that symbolized the rejuvenation of the body and the crops.[[41]](#footnote-42)

In light of the unique Osiris narrative and his distinctive role as the lord of the underworld, the overall cultural influence Egypt exerted upon Ugarit, and the fact that Baal, Mot’s rival, had been identified with Osiris’ assassin, Seth, it is possible that Mot became an *interpretatio Ugaritica* of Osiris during the Late Bronze age.[[42]](#footnote-43) This explains his depiction as a dying and regenerated god, and his association with agricultural activities, all juxtaposed to his description as a terrifying god. The process of adaptation was never fully completed in Ugarit; up until Ugarit’s fall, Mot was still not depicted as a fertility god *par excellence*. The beginning of this process, however, can be clearly seen.[[43]](#footnote-44)

1. Viticulture and the dying and rising gods

As viticulture is an agricultural activity, it is not surprising to find dying and rising gods, such as those mentioned above, being associated with the vine and its yield as well. One of the well-known deities in this respect is the Sumerian god Ningišzida “The Lord of the Good Tree,” who resides in the underworld. His mythology was greatly influenced by that of other dying gods, thus he is described, like Dumuzi, as being dragged by demons to the underworld (*ETCSL* 1.7.3), where he was appointed “chair bearer of the underworld (gu-za-lá-ki-an-na / *guzalâ erṣetim*).”[[44]](#footnote-45) His relation to wine appears in an offering to “Ningišzida of the wine house (é ğeštin)” that was served in Nippur of the Ur III period. Occasionally, Ningišzida was mentioned alongside the beer god Siriš or the beer-goddess Nin-kasi, while in Lagaš he was venerated with his spouse Geštinanna “the Vine of Heaven.”[[45]](#footnote-46) The latter, entitled “chief scribe of Arali (dub-sar-maḫ-a-ra-li-ke4),”[[46]](#footnote-47) is best known as the sister of Dumuzi, who according to the last lines of *Inanna’s Descent to the Netherworld*, replaces Dumuzi in the underworld for half the year.[[47]](#footnote-48) Baal himself, *the* dying and rising god of Ugarit, has a vizier named *Gpn-wUˀgr* “Vine and Field,” who has been sent to the realm of Mot by Baal several times, and reemerged without harm (*KTU* 1.4, VII 52 – 1.5, III).

And what about Osiris, the Egyptian lord of the underworld? Apart from his close association with grain, Osiris was also known as *nb irp* “Lord of the Wine.” In fact, his association with wine, although less attested, predates his association with grain. A spell from the Pyramid Texts states:

This Great One has fallen on his side, he who is in *Ndit* is felled (*ḫr r=f ti wr pw ḥr gs=f ndi r=f imi Ndit*). Your hand is taken by Re, your head is lifted up by the Two Enneads. Behold, he has come as Orion, behold, Osiris has come as Orion (*Wsir ii m s3ḥ*), the Lord of the Wine during the *W3g*-Festival (*nb irp m W3g*). “My beautiful one,” said his mother, “My heir,” said his father… (PT 442, pyr. 819–820).

“The Great One who has fallen on his side…in *Ndit*” is a clear reference to Osiris. The epithet “Lord of the Wine” was given to him (through Orion or independently) during the *Wag*-Festival, a funerary feast that was celebrated at the beginning of the Nile’s inundation.[[48]](#footnote-49) This is also reflected in the following spell:

The Lord of the Wine during the flood (*nb irp m w3ḫ*), his seasons have recognized him (*ip.n sw t(r)=f*), his times have remembered him (*sḫ3.n sw nw=f*)… (PT 577, pyr. 1524).

“His seasons” and “his times” are commonly interpreted as references to the seasonal ripening of grapes, which in turn symbolizes the resurrection of Osiris.[[49]](#footnote-50)

Visually, the grapevine frequently decorates the Theban tombs of the New Kingdom, the most famous example being Sennefer’s “tomb of vine” (TT 96).[[50]](#footnote-51) It also appears in the Nakht papyrus of the Book of the Dead (late 18th or early 19th dynasty). Russmann describes the image as follows: “a grapevine at the corner of the lake (where vines were not normally planted) seems irresistibly attracted to the face of Osiris, which sometimes, as here, is colored green to symbolize the god’s association with plant germination and growth.”[[51]](#footnote-52) As the vine is not usually planted next to lakes, its appearance here seems to bear a symbolic significance. This is true for the Ta-udja-re papyrus as well, in which, in all scenes, the deceased female protagonist holds a branch of vine leaves.[[52]](#footnote-53) In later periods, the link between Osiris and the vine is manifest in his identification with Dionysus, the Greek wine-god, documented by Herodotus already in the 5th century BCE (II.42.3–5, II.144.10). This identification would be further developed in the Ptolemaic period and onward.[[53]](#footnote-54)

1. *Mt-wšr* in *KTU* 1.23

If we return to *KTU* 1.23, it is Mot’s secondary image as a passive and dying god associated with agriculture (as opposed to his initial image as a terrifying god) that makes him a suitable candidate for this ritual. The significance of the violent treatment of Mot by vine workers during the feast—which when performed on the vine is beneficial, waking it from dormancy and improving its ripening—can only be understood in light of Mot’s secondary features.

I would therefore like to suggest a new interpretation of Mot’s designation in *KTU* 1.23 as *Mt-wšr*. The conventional explanation of the second element *wšr* divides the designation into three morphemes: the epithet *šr*, which is customarily understood as deriving from the roots *š-y-r* or *š-r-r* (I, II), a conjunctive *waw*, and the personal name of the god, *mt*, which is also a general noun meaning death.[[54]](#footnote-55) None of the suggested roots for *šr*, however, are consistent with Mot’s character or Ugaritic linguistic usage.Nevertheless, the Ugaritic custom of borrowing a non-Ugaritic name that is associated with the name of the local god, in order to identify him with his foreign counterpart, is well attested. This seems to be the case for *Kṯr-wḪss*, *Nkl-wˀIb*, and perhaps also *ˁṯtr-wˁṯtpr*.[[55]](#footnote-56) In light of the close affinity between Mot and Osiris noted above,*Wšr* may be the Ugaritic alphabetic transliteration of the Egyptian name *Wsir* (  )*—*namely, Osiris, while the conjunctive *waw* was assimilated into the initial *waw*.[[56]](#footnote-57) If this is the case here, the bereavement and widowhood staffs that *Mt-Wšr* holds in his hands—according to *KTU* 1.23 as a symbol of his original terrible features—might also represent a local interpretation of the well-known image of Osiris holding his two scepters, the crook (*ḥq3.t*) and flail (*nḫ3ḫ3*).[[57]](#footnote-58)

1. Summary

To elucidate the role that Mot plays in the vine ritual in *KTU* 1.23, I have examined parallel agricultural rituals in other ancient Near Eastern cultures. While in each case a different god is cast down, the deity in question is always associated with fertility and regeneration. Since Mot at first glance does not suit this paradigm, scholars had difficulty explaining his appearance in the Ugaritic vine ritual of *KTU* 1.23. A close examination of the Baal Cycle reveals, however, that the Ugaritic Mot is, in fact, associated with both agriculture and regeneration as well. The dissonance between these attributes and the more prevalent portrayal of Mot as a terrifying god charged with meeting out annihilation appears to be the result of external influences that colored the figure of the local deity. The role of Mot as the lord of the underworld and the rival of Baal on the one hand, and the firm association between Seth and Baal during the late Bronze Age on the other, may have led to a concomitant association between Mot and Osiris. This would account for Mot’s dismemberment and reassembly as well as his association with grain and the grapevine. As the two gods were never fully merged, however, Mot’s old character as the god of bereavement and widowhood, who consumes people and gods, remained and continued to be juxtaposed to his new positive association with fertility, grain and the vine, both in the Baal Cycle and *KTU* 1.23.

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1. For the various studies on *KTU* 1.23, from its first publication to 2006, see the comprehensive bibliography in Smith, Rituals. Subsequent studies include: Park, Member; Tsumura, Revisiting; Smith, Sacred; Scurlock, Death; Cooley, Poetic, 221–224*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Perhaps a mythologization of the ritual feast of the first part? For a literary analysis, cf. Hettema, Repeated, 92. For the identity of the Goodly Gods, and whether or not they are the twins Dawn and Dusk, see Smith, Rituals, 68–69. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Cf. ll. 6; 9–11; 26; 74–76. In addition, Schloen has suggested linking the ambiguous term *mštˁltm*, mentioned in the narrative section with Hebrew עוללות (Aram: עוללתא) “gleaning [of grapes and olives]”; see: Schloen, Exile, 217–218. In light of all these references, it has been suggested that the ritual may be related to a ceremony that took place during the month of “The Beginning of the Wine” (*rˀiš yn*), documented in *KTU* 1.41/1.87; cf. Gaster, Canaanite; Pardee, Ugaritic, 275; Dijkstra, Astral. The date of the month “The Beginning of the Wine,” however, is still unclear. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The transliteration of all the Ugaritic material cited here follows *KTU*3. For translations of these texts, cf. Parker (ed.), Ugaritic (Lewis for *KTU* 1.23 / Smith for *KTU* 1.5–1.6); Pardee, Ugaritic; Wyatt, Religious. For *KTU* 1.23, see also Smith, Rituals. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. An alternative translation, based on the last rhyme could be: “The pruners prune him (like) a vine, the binders bind him (like) a vine.” In any case, the acts are the same. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. The lexeme *šdmt*, occurring also in the Hebrew Bible, is dubious in both corpuses. Its derivation is unknown, and therefore it can only be interpreted based on context. Smith, Rituals, 45 discusses the two main theories among scholars: ‘terrace’ and ‘tendrils, shoots.’ The translation offered here follows Lewis in Parker, Ugaritic; Wyatt, New; Watson, Aspects. Cf. Deut 32:32 and Isa 16:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. This raises the question, whether the ritual was a performance or only a declamation. See the discussion in Smith, Rituals, 50. I assume that this ceremony was performed at the feast as an imitation of the agricultural activity that took place in the vineyard. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Thus it has been linked with the “circumcision” of trees (ערלה) a là the biblical law in Lev. 19:23–25; see Wyatt, Pruning; Dijkstra, Astral, 286–287. Another suggestion associates it with the customs of the Zambian people, see Pope, cited in Smith, Potpourri, 663. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. I am grateful to the agronomist and vinedresser Chanoch Plesser, from Beth-Shean valley, Israel, for his clarifications; cf. Kosmala, Mot. For ancient descriptions of such activities (although later than the Ugaritic material), see e.g., John 15:1–17 and Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 14.3 (see, however, Albright, North-Canaanite, 133, n. 173). These activities take place during the late winter, perhaps suggesting the time of this ritual as a whole. For other suggestions, see de Moor, Seasonal, 79 n. 30; Smith, Rituals, 47–48, and n. 3 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Wyatt, Pruning; Dijkstra, Astral Myth. Cf. Pardee, Ugaritic, 276–277, n. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. In this case, “evil” as a translation of *šr* (root: *š-r-r*), has also been suggested. See discussion in Smith, Rituals, 40. According to the proposal of Fischer-Elfert, a literal Egyptian translation of the compound name [*Mt*]-*wŠr* might be found in pLeiden I 343 + I 345 as [*Mt*] *ḥnˁ Šr* (= *Mt* and *Šr*): see Fischer-Elfert, Samanu, 197. Other commentators read it, however, as “[*Bˁr*] (=Baal) and (the Syrian goddess, his spouse) Šala.” For the deity name *ˁd wšr*, see *KTU*3 1.123:13. For a new suggestion for the second element, see below. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. For the text, see de Buck and Gardiner, Egyptian. The translation follows Faulkner, Ancient; cf. Carrier, Textes. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. For the pre-Ptolemaic details of the Osirian myth, attested mainly in the funerary texts and magical papyri, see e.g. Griffiths, Origins; Assmann, Search; Mathieu, Osiris; Quack, Resting; see also below. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. A similar depiction appears also in John 12: 24–25. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. For the text, see Sethe, Dramatische, 134–138, and Pl. 14; Geisen, Ramesseum, 72–73. The text and translation here follow Geisen, Ramesseum, 277 (cf. 186–187). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Cf. e.g. Assmann, Resurrection. His definition of “Egyptian resurrection” is illuminating (p. 124): “In the context of these religions, ancient Egypt seems to have been the sole exception. Only here, human existence encompassed three worlds, the world of the living, the world of the dead, and an Elysian world for which there are many names and descriptions in Egyptian texts such as ‘field of rushes,’ ‘field of offerings,’ ‘bark of millions,’ and ‘house of Osiris.’ Here ‘resurrection’ does not mean to return to life on earth, but to be redeemed from the world of the dead and to be admitted into the Elysian world… Again, the distinction between the world of the dead and the Elysian world, in order to make this absolutely clear, consists in the fact that the world of the dead is a place where the dead are dead, whereas the Elysium is the place where those who were granted resurrection from death lead a new, eternal life.” See also Hornung, Conceptions, 160: “The blessed dead and gods are rejuvenated in death and regenerate themselves at the wellsprings of their existence.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. The most recent and comprehensive essay that deals with this is Mettinger, Riddle. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. For the text and further details of the ritual, see Alster and Geller, Sumerian, Pl. 24 (# 21); Katz, Image, 162–167. Translation and transliteration follows Katz . [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. See for example, Dumuzi’s Dream (*ETCSL* 1.4.3). According to Jacobsen, Lad, 195, Arali was the local name of the desert lying between Bad-Tibira (Medinah) and Uruk (Warka). Only later, when the ancient topography of Uruk was forgotten, was it understood as a designation for the netherworld. This usage, however, is secondary. Cf. Katz, Image, 58–59. For a brief but comprehensive summary of the figure of Dumuzi, see Alster, Tammuz. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Katz, Image, 159 and n. 116. Cf. the Eršemma of Nergal (Cohen, Sumerian, 92–95 [# 164], ll. 25–27). For the unexpected description of Nergal as a young dying god, see Katz, Image, 160–162. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Cf. Livingstone, Mystical, 120–121, l. 19. Gabbay suggests associating this act with the rising of Dumuzi, see: Gabbay, Exegetical, 251–252. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. An-Nadīm’s *Fihrist*, Dodge edition, 758 (Dodge, Fihrist). The translation here follows Hämeen-Anttila, Continuity, 101. For a general discussion of the pagan communities and beliefs in Haran and Iraq during the 10th century CE, see also idem, Pagans. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. For the unique character of the Levantine Adonis, as opposed to his Greek counterpart, see Mettinger, Riddle, 124–137. As he correctly notes there, while most of the Greek texts focus on Adonis’ death, the Levantine texts, (for example, *De Dea Syria*) also describe his resurrection. Apart from Jerome and Origen, the link between Adonis and the ripening of the fruit is also attested in Porphyry and Ammianus Marcelinus. See Mettinger, Riddle, 130–131; cf. Ribichini, Adonis; Lightfoot, Lucian, 310–311. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. For the text, see Migne (ed.), PatrologiaeGraeca 13, cols. 797–800. I am grateful to Dr. G. Darshan for his assistance in translating this text. For other translations, see de Vaux, Bible, 225 (= idem, Quelqes); Mettinger, Riddle, 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. The Vulgate renders Tammuz in Ezekiel 8 as Adonis. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. For an edition of the text, see Migne (ed.) Patrologiae Latina 25, cols. 85–86. The translation follows (with modifications) Scheck, Jerome Ezekiel, 96. Jerome’s acquaintance with the mourning of Adonis/Tammuz in Bethlehem is also mentioned in his letter to Paulinus (Epist. LVIII ad Paulinum, in Patrologia Latina 22, col. 581). Mettinger, Riddle, 129–130, argues that despite Jerome’s acquaintance with Origen’s writings, it is unlikely that he was basing himself on Origen here given the fact that he adds the etiological tale of Adonis which is missing from Origen. Most scholars, however, do not agree; see, e.g. de Vaux, Bible, 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Biblical translations are mine. Very few scholars have noted the Levantine mythological and ritual context of these verses; all seem to have been unaware of the texts of Jerome and Origen. See: Weiser, Psalms, 762–763; Hvidberg, Weeping, 132–134; Anderson, Psalms, 865–866.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. For a detailed list of the parallel themes and vocabulary of the two parts of *KTU* 1.23, see Smith, Rituals, 136–139. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Because of these episodes, early commentators regarded Mot as the god of fertility and grain: see Dussaud, Mythologie; Virolleaud, Cultes**,** 172–173. Modern scholars who hold this position include de Moor, Seasonal, 212, n. 1. Due to Mot’s terrifying character in other places, however, other scholars contend that Mot has no association with grain, and the references are purely metaphorical: see Cassuto Baal; Loewenstamm, Ugaritic; idem, Making; idem, Killing; Fensham, Burning; Watson, Death; Wyatt, Atonement, 427; Mazzini, Torture. This is still the prevalent view today. For recent discussion of these suggestions, with a more extensive bibliography, see Ayali-Darshan, Death. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Most commentators interpret the Ugaritic preposition *l* here as an asseverative *l*, thus reading the sentence as a positive statement: “the birds consume his body.” For further philological notes relating to the Ugaritic citations from *KTU* 1.6, see ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. The motif of seven years as a time span between death and resurrection can also be found in the description of the death and resurrection of Baal or his enemies in *KTU* 1.12 (ll. 44–45); cf. also *KTU* 1.23, 66–67. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. For a concise survey and bibliography about visual representations in Ugarit, see Cornelius, Iconography; cf. Matoïan, Ugarit. In terms of literature, one of the most famous examples is the identification of the Ugaritic Craftsman-god’s (*Kṯr-wḫss*) abode with *ḥkpt* (*ḥkpt arṣ nḥlth*), the temple of the Egyptian Craftsman-god Ptah (Egyptian: *ḥwt k3 ptḥ*), associated with Memphis. See Albright, Recent, 22. Other forms of Egyptian influence upon the Coastal Levant as a whole are also known, such as the shapes of the alphabetical letters and the demotic numbers. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. the relative absence of significant links between Egyptian and Ugaritic literature, (compared to the Egyptian influence detected in other Near Eastern literatures) on one hand, and the numerous affinities between Egyptian and Ugaritic visual art on the other – appears to originate, at least in part, in Egyptian literary conventions. Mesopotamian scribes committed myths to writing from a very early period. The Hurrians and Hittites followed suit, thereby enabling modern scholars to compare their works with those written in Ugarit. As indicated by various texts, the Egyptians, by contrast, continued to preserve myths orally for a much longer period, turning some of them into *belles lettres* on a large scale only in the thirteenth century BCE, toward the end of the New Kingdom period [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. For references and bibliography, see n. 13 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Ayali-Darshan, Death. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. For the text and translation of the Pyramid Texts, see Sethe, Altägyptischen. The translation follows (with modifications) Faulkner, Ancient. Cf. Allen, Ancient. The latter (ibid., 236 n. 23) contends that the reference to “swimming parts” (*nbit=k*) alludes to the story of Seth’s scattering of Osiris’ limbs in the Nile, as documented in later periods (see below). Faulkner, Ancient, understands it as “soft parts”, referring to a specific type of organ. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. For the text and translation of the Coffin Texts, see n. 12 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Leitz, Buch, 119–122. This scene corresponds both to the *Contendings of Horus and Seth* and the *Tebtunis Mythological Manual*: see ibid; Jørgensen, Egyptian, 53–54. For the use of the verb *sr* to refer to scattering, see Quack, Review, 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Chassinat, Le papyrus, 14–16, ll. 5–7; cf. the parallel versions of pNew York 35.9.21, pBerlin 3027, pBrooklyn 47.218.138 and at Hibis, in Goyon, Textes, 356–359. In regards to the amorphous term *ḏ3t*, and the translation of the verb *mḥi* as denoting “immersion,” see the bibliography cited in Ayali-Darshan, Death. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. For the Egyptian text, see Gardiner, Late,57. The translation follows Wente, Contendings, 101. For the maintenance of this tradition, see also spell 142 in the Book of the Dead: “Osiris, pre-eminent in goodly grain, Osiris the lord of the grain”: see Allen, Egyptian, 119. For additional examples from the Dendera temple, see Blackman, Osiris. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. For this practice, see Raven, Corn-mummies; Quack, Saatprobe; Chassinat, Le mystère; Raven, Four; Eaton, Festival. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. For earlier suggestions of a possible influence of the Osirian cycle on Mot, see Gaster, Thespis, 325; Watson, Death, 64; de Moor, Cuneiform, 88, n. 430; Smith, Death, 271; Ayali-Darshan, Death. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. One can speculate that the entity named Mot (Μώτ), mentioned in the cosmogony of Philo of Byblos as “the putrefaction of a watery mixture,” from which “was born every seed of creation and [the] origin of all” (806:20–22; trans. Baumgarten, Phoenician, 97), reflects a complete association of the ancient Mot with fertility features. Philo also mentions the young god Mouth (Μoὺθ), son of Elos-Kronos, who died in his childhood, was sanctified “and the Phoenicians call this one Thanatos and Pluto” (812:9–11). The latter reflects another aspect of the same ancient deity, Mot. Cf. Baumgarten, Phoenician, 111–113. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. See Wiggermann, Transtigridian; idem, Nin-ĝišzida; Katz, Image, 391–395; Alster and Jacobsen, Ningišzida’s. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. Wiggermann, Nin-ĝišzida, 370; Katz, Image, 397–401. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. *Udughul* 284–286: see Katz, Image, 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Inanna’s Descent to the Netherworld, ll. 407–409(*ETCSL* 1.4.1): “You for half the year and your sister for half the year (nin9-zu mu MAŠ-am3); when you are demanded, on that day you will stay, when your sister is demanded, on that day you will be released.” For the integration of this unique theme in the Sumerian version of the text, see Katz, How Dumuzi; idem, Image, 273–287. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. See Poo, Wine,149–151; cf. Mercer, Pyramid, 738–739. According to Griffiths, Origins, 162–163, this appellation was given to Orion, who merged with Osiris on this occasion. For the *Wag*-Festival, see Posener-Kriéger, Wag-Fest. Sources from the New Kingdom attest to the existence of Osirian performances related to his dying and resurrection during the *Wag*-festival. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. See Poo, Wine, 150, following Sethe, Übersetzung, 478–79. Cf. Mercer, Pyramid. The association between Osiris, the grapes and the *Wag*-Festival is explained by Poo, Liquids, as follows: “The festival itself was a funerary feast that was probably aimed at the celebration of the resurrection of life that the inundation brought. Since Osiris epitomized resurrection, there may be a certain connection between Osiris as the god of vegetation and rejuvenation and the symbolic coming to life of the grapevine. The fact that wine production depended upon the coming of the inundation might therefore have fostered the meaning of wine as a symbol of life and rejuvenation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. See the images in <https://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/nobles/sennefer/e_sennefer_01.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. Russmann, Eternal, 196–197 (# 100); cf. Taylor (ed.), Journey, 250–251 (# 128). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. Piankoff and Rambova, Mythological, 133–142 (# 15). Cf. Heerma van Voss, Die Ranken, 235–237; Guasch-Jané, Meaning, 853. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. Cf. Coulon, Osiris, 177–181; Smith, Following, 409–411. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. For references, see nn. 10–11 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. *Ḫss* is probably a local adaptation of the Hurrian epithet/name of Ea: d*Ḫa-az-zi-iz-zi* (see Ayali-Darshan, Meaning, 1–6), *ˀIb* a local adaptation of the Akkadian epithet of Ningal (who herself was borrowed in Ugarit and Syria as Nikkal): *Ilat inbi* (see Driver, Canaanite, 125, n. 4), and *ˁṯtpr* is a local adaptation of the Syrian god Aštabi (see Pardee, Les Textes, 252–253). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. The pronunciation of the first pictogram  as *ws* in the Egyptian name of Osiris was first suggested by Erman, Namen, in light of Coptic (OUCER-), Greek (Ὀσιρις), and Aramaic (אוסרי, וסרי, אסרי) orthography, as well as Egyptian syllabic writing from the Ptolemaic period (   ;  ;    ). Some scholars have recently argued (Lorton, Considerations, 125–126 n. 27; Muchiki, Transliteration; Allen, Name), in light of the same scripts, that the *aleph* at the beginning of the name Osiris was pronounced in ancient Egypt either. However, given the Egyptian syllabic and Coptic script from the 21st dynasty onward that used *w*, and the limitation of the Aramaic alphabetical system to represent it, that Osiris was read as *Wsir* remains valid conjecture; see Quack, Sarapis, 231, n. 14. In regard to the pronunciation of the consonant *s* in the Egyptian name Osiris, there is no dispute, as Semitic languages rendered the Egyptian s as both *š* and *s*. Cf., for example, the Neo-Assyrian transliteration of Isis as *ešu*: see Muchiki, Egyptian. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. Cf. the scene of Osiris in the Nakht papyrus of the Book of the Dead cited above. In light of this we might further identify the image of the Ugaritic seated golden god who is crowned with an Osirian hat (today in the Damascus museum) as a depiction of Mot rather than El. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)