**The demonization of the Ugaritic warrior-goddess Anat\***

**Introduction -Anat and the phenomenon of the warrior goddesses**

Anat, the Ugaritic goddess of war and hunt, is one of the extraordinary goddesses in the multicultural phenomenon of female figures portrayed as powerful and violent warriors in various pantheons of the Ancient Near East.[[1]](#footnote-1) This phenomenon is particularly striking in patriarchal cultures where women's roles in society are typically confined to the domestic sphere.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This essay focuses on the goddess Anat and the question of the ambivalent attitude towards her actions and behavior in the Ugaritic mythological, epic, and ritual-cultic texts. On the one hand, she is worshiped as a glorified female warrior, while on the other hand, she is criticized/reproached for her bellicosity and extreme violence. The explicit, implicit, and implied criticism expressed in various descriptions that portray her negatively leads to demonizing her image and persona. In ancient traditional societies, the feminine social status and roles were restricted to the domestic, familial sphere. Compared to the stereotyped feminine representations in these societies, the model of a warrior female figure such as the Ugaritic Anat, the Mesopotamian Inanna/Ishtar,[[3]](#footnote-3) or the Egyptian Hathor/Sekhmet[[4]](#footnote-4) is a remarkable and outstanding occurrence.[[5]](#footnote-5) The most significant characteristic of these warrior goddesses' imagery is the 'gender role reversal,' expressed in their independent behavior, actions, free movement, and freedom of speech. These goddesses represent a nondomestic female goddess and exemplify the crossing of gender lines. Regardless of the many differences between the various warrior goddesses, they share similar aspects and imagery. By reexamining Anat's descriptions compared to those of other mythical warrior goddesses with demonic portrayals, this study might contribute to a better interpretation and comprehension of the needs, causes, and purposes that led to the presentation of their image and functions in such great contrast to the other goddesses in the pantheons and to the stereotypical image of the earthly female. Most importantly, this comparative study could shed more light on the significance, symbolic meaning, and life-setting 'Sitz in Leben' of Anat's demonic imagery in Ugaritic culture. The comparative analysis is conducted with the awareness that these female figures belong to different cultures with different social systems, religious beliefs, political structures, and mythologies.

**The goddess Anat**

The goddess Anat is portrayed in Ugaritic/Canaanite narrative poetry texts (the Baal Cycle, Aqhat) as a goddess of war and hunting.[[6]](#footnote-6) She is presented in many texts with the epithets: ‘btlt 'nt' the maiden 'Anatu' and' btlt(m)' 'maiden'. No other goddess in the Ugaritic texts bears the title btlt.[[7]](#footnote-7) It is agreed among scholars that this term denotes the social status of her age as a young nubile woman rather than as determining her sexual experience. Anat is known as the daughter of the god creator El, the head of the Ugaritic pantheon, and the sister of the storm god Baal, and is probably also his consort and his main ally.[[8]](#footnote-8)Her epithet ’*b’lt mlk*’ presents her as the patroness of heroes and kings. She is a huntress and mistress of animals with predatory and protective aspects (Day 1992: 181-190); hunting seems to be her favorite pastime (KTU 1.6 ii 15-17; CAT 1.114 23-24). In the texts and the iconography (Ugaritic and Egyptian), she is frequently described with animals (gazelles, lions, and horses) and weapons (a shield, a spear, a battle-axe, and a bow), the symbols for masculinity[[9]](#footnote-9) (Winter 1983; Wyatt 1996: 327-337; Keel and Oehlinger 1998: 161-171; Cornelius 2008: 73-76).[[10]](#footnote-10) She has a complex and multifaceted personality and an independent status within the divine realm. As a female goddess of war and hunt who crosses the gender lines, Anat moves freely between male and female spheres and the divine and human worlds. She is typically depicted as a powerful and ferocious warrior goddess, primarily known for her prowess on the battlefield. Her aspects of violence and ruthlessness befitting her title 'nt hbly' - 'Anat destroyer,' as mentioned in a cultic-ritual text (KTU 1.102.11). Her aggressive nature frightens humans, and even El, Athirat, and other gods are terrified of her. Anat's portrayals in the Baal Cycle describe her mutilating the bodies of human warriors she has just massacred, cutting off heads and hands and wallowing in blood, and the way she murders Aqhat to acquire/get hold of his composite bow as well as other texts and interpretations that portray her negatively, potentially lead to her characterization as a demonic figure.

**Anat’s battles**

Besides Anat's violence in wars, her unrestrained character manifests in her aggressive confrontations with El and Aqhat and her ferocious violent conduct in the battles. She prides herself on killing the enemies of Baal, gods, monsters, and humans. Among the enemies she lists are the sea serpent Yamm/Nahar, the sea monsters (*bṯn ‘qltm*) and Arsh (‘*arš*), the seven heads monster (*šlyṭ d šb‘t r’ašm*), the calf of El Atik *(‘tk*), two demonesses: Dabibu (*ḏbb*) describes as El’s daughter and Flame Ishatu *(‘išt*).[[11]](#footnote-11)

In one of the episodes in the Baal Cycle*,*for example, she is described as fighting on the battlefield, slaughtering and defeating and killing human warriors, the enemies of Baal. She wades in their blood, dismembering and mutilating warriors’ bodies, severing heads, and cutting off hands. Then she ties these grisly trophies to her body:[[12]](#footnote-12)

“Anat meets the youths at the foot of the mountain.

And look! Anat fights in the valley,

Battles between the two towns.

She fights the people of the shore,

Strikes the populance of the su[n r]ise.

Under her, like balls, are hea[ds,]

Above her, like locusts, (fly) hands,

Like locusts heaps of warrior-hands.

She fixes heads to her back,

Fastens hands to her belt.

knee-deep she glea[n]s in warriors- blood,

Neck-deep in the the gor[e]of soldiers,

With a club she drives away captives,

With her bow-string the foe. (Ba’al Cycle:

*CAT* 1.3 ii 4-16) (Smith 1997:107)

Unsated with her killings in the fields, she continues massacring soldiers in her palace:

And look! Anat goes to her house,

The goddess takes herself to her palace.

Unsated with her fighting in the valley,

With battling between the two towns.

She arranges chairs for the soldiery,

Arranges tables for hosts,

Footstools for heroes.

Knee-deep she gleans in warrior-blood,

Neck-deep in the gore of soldiers,

Until sated with fighting in the house,

With battling between the tables. (Ba’al Cycle:

*CAT* 1.3ii 17-24; 27-30) (Smith1997:108)

In another episode, Anat battles with the god of Death, Mot, who defeats Baal and kills him. She performs a series of destructive acts showing her prowess in battle and mainly her horrifying behavior and unrestrained rage by executing her vengeance on Mot’s remains.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Anat seizes Divine Mot,

With a sword she splits him,

With a sieve she winnowed him.

With a fire she burns him,

With millstones she grinds him,

In the field she sows (scatters) him.

The birds eat his flesh,

Fowl devour his parts,

Flesh to flesh cries out. (Ba’al Cycle:

(*CAT* 1.3 ii 17-24; 27-30) (Smith1997:106)

**Anat in the Epic of Aqhat**

The epic “*Aqhat*” (*CAT* 1.17-1.19) is a significant example of Anat’s devious and vindictive behavior. The text tells of Anat’s desire for the magnificent composite bow made for Aqhat by the god of crafts, Kothar-wa-Hasis. She asks Aqhat for the bow and offers him money, kingship, and immortality, but he refuses her offers and insults her. The furious Anat plots to get the bow at any cost and goes to her father, the god El, the head of the pantheon. She demands his consent to Aqhat's murder and threatens to harm him if he refuses:

I will make [your head] run with [blood],

Your old gre[y bea]rd with gore.

Then cry to] Aqhat to rescue you

To [Daniel’s] son to save you

From the hand of [Anat] the girl!

(Aqhat: *CAT* 1.18 i 11-14) (Parker 1997: 63)

Although El is Aqhat’s godfather he capitulates and says[[14]](#footnote-14):

I know you, daughter, as desperate,

[Among the goddesses no]thing resists you,

Go off, daughter, haughty of heart,

[Lay] hold of what’s in your liver,

Set up the […in] your breast.

To resist you is to be beaten.

(Aqhat: *CAT* 1.18 i 16-19) (Parker 1997: 64)

After Anat overcame El's resistance, she entices Aqhat to join her on a hunting trip. While the unsuspecting Aqhat is waiting for her in the field, she turns Yatpan, her henchman, into a bird of prey that flies above Aqhat and kills him with blows to his head (Watson 1977: 73). She then takes Aqhat’s bow, which falls into the sea and is lost. Anat mourns Aqhat's death, but then she dismembers his body, and the vultures devour his remains (Parker 1997: 60-67).[[15]](#footnote-15)

**Warrior goddesses’ violence and cruelty- Comparative perspectives**

Similar descriptions of violence and ruthlessness also portray other warrior goddesses. For example, the Mesopotamian Inanna/Ishtar, the most remarkable and multifaceted goddess of love and war, demonstrates violence and brutality in battle in the myth “Inanna and Ebih.” The text describes her fighting with the rebellious Kur (the personified mountain/Netherworld monster), who refused to acknowledge her superiority:

"She (Inanna) confronts the mountain range…

she sharpened both edges of her dagger.

She grabbed Ebih's neck as if ripping up esparto grass…

she pressed the dagger's teeth into its interior…

she roared like thunder.”

After she finished destroying the mountain,

its inhabitants, forests, and animals

she addressed the mountain:

"… because of your height and your reaching up to heaven,

because you did not put your nose to the ground…

I have killed you and brought you low."

Rejoicing in her fearsome terror she spoke:…

my anger, a harrow with great teeth, has torn the mountain apart…

I imposed my victory on the mountain.

I imposed my victory on Ebih."

(Black 2004: 335 “Inanna and Ebih”)

Another example is the description of the Egyptian goddess Hathor in her incarnation/aspect as the warrior goddess Sekhmet in the myth “The destruction of humanity.

” Hathor/Sekhmet is the daughter of Ra/Re, head of the Egyptian pantheon. As a Goddess of war and patroness of kings, she accompanied the Egyptian Pharaoh to battle and was often described as his mother. In the iconography, Sekhmet is frequently depicted with a lioness head. She is known for spreading terror everywhere, and humans and gods are afraid of her:

“When human beings stopped respecting Ra/Re, the sun god, the father of all creation and the head of the Egyptian pantheon he ordered his daughter Hathor to take on her warrior goddess aspect in the form of Sekhmet and kill humans. She obeyed the command and slaughters men, tearing them to shreds, covering the earth blood. After a while, Ra is satisfied with her killings and decides not to destroy all mankind. He commanded Hathor/Sekhmet to stop. But, she disobeys him because she has developed an uncontrollable blood thirst and finds her pleasure in torturing mortals. Ra attempts to stop her but it is to no avail. She continues her massacre among the innocents until Ra with the aid the other gods tricks her by using a huge amount red wine or red colored beer. Hathor/Sekhmet mistakes the wine/beer for blood, drinks it and falls asleep. When she awakes, her blood-lust has subsided and stopped her desire for bloodshed and destruction. Thus Ra saves humanity from annihilation.” (Lichtheim 1976: 197-199).

Notably, most male warrior gods in the various pantheons are also described as fierce, invincible, merciless, and violent in their battles with their enemies. They performed actions of decapitation, mutilation, and dismembering of their enemies’ bodies, actions that were standard wartime practices in the Ancient Near East. For example, Ba'al’s description of fighting Yamm: The weapon leaps from Baal’s hand,

[like] a raptor from his fingers,

It strikes the head of Prince [Yamm,]

Between the eyes of Judge River.

Yamm collapses and falls to the earth,

His joints shake,

And his form collapses.

Baal drags and dismembers Yamm,

Destroy Judge River. (*CAT* 1.2 iv 23-27) (Smith 1997:104)

Another example is that of the Mesopotamian warrior-god Ninurta/Ningirsu fighting the rebellious lands:

Let my mother ([Ninhursag](https://www.mesopotamiangods.com/ninhursag/)) know it.

           I, Ninurta, will fell trees, I will strike down forests.

           Let my mother know it.

           I will clear them away like an … ax.

           Let my mother know it.

           I (Ninurta) will strike down … walls like a huge ax.

           Let my mother now it.

           I will make their troops tremble like …

           Let my mother know it.

           I will devour them like storm and flood.

           Let my mother know it.

           The warrior (Ninurta) … in furious battle, smashes heads.

           The Lord curses the disobedient, rebellious lands:

           I will …… battering ram, I will …… your venom.

           I will destroy (?) your city gate ……, and reach your …

I will …… shield on (?) your tower, and reduce it to a pile of dust.

           I will …… your ……, like a city cursed by [Enlil](https://www.mesopotamiangods.com/enlil/).

           I will …… you into ruin mounds, like a city hated by Ninurta.” (Annus 2002: 161)

However, these examples show that the narrator uses different language and imagery to describe the male warrior gods than the female warrior goddesses’ imagery. Some of the differences are obvious, and some are implied. The differences are exhibited in the overly detailed descriptions of the fighting practices of the female warriors and by emphasizing specific characteristics of the goddesses' behavior and imagery, such as their being too emotional and verging on hysterics and far more frightening than the male warriors.

The most significant distinction between these descriptions is the emphasis on the ‘gender role reversal’ aspect, as expressed in the criticism of the warrior goddess's use of male warrior weapons. It is reflected in Aqhat’s words:

“Bows are[weapons of] warriors

Will womankind now be hunting?”

The bow and arrow are the most important masculine symbols in ancient Near Eastern cultures. Bows and arrows are part of Anat, Inanna/Ishtar, and Hathor/Sekhmet’s gear. Aqhat’s refusal to give Anat his bow reflects the gender ideology of the patriarchal ideology. Another significant distinction in the narrator’s treatment of male and female warriors is the frequent and extensive physical graphic portrayal of these goddesses' bodies and anatomical parts compared to other gods, significantly showing the different attitudes towards the female warrior goddesses. To emphasize this point, here is a detailed account of Anat’s body parts as mentioned in the Baal Cycle:[[16]](#footnote-16)

**Anat’s Anatomy**

“Feet (*p’n*): 1.1 II 15; 1.3 III 9, 19, 32; 1.3 IV 11; 1.3 V 4; 1.4 V 21.

Back (*bmt*): 1.3 II 12; 1.6 I 5; (*ksl*): 1.3 III 33, 35.

Knees (*brkm*): 1.3 II 13, 27.

Liver (*kbd*): 1.3 II 25, 26.

Heart (*lb*): 1.3 II 26; 1.6 II 8, 29.

Hand/Hands (*yd/ydm*): 1.3 II 32, 34.

Right hand (*ymn*): 1.3 V 22.

Long arm (*arkt*)[[17]](#footnote-17): 1,3 V 23.

Humeral bone of th arm (qn dr’): 1.6 I 4.

Fingers (*uṣb’t*): 1.3II 33, 35.

Breast (*irt*): 1.3 III 5.

Legs (*išd*): 1.3 III 20; 1.3 IV 12.

Face (*pn*): 1.3 II 34; (*pnm*): 1.3 IV 37; 1.3 V 5; 1.4 V 22; 1.6 I 32; 1.6 IV 7.

Vertebrae-back, spine (*pnt*): 1.3 III 34.

Back muscles (*anš dt ẓr*): 1.3 III 35.

Skin (*ģr*): 1.6 I 2.

Cheeks (*lḥm*): 1.6 I 2.

Beard (*dqn*): 1.6 I 3.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Nipples (*ap lb*): 1.6 I 5.

Shoulders (*ktp*): 1.6 I 14.

As “the body” is a cultural, social, and religious symbol, argues Mary Douglas (2003: 161-163), descriptions of sexual nudity and the use of body descriptions signify society’s norms. The excess of Anat’s body descriptions suggests the authors/narrators/redactors treat her more like a human female than a divine goddess.

Certain feminine qualities and behaviors attributed to a woman, like laughing and crying, are also emphasized in Anat's descriptions. However, they usually present something repulsive and destructive in her personality. Here is an example fron the epic Aqhat:

Laughter - Anat laughs a seductive laugh and, in her heart, plans the murder of Aqhat:

Anat laughed out loud,

But inwardly she plotted […].

(*CAT* 1.17 iv 41-42) (Parker 1997: 62)

Crying - After murdering Aqhat, Anat cries and tearfully mourns his death:

[His] life went off like a breath…

[…] Aqhat, and she wept.

(CAT 1.17 iv 36; 39) (Parker 1997: 66)

However, then, she dismembers his body and leaves his remains for the vultures to consume.

Anat’s quick shift from fury to regret and to fury again shows her capricious character.

Another insight into the narrator/author's attitude towards Anat is reflected in the descriptions of Anat’s femininity and by letting the readers peak at the goddess’ private activities and her boudoir:

Washing and Make-up: Anat’s preparations for the battle in the field include bathing, putting on make-up and perfume:

Henna of seven maids,

Scent of coriander and murex. (ii 2-3) (Smith1997:107)

Macabre Adornment: After killing the human warriors, she adorns herself with the dead warriors’ hands, which she ties around her girdle and the heads of the dead warriors as a necklace:

She fixes heads to her back,

Fastens hands to her belt.

(ii 11-13) (Smith1997:107)

Repulsive Playfulness:

knee-deep she glea[n]s in warriors- blood,

Neck-deep in the gor[e]of soldiers,

(ii 13-15) (Smith1997:107)

Arrangement**:** After the massacre in her palace, Anat performs some domestic chores:

She [ar]ranges chairs with chairs,

Tables [with] table <s>;

Footstools she arranges with footstools.

(ii 36-37) (Smith1997:108)

Then, she

Washes and beautifies**:**

[She] draws water and washes

[With D]ew of heaven, Oil of Earth,

Showers of Cloud[r]ider…

She beautifies herself with murex…

(*CAT* 1.17 ii 38-40; iii 1) (Smith1997:109)

Anat plays and sings love songs:

[She takes her harp in hand,]

[P]uts the lyre to her breast.

She sings the love of Mightiest Baal,

The passion of Pidray, Daughter of Light…

(*CAT*  iii 4-8) (Smith1997:109)

After the massacre in her palace, Anat performs some domestic chores. The feminine descriptions of Anat as a female goddess make her closer and more accessible to humans; therefore, as a female figure, she can be more easily criticized. Likewise, the descriptions of Anat's unrestrained violence and ruthlessness, combined with the gruesome and repulsive descriptions of her so-called 'feminine' traits, also provide another layer in her transformation into a demonic figure.

**Anat’s Connections to Death**:

Two more elements in Anat’s descriptions may have influenced her perception as a sinister and demonic deity. These are her association with death and the underworld in the Ba'al Cycle and her frequent mention in sacrificial and tribute lists in the Ugaritic ritual-cultic texts with the Plague and Destruction god Reshef. This association with the realm of the dead might also be considered another reason that eventually led to demonizing her image and persona.

**Conclusion**

The phenomenon of female warrior goddesses is a dramatic and powerful literary strategy. The portrayals of these unique female figures suggest that they are cultural symbolic projections and a didactic means by which the conceptualization of cultural ideologies, social norms, and values are substantiated in their societies. Gender role reversal is a powerful tool in furthering messages directed at modes of feminine behavior. These independent maiden warrior goddesses with "masculine" attributes and activities cross the boundaries of the expected gender roles and pose a threat to the social order. They challenge the social/religious conventions on the one hand and simultaneously draw the boundaries of the social order, thus constructing them. (Bal 1988, 264-265). The ambivalent attitude towards the warrior goddesses is characterized by the opposing ideologies incorporated within the texts that describe them. It is conceivable to assume that there are objectives and a meta-message behind this literary strategy.They tell us much about the authors/narrators/redactors' ideologies and reflect those patriarchal societies' larger worldview and agenda. Such descriptions contain educational didactic messages and goals. These goddesses are not only female warriors performing male activities. They are incomplete, liminal female figures with ambiguous identities. The gender role reversal aspect characterizing the warrior goddesses presents them as autonomous, independent females who are not fulfilling "feminine roles" as wives and mothers and could be a threat to the social order. This representation is essential to demonstrating society's ambivalent attitude towards women. It also clarifies the dialogue of polarity between "positive" and "negative" female behavior in these traditional cultures. Through the narratives of the anomalous phenomenon of warrior goddesses, the writers acknowledge the existence of contradictions and opposing powers and the importance of the balance between order and disorder. The autonomous, powerful female presents a paradox of coveted-threatening females in androcentric cultures reflecting patriarchal males' desires and fantasies. The demonization of the warrior goddess is also a symbolic representation of the anxieties and concerns of the killing and emasculating powers attributed to these independent divine female figures, with the Canaanite/Ugaritic goddess Anat leading example.

The violent heroines' liminality allows for better insights into social gender perception in these societies. By placing them within society's boundaries, they can be accepted.

Many interpretative approaches have been given to Anat's character, roles, and place in Ugaritic culture, mythology, and religion. Among them are interpretations related to the change of seasons and fertility, ritual interpretation, war between the forces of order and chaos, and wars over status in the pantheon. Nevertheless, these interpretations do not provide a sufficient explanation for her transformation into a demonic figure. This essay proposes to consider the aspect of the gender role reversal in her presentation as the central element in demonizing Anat’s character and persona.

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1. \*This essay is expanded from a paper presented at the SBL International Meeting in Salzburg in July 2022, dedicated to my dear and special friend Sara Shachar-Lev.

   On the goddess Anat see: Kaperlrud 1959; Walls 1992; Day 1995:62-77; Lloyd 1994 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The patriarchal order controls the power relations between the sexes in the social structure and determines attitudes toward women. Men are the heads of most institutions in the family, the community, and state authorities. They hold power and social, cultural, and economic resources. (Elior 2000: 215-217). On gender studies see: Ortner 1974: 67-87; Rosaldo 1974:17-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. On the goddess Inanna/Ishtar see Harris 1991: 261-278; Frymer-Kensky 1992: 25-31; 77-80; Jacobsen 1993: 63-68; Abusch 1995: 847-855; De Shong 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. On Hathor/Sekhmet see: Bleecker 1973; Germond 1981; Hart 1986: 161-181. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On Women in Ugarit see Marsman 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. On ritual and cultic Ugaritic texts see Pardee 2002a; On the Baal cycle 2002b : 241-274. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For Anat’s tittles and epithets, and character see: Albright 1925: 73-101; Bowman 1978:169-182; Day 1991: 141-146; Walls 1992: 78-82; Lloyd 1994. Dietrich and Loretz 1997: 151–160. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Rahmouni 2008: 140; Walls 1992: 185-186. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. On symbols for masculinity see Hoffner 1966: 326-334 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. On Anat in the Egyptian pantheon see: Walls 1992: 144-152. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Some of these enemies are mentioned as defeated by Ba’al himself. This contrast might be explained as two different versions of the myth. See: Walls 1992: 161—162; Rahmouni 2008: 215-216. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. On Anat’s Bloodbath see Gray 1979: 315-324. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Bowman 1986, Walls 1992, Lloyd 1994, and others interpret the description of Anat’s battle with Mot and her brutal abusement of his remains as an agricultural ritual. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See Natan-Yulzari 2019: 582 n. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. On the story of Aqhat see Hillers 1973: 71-80; Margalit 1989; Wyatt 1999: 234-258; Brison 2007: 67-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Page 1998: 603-613. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Gibson 1977: 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. On the debate concerning the “bearded Anat” see Loewenstamm 1982: 119-123; Walls 1992: 83-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)