**The Love of Baal for a Cow: Its Background, Dissemination and Development in Ugarit**

The myth of Baal’s love for a cow, his intimacy with her, and the birth of their calf is included in two independent Ugaritic works and is echoed in other Ugaritic writings as well. Like the two central episodes of the Baal cycle—Baal’s battle with Sea and Baal’s descent into the netherworld—this myth too has precedents, parallels, and echoes in the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean literature, which point to its centrality in these ancient cultures. Nevertheless, perhaps because the main Ugaritic sources reflecting this myth are fragmentary, to date no comprehensive research has been undertaken to examine the development of this myth in its Ugaritic context and in light of its precedents and contemporary parallels in ancient Near Eastern literature.

The principal Ugaritic sources in which the myth in question is included, are *KTU* 1.10 and column V in *KTU* 1.5. *KTU* 1.10 is an independent literary work, the last two columns of which tell about Baal’s lust for a cow and the birth of their calf. An additional protagonist in this text is Anat, to whom the text relates occasionally as Baal’s lover in terms reminiscent of Mesopotamian and biblical love songs, including the absence of the male lover and the search for him. The second text, which tells about Baal’s love for a cow and the birth of their offspring, is integrated into the myth of Baal’s descent into the netherworld, with no reference to Anat. This text, which employs terms characteristic of animals, constitutes a distinct tradition that contradicts other traditions within the Baal cycle.

Three additional Ugaritic texts may be related to this topic: the fragmentary *KTU* 1.1, the few remnants of which indicate a close similarity to *KTU* 1.10, suggesting it might be another version of *KTU* 1.10; *KTU* 1.93, of which only the beginning is extant, containing a dialogue between Baal and a cow; but without a sexual context; and *KTU* 1.12, which refers to the maid of the moon god and her difficulties in pregnancy. At first glance, KTU 1.12 has nothing to do with the myth of Baal’s love for a cow, since neither Baal nor a cow is mentioned in this composition. Nevertheless, it might attest for the familiarity of the Ugaritic scribes with a crucial component embedded in a Mesopotamian equivalent myth, as will be shown below.

In order to examine the background of the myth of Baal’s love for a cow, one must initially to consult the extra-Ugaritic texts referring to the myth of the god’s love for a cow, before turning back to the Ugaritic material. About a year ago, when I wrote the abstract for this lecture, I thought that dealing with the extra-Ugaritic material will take no more than a paragraph, since this had already been dealt with in several studies. After a while, however, I discovered that presenting the finds will take more than three lectures. Therefore, the lecture today will focus on the first steps of that myth in Mesopotamia and imply for the crucial development it apparently takes in both Ugarit and Hatti at the Late Bronze Age.

As is well known, among the ancient Near Eastern cultures, the oldest and greatest number of textual finds referring to the god’s love for a cow have been discovered in Mesopotamia, while at Hatti a sole composition whose introduction refers to the god’s love for a cow was unearthed. However, all the Mesopotamian occurrences of this myth is included solely in incantations for women who having pain in labor. This different setting of the myth in Mesopotamia, in relation to Ugarit and Hatti, may be one of the explanations for its different content and focus on the one hand, as well as for its dispersion of among the Near Eastern cultures on the other.

The longest Mesopotamian historiola – which is the definition of a narrative imbedded in incantation – that refers to the myth of the god’s love for a heifer was copied in a series known today as the Neo-Assyrian Compendium for a Woman in Childbirth. Fragmentary manuscripts of the same historiola were unearthed at Ugarit and Hatti of the Late Bronze Age, attesting thus for a much earlier date of this text. It goes as the following:

**Text no. 1…**

According to this Mesopotamian historiola, the moon-god loved a beautiful cow, so he adorned her with something shining, and placed her at the head of the herd. Consequently, the herdsmen followed behind her and gave her lushest grass and good water, and a bull mated with her. When she was about to give birth, the cow was very much afraid and frightened the herdsman. He and the herdsboys, in turn, cried and wailed along with her. The moon-god heard the crying in heaven and sent two protective spirits to assist in her labor. On the third try, the cow easily gave birth to a calf.

This text emphasizes the role of the herdsmen and the herd, while giving only a minor place to the moon-god, *the* savior of the cow. The latter is mentioned, in fact, just twice: first, when he loves the beautiful cow and places her at the head of the herd, and later, when he assists her during her difficult labor by sending the two protective spirits. What transpires between those two events takes place within the herd, on the ground, described as part of the daily life of the herd.

Nevertheless, many scholars – perhaps under the influence of the Classic tales of Io and Europa – have interpreted both the herdsmen and the bull as epithets for the moon-god who mating with the cow. Others have suggested that the moon-god dressed up as a bull in order to copulate with the cow, or that the entire legendary scene took place in the heavens. There is no hint, however, of any of these in the current text. While the Sumerian hymns that describe the moon-god as a bull or herdsman with a huge herd of cows may clarify the background for composing a myth about the love of the moon-god for a cow and his assistance to her, they do not enable us to interpret every “herdsman” (and plural “herdsmen” even less so) and every “bull” as a hypostasis of the moon-god, unless it is specified in one way or another.

Scholars are also divided over the question of whether the narrative about the moon-god and his cow was first developed apart from an incantation for a woman in labor or was composed initially as an inherent part of it. Given that the narrative reflected in this incantation tells about the cow in its natural setting of herdsmen and herds, it does not appear to have been deliberately composed to serve as a historiola for a woman *per se.* Rather, over time the similarity between the difficult labor of domesticated animals, such as the cow in this myth, and that of a woman in childbirth led to its insertion in an incantation of this sort.

This suggestion, namely, that the narrative as preserved in this incantation was directed only *ex post facto* to serve as a historiola for a woman, gains support from a Middle Assyrian version of the same historiola, which deliberately omits all mention of the herd and the herdsmen. To date, scholars have explained the differences between the Neo-Assyrian copy and the two Middle Assyrian versions of the historiola, as ultimately stemming from scribal corruptions and affected by the Assyrian dialect. This premise, however, must be corrected; the consistent omissions in the Middle Assyrian versions indicate a deliberate reworking, whose purpose was to bring the narrative closer to the patient—the woman in labor. The text of one of the Middle-Assyrian versions in extant goes thus:

**Text no. 2…**

In order to bring the narrative closer to the patient, the Middle Assyrian composer thus employed two actions: one, as mentioned above, was the elimination of any reference to the herd and the herdsmen. These references have either been deleted completely or attributed to other characters. Thus, for example, instead of the cow being pastured by the herdsmen as in the earlier version, it is the moon-god who herds the cow, and in place of the herdsmen kneeling in supplication, it is the birthing cow who kneels with labor pains. The second thing done by the Middle Assyrian author was to frame the story in the context of the woman’s difficulties in labor, both at the beginning and at the end. Since the final lines relating to the woman in childbirth were already exist in this incantation, he had only to add the opening lines, which he borrowed from the opening lines of a previous incantation that was copied on the same tablet. As a result of this redaction, the historiola became more appropriate for the patient. However, a secondary – perhaps unintentional – result of this was the transference of the myth from a setting of herdsmen and herds to a mythic setting in which the sole protagonist is the moon-god Sîn. The opposite possibility, that the Middle Assyrian version represents the short, original narrative, with no herd or herdsmen, which were added into the text reflected in the Neo-Assyrian copy and the two fragmented texts from Hatti and Ugarit, is implausible. It would be very difficult to assume that a later scribe would add a realistic description of the herd and herdsmen to an incantation for a pregnant woman, or would deliberately demythologize the historiola.

Evidence that the Mesopotamian narrative referring to the moon-god’s love for a cow continued to be diminished over the years is provided by another Neo-Assyrian incantation which was copied also in the Compendium for a Woman in Childbirth.

**Text no. 3…**

Despite the brevity of this text, traces of several earlier versions are discernible here. The opening line of the narrative is identical to the one that opens the former Neo-Assyrian copy, mentioning the common name of the cow, Geme-Sîn, while the end of it calls the cow by a different name, i.e., Egi-Sîn, based on the name mentioned in the Middle Assyrian version: Gī-Sîn.

The combination of traditions here, and in particular the textual difficulty resulting from the two different names of the cow, testify to the lateness of that version in relation to the other above-mentioned versions. Unsurprisingly, this late version also focuses solely on the pregnancy. Neither the herd nor the herdsmen are referred to, nor the mating with the bull. It thus appears that, as in the Middle Assyrian version, the main factor behind this is the adaptation of the myth to the patient’s situation: the difficulties encountered by the woman in labor.

All the Mesopotamian texts reviewed so far were part of one branch of the historiola referring to the Moon-god’s love for a cow. A second branch, whose earlier version is dated to the Old Babylonian period, focuses on the cow’s difficulty in giving birth, her crying to the moon-god, and the assistance given to her, without a narrative frame referring to her being beloved and pastured by the moon-god. Nevertheless, this branch attests to the *terminus post quem* of the myth, since it is based on the very same narrative. No evidence of this narrative prior to the Old Babylonian period exists.

In light of these, the common assumption among scholars that “The Cow of Sîn” was one of the most widespread and ancient myths in Mesopotamia, and the first of the stories that spread around the Near East about the mating of a god – in the figure of a bull – with a cow, must be rejected. Our results show that no familiarity with this story is evident prior to the Old Babylonian period, no familiarity with it exists in other Mesopotamian texts except the ten versions of the incantation for a woman in labor, and none of these versions refers to a god who impregnates a cow. The first explicit narrative in which a cow mates with a god and gives birth to their offspring occurs in the extra-Mesopotamian literature of Hatti and Ugarit of the Late Bronze Age.

Given that conclusions, do the Ugaritic and Hittite materials referring to the god’s love for a cow and their intimacy have any relation at all with the Mesopotamian incantations for a woman in labor? I believe they have. The fact that the Mesopotamian historiola serves in both Hatti and Ugarit as part of the local curricula evidently indicate one of the paths in which the core of the myth could have been transmitted from its homeland to the local scribes of the periphery. Additional path might be the oral magic, but this path has naturally no evidence, and its very existence is in question on its own. Either way, the acquaintance of the Ugaritic scribes with that historiola may be implied further by the occurrence of an Ugaritic figure named ‘the maid of the moon-god’ who having trouble pregnancy in *KTU* 1.12, in a way reminiscent of the cow-‘maid of the moon-god’ in the Mesopotamian historiola.

During its development into a tale on it own, the Ugaritic myth of Baal’s love for a cow, as reflected in *KTU* 1.10 and *KTU* 1.5 V, lost completely the topic of the pain in labor which were part of the original incantation, while elaborating the sexual relations of the god with the cow, which are absent from the Mesopotamian historiola. The same occurred also regarding the Hittite texts; there, too, local material reveals links between the moon god and difficulties in pregnancy, alongside attribution of the mating with the cow and the birth of their offspring to the sun-god. These findings provide evidence for various stages in the transmission, reception and development of the Mesopotamian myth in both Hatti and Ugarit. It further implies for the transmission of these traditions around the Mediterranean up to Classical Greece. This, however, goes far beyond the scope of the present lecture.