How to Become a Brother in the Bronze Age:
An Inquiry into the Representation of Politics
in Ugaritic Myth

AARON TUGENDHAFT
New York University
atugendhaft@gmail.com

Abstract: The article argues that a scene from the thirteenth-century B.C. Ugaritic Baal Cycle in which the goddess Anat announces to Baal that he has been offered a palace like his brothers’ can be best understood in reference to the contemporary international political practice of fellow Bronze Age kings calling each other “brother.” By depicting Baal as having “become a brother,” the poem provides a means for its audience to compare a god’s exploits in a poem to recent political events on the ground and to thereby reflect upon the nature of “brotherhood” as a marker of political legitimacy. In reading the poetic text against works attesting to Late Bronze Age political practice, the article not only offers an innovative method for studying Ugaritic poetry but also raises broader questions about the relationship between poetry and politics that have bearing on the study of ancient literature more generally.

I. Anat’s Good News

In the surviving text of the Bronze Age poem from Ugarit that bears his name, the storm-god Baal (or one of his proxies) complains four times of not having “a house like the gods’” or “a court like the sons of Athirat’s.”

Seven columns after Baal’s first attested lament, the goddess Anat brings Baal good news:

A house has been given you like your brothers’,
A court like your kinsmen’s.

On the surface, the good news is straightforward enough: Baal will obtain the house that until now he has lacked. But more is at stake in Anat’s announcement. The language Anat uses to describe the house differs from the language of Baal’s oft-repeated lament. In the earlier passages the house in question is described as “like the gods” (km ’ilm) and “like the sons of Athirat’s” (kbn ’atra). Anat now uses the phrases “like your brothers” (km ’aḥk) and “like your kinsmen’s” (km ’aryk). Why this shift in language and what does it signify about Anat’s good news?
In their recent commentary to the middle two tablets of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, Mark S. Smith and Wayne Pitard remark that this change “illustrates the type of variations that are possible within even a highly formulaic passage.” But this only heightens the question: why, in a form of poetry known for its repetitions, does the standard formula give way precisely at this moment? Anat’s message is no longer a statement of lack, but rather an announcement of fulfillment. To say that the change is due to poetic variation misses the full import of this shift. It is only after Baal’s objective of a house is obtained—following a prolonged process in which the lament is each time repeated verbatim—that Athirat’s sons are called Baal’s brothers. The change in terminology reflects a changed situation.

The phrases Anat uses are not simply variants of those used earlier by Baal. In the lament, Baal presents himself as not belonging to the family of El and Athirat. This conforms to a general tendency in the poem to present Baal as an “outsider” to Athirat’s family. But this status is not static. Anat’s new language should be taken as a marker of a shift in Baal’s status at this point in the narrative. Anat can now call Athirat’s sons “Baal’s brothers” because a transformation in the divine household has taken place. Baal’s attainment of a house like the other gods’ reflects a change in his relationship to those other gods. Those who had been unrelated have now become related. Baal has become a brother.

Following Anat’s report, Baal arranges for his house to be built. Cedars are brought from Lebanon, and silver and gold are employed in abundance. Upon the house’s completion, Baal holds a feast to which the other gods are invited. Once again, Athirat’s children are called Baal’s brothers:

He slaughtered large stock [as well as] small,
He felled bulls [and] fattened rams,
Year old calves,
Sheep by the flock with k[il]ds.
He invited his brothers into his house,
His kinsmen into his palace,
He invited the seventy sons of Athirat.

By welcoming his new siblings into his new house, feasting them with calves, kids, rams, and bulls, Baal solidifies his new position among the gods.

The scene parallels a political practice engaged in by Late Bronze Age kings. A fourteenth-century B.C. royal letter discovered in Egypt, for example, attests to the hosting of a feast upon the completion of a new palace. Kadashman-Enlil of Babylonia writes to Pharaoh Amenhotep III: “I have built a [ne]w [house. No]w I am going to hav[e] a house-opening. Come [yourself] to [eat an]d drink with me.” Similar feasts would be held at royal enthronements. When Amenhotep III’s son took the throne of Egypt he hosted such a reception. Conceptually, royal accession and
the acquiring of a new house were related; the Akkadian word *bitum* ("house") and its cognates (including Ugaritic *bt*) connoted both the physical structure one inhabited and the dynasty one ruled.\(^{11}\)

In addressing his invitation to Amenhotep III, Kadashman-Enlil refers to his Egyptian counterpart as "my brother" and calls himself "your brother."\(^{12}\) The familial designation should not be taken literally. In the Late Bronze Age, kings regularly used the term "brother" among themselves in order to articulate a shared recognition of their equal status and legitimacy.\(^{13}\) The terminology allowed monarchs to present international political relationships as if they were grounded in and governed by traditional kinship norms. Joint banqueting reinforced these ties, and an enthronement was a particularly appropriate occasion for such feasting because it marked the moment when the host attained a status equal to his guests, the neighboring monarchs. It was the moment when the new king became one of the brothers. Baal’s feast, to which he invites his new brothers, echoes this diplomatic tradition of hosting one’s fellow monarchs upon rising to their status.

### II. Politics in Poetic Representation

In a 1967 article on treaty terminology in the Bible, the renowned north-west Semitic philologist Jonas Greenfield noted that several phrases in the Baal Cycle echo the language of Late Bronze Age treaties.\(^ {14}\) Greenfield draws attention to two passages in the Ugaritic poem. In one, Baal sends a message to Mot, the Ugaritic deity of death, in which he declares himself Mot’s “eternal vassal.”\(^ {15}\) In the other passage, a speech that El makes in reply to messengers sent by Yamm, Baal is said to be Yamm’s vassal and so is ordered to bring tribute to the sea-god:

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Your vassal is Baal, O Yamm,
Your vassal is Baal, [O River,]
The son of Dagan, your captive,
He will bring your tribute,
As the gods, bring [your gift,]
As the holy ones, your offerings.\(^ {16}\)
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As Greenfield recognized, the passage employs the same terminology that one finds in documents attesting to Ugarit’s subservient relationship to the kingdom of Hatti, the great imperial power that controlled much of Syria in the Late Bronze Age. Just as El comments that Baal must bring tribute (*ybl ‘argmn*) to Yamm, an administrative document identifies “the tribute (*’argmn*) that Niqmaddu, king of Ugarit, shall bring (*ybl*) to the Sun, the Great King, his lord.”\(^ {17}\) The poem’s evocation of such diplomatic conventions offers its audience a hook with which the relationships among the poem’s divine protagonists can be linked to contemporary politics.\(^ {18}\)
How are we to understand this link between mythic literature and political life? Some scholars have argued that the depiction of Baal as a vassal corresponds to Ugarit’s political subordination and relative weakness with respect to the great powers of the day.\(^19\) Though I would agree that the Baal Cycle arises out of local political experience, I plan to show that the poem achieves a more sophisticated relationship to that experience than mere representation. Rather than simply being a reflection of its world, the Baal Cycle furnishes its audience with a means to reflect on the political norms operative within it. In contrast to those who have argued that the Baal Cycle is a vehicle for entrenching ideology, I suggest that the poem instead throws into question the normative status of kinship as a political principle.\(^20\) It does so by providing its audience with a narrative that can be triangulated with reigning political norms, on the one hand, and actual experience of political events, on the other.

The poetic texts from Ugarit stand out among works of ancient literature in that they were dug up side-by-side with diplomatic treaties, edicts, and political correspondence that attest to both contemporary political thought and recent political history. Many other contemporary political documents have been unearthed at neighboring sites. This non-literary material makes it possible to consider the relationship between poetry and political life in a way unthinkable for textually more isolated works like the Homeric poems and the Mahabharata. The reading presented here should therefore be of interest beyond the limited circle of those concerned with the interpretation of Ugaritic literature. The richness of the contextual sources surrounding the Baal Cycle renders this fragmentary poem from a peripheral Bronze Age city an excellent locus for studying the dynamic relationship between audience and text that can emerge in the play between political ideals, historical experience, and literary representation.

### III. The Path to Brotherhood

How did one become a brother in the Bronze Age? Some rulers of course became brothers the old-fashioned way—by inheriting the throne from their fathers according to conventional rules of succession.\(^21\) The principle that “brotherhood” could pass from one generation to the next can be found, for example, in a letter from Hattusili III to Kadashman-Enlil II.\(^22\) The Hittite ruler assures the young king of Babylonia that the “brotherhood” he had enjoyed with the latter’s late father was not “for a single day,” but was intended to persist beyond the death of any individual party. Accordingly, Hattusili addresses the young Kadashman-Enlil as “brother,” just as he had called the latter’s father Kadashman-Turgu “brother” before him.\(^23\)

But one’s path to brotherhood was not always so straightforward. Familiarity with Hattusili’s career makes this apparent. This Hittite monarch
assumed kingship, after all, by means of a coup, usurping the throne from his nephew Urhi-Tessub. Hattusili’s career provides a vivid example of how political status could be contested, gained, and lost. Being a brother was by no means a static fact in the politics of the Late Bronze Age. And what was true for individuals was no less true for states. Hattusili, in a letter to Adad-nirari I of Assyria, speaks of the kings of equal rank. These were the kings of the “Great Powers Club”—but precisely who belonged to this club and why was never as self-evident as its members tended to assert.

Even though Great Kings often claimed that membership was fixed and rooted in tradition, the extant sources reveal that members in fact shifted in and out over the course of the Late Bronze Age. Towards the close of this period, Tudhaliya IV of Hatti states in his treaty with Shaushkamuwa of Amurru: “the kings who are my equals in rank are the King of Egypt, the King of Babylonia, the King of Assyria, and the King of Ahhiyawa.” As has been often noted, the final member in the list was erased by the scribe who produced this document, suggesting that Ahhiyawa had actually lost its status as a great power by this point. Similarly, just as Ahhiyawa could fall, other kingdoms could rise in the ranks. This is most strikingly the case with Assyria. Though its ruler is listed here as an equal king, such was not always the case. Studying Assyria’s rise to parity with the other great powers provides an instructive case for how one could become a brother in the Bronze Age. A series of documents allow us to follow Assyria’s trajectory, beginning with the period of the Amarna archive in the fourteenth century B.C. and continuing through to the collapse of the international system at the end of the thirteenth century B.C.

Assyria appears on the international scene for the first time in a modest letter to the Egyptian court. Assur-uballit, the Assyrian king, announces that though his predecessors had never written to Egypt, he is now initiating a correspondence. The short letter mentions a selection of gifts that the Assyrian king is enclosing and includes a request that the Assyrian messenger be allowed to “see what you are like and what your country is like, and then leave for here.” Seemingly benign, this letter is actually a prime example of diplomatic audacity. By presenting a greeting-gift to the king of Egypt and trying to open an exchange of messengers between the two courts, the sender is attempting to break into the elite club of great powers. Even so, one still notices signs of restraint in the Assyrian king’s letter: it does not use the language of brotherhood in addressing the Egyptian monarch, nor does it include a comment about the sender’s own well-being (a common element in letters between equals.) Ruffling Egyptian feathers would not have gotten Assur-uballit what he sought at this early stage in the game.
Though we do not possess the Egyptian response to this overture, a follow-up letter from Assur-uballit to the Egyptian court suggests that the Assyrian venture met with some success. This second letter opens: “S[ay] to . . ., [Great King], king of Egypt, my brother. Thus Assur-uballit, king of [Assy]ria, Great King, your brother.” The reticence that marks the first letter has disappeared and the language of brotherhood is fully employed. The sender then continues, “When I saw your [me]ss[en]gers, I was very happy.” Presumably, these Egyptian messengers journeyed to Assyria in response to the previous letter. Did they already address the Assyrian monarch as a great king and brother to the Pharaoh, as Assur-uballit now styles himself? We cannot know. We do know that they came bearing gifts, because the king of Assyria complains that the gold brought him wasn’t worthy of a great king. “I am the [equal] of the king of Hanigalba,” he writes, “but you sent me . . . of gold, and it is not enough [f]or the pay of my messengers on the journey to and back. If your purpose is graciously one of friendship, send me much gold.” From this statement, one might conclude that the Egyptian response to Assyria’s overture did not go so far as to treat the newcomer as an equal. Caution is necessary, however, as hyperbole and other forms of rhetorical maneuvering are not uncommon in such letters. By playing off both expressions of joy and disappointment in his letter, Assur-uballit continues to negotiate his diplomatic status vis-à-vis Egypt, in the wake of promising initial results.

Not all the great powers were as willing to let Assyria into the game. Assur-uballit’s venture provoked a particularly vehement reaction in the king of Babylonia. He writes to his Egyptian brother: “Now, as for my Assyrian vassals, I was not the one who sent them to you. Why on their own authority have they come to your country? If you love me, they will conduct no business whatsoever. Send them off to me empty handed.” Babylonia was not alone in refusing Assyria admittance into the circle of brothers, as the following text from Hatti reveals.

The letter seems to have been written in the wake of Assyria’s defeat of Mitanni, as a Hittite response to a lost letter from the king of Assyria announcing his successes. Irritated, the Hittite king replies:

You continue to speak about [the defeat] of Wasashatta [and the conquest] of the land of Hurri. You indeed conquered by force of arms. And you conquered . . ., and have become a Great King. But why do you still continue to speak about brotherhood and about seeing Mount Amanus? What is this, brotherhood? And what is this, seeing Mount Amanus? For what reason should I write to you about
brotherhood? Who customarily writes to someone about brotherhood? Do those who are not on good terms customarily write to one another about brotherhood? On what account should I write to you about brotherhood? Were you and I born from one mother? As [my grandfather] and my father did not write to the King of Assyria [about brotherhood], you shall not keep writing to me [about brotherhood] and Great Kingship. [It is not my] wish.\(^{33}\)

The passage is generally taken to reflect a distinction in the author’s mind between “great kingship,” on the one hand, and “brotherhood,” on the other. Thanks to Assyria’s newly established military prowess it could no longer be denied that she was one of the great powers, but Urhi-Tessub was not about to recognize her as a brother on that basis.\(^{34}\) A new translation by Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., however, suggests a slight change in nuance whose implications are worth considering. Rather than translating Urhi-Tessub’s statement about great kingship as an acknowledgment of fact, Hoffner renders this crucial line as a sarcastic question: “So you’ve become a ‘Great King,’ have you?”\(^{35}\) This would make the claim to great kingship, too, part of the (Hittite perceived) Assyrian pretention. Though Hoffner does not draw this conclusion from his rendering (in fact he repeats the standard interpretation, quoting Bryce at length), if read as sarcasm the phrase would not necessitate a conceptual distinction between “great kingship” (which the Hittite sovereign recognizes in Assyria, even if grudgingly) and “brotherhood” (which continues to be denied the Assyrian king). Rather, at this point in Hittite-Assyrian relations, it would seem, the Hittite king is simply not willing to admit that Assyrian “force of arms” entitles the Assyrian king to a status equal to his own, be it called “great kingship” or “brotherhood.” The passage, in fact, ends with the author stating explicitly that he does not want to hear his Assyrian correspondent speak about great kingship anymore, suggesting that this status too—and not just brotherhood—is being denied to the Assyrian monarch.\(^{36}\)

Simple “force of arms”—so Urhi-Tessub maintains—is not what makes one a brother. Brotherhood is founded upon a complex system of mutual recognition and interaction that Urhi-Tessub was not about to extend to his neighbor. In denying that brotherhood can be the prize of brute force, he reveals an anxiety that power may in fact be its ultimate foundation. The irritation expressed in the letter suggests that Urhi-Tessub knew his correspondent had a point—no matter how little he wanted to admit it. The fact that Urhi-Tessub’s own legitimacy as Hittite sovereign was not without challenges may have contributed to the tensions evident in the letter. The Hittite monarch knew all too well that one’s legitimacy could not so easily be divorced from the power that puts and keeps one on the throne. Urhi-Tessub would not last long on that throne. His uncle Hattusili wanted to be king and set in motion a coup that would bring him the crown. With a new ruler in Hattusa, policy towards Assyria took a turn.
Upon acceding to the Hittite throne, Hattusili wrote to Adad-nirari I, king of Assyria:

When I assumed kingship, you did not send a messenger to me. It is the custom that when kings assume kingship, the kings, his equals in rank, send him appropriate [gifts of greeting], clothing befitting kingship, and fine [oil] for his anointing. But you did not do this today.\(^{37}\)

Though on the surface Hattusili’s letter is a rebuke of Adad-nirari’s behavior, it is in actuality an overture of friendship to Assyria. The rebuke itself implies that Hattusili desired Adad-nirari’s attendance, and so viewed the Assyrian king as his equal—a status no earlier extant Hittite document grants to Assyria. Likewise, by asking Adad-nirari whether the king of Babylonia had sent him appropriate greeting-gifts, Hattusili flatters Assyria as the equal of a country whose king had called his great-grandfather a vassal three-quarters of a century earlier.\(^{38}\) In fact, the claim that Assyria would be treated differently under Hattusili’s administration than it had been previously is the theme of the remainder of the letter. The new Hittite monarch assures Adad-nirari that his messengers will no longer suffer aggravation as they had when Urhi-Tessub reigned. We can only speculate as to Hattusili’s motivations in overturning the previous Hittite policy. Was he simply recognizing what everyone had known for a long time—that Assyria was now one of the great powers? Perhaps. But considering what we know about Hattusili’s skills in the ways of politics, we might wonder if more was at play. Positive relations with Assyria could have been of help to Hattusili in solidifying his position at home. If this is so, then one chapter in the story of Assyria’s rise to brotherhood may well have been the product of a Hittite king’s own striving for legitimacy.

Assyria continued to grow powerful militarily. In the face of this developing threat, Hattusili adopted a policy of reconciliation in order to ease tensions between the two powers.\(^{39}\) Within this context Hatti began addressing Assyria as a brother. Numerous letters are extant from the diplomatic correspondence between the two courts for this general period.\(^{40}\) Though many are quite fragmentary, the letters attest to Hattusili and his son Tudhaliya addressing their Assyrian counterparts as “my brother.” In the face of Assyrian aggression, these Hittite sovereigns—knowing full well their weakened military state—turned to diplomatic overtures to protect their interests.

Despite such overtures, war did arise between Hatti and Assyria during Tudhaliya’s reign. The battle of Nihriya was a disaster for the Hittites.\(^{41}\) A letter found at Ugarit, dating from its aftermath, provides a fitting final chapter to the story of Assyria’s rise to brotherhood.\(^{42}\) The letter has been interpreted as an attempt by the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta to entice the kingdom of Ugarit away from loyally serving the king of Hatti, Ugarit’s suzerain at the time.\(^{43}\) The Assyrian king employs a sophisticated
set of rhetorical techniques in order to perform this task, ones that are worthy of detailed attention for how they construe the meaning of political brotherhood.

The Assyrian monarch narrates his recent encounter with the Hittite king. According to his version of the events, the armies of Hatti and Assyria were poised for battle when:

Tudhaliya, the king of Hatti, sent me a second messenger carrying two tablets (proposing) war and one tablet (proposing) peace. He presented me with the two tablets of war. When my soldiers heard these messages of war they burned to march (into combat), and the messenger of the king of Hatti saw it. After three days had passed, the messenger of the king of Hatti presented me with the tablet of peace and on that tablet it was written: “(I swear) by the Storm-god and by the Sun-goddess that I am not at war with the king of Assyria, my brother, [but rather that] I am at peace. (I swear that) the fugitives . . . I will return to him and the soldiers of . . . who fled from before the king of Assyria and . . . and entered the land of Hatti, I . . . and I will return (them) to the king of Assyria. . . . Why should we, who are brothers, be at war with each other?”

The letter continues to depict the Hittite ruler as engaging in other stalling tactics, until a battle is finally fought and the Hittites are decisively defeated. Though the depiction of Hittite weakness is surely part of the letter’s means of achieving its purpose, it cuts deeper by exposing the instrumental nature of brotherhood discourse and thereby eradicating the sacred aura that kinship terminology aimed to bestow on political relations.

The letter’s intended audience is the king of Ugarit. This is true not only of the narrator’s own words, but also those quoted as the words of Tudhaliya. Within the frame of the narrative, the Hittite king’s statements are presented as aimed at the king of Assyria, but the context of the letter imbues them with a sideward glance to the king of Ugarit. We do not know if Tudhaliya ever sent this message; we do know that Tukulti-Ninurta wanted the king of Ugarit to think that he did. What message was Assyria sending Ugarit by means of this depiction of a Hittite messenger and his tablets of war and peace?

The Hittite messenger is said to have arrived in the Assyrian camp with two sets of contradictory tablets, one threatening war and the other suing for peace. As one eventually learns, though the messages are contradictory their intentions are the same: to avoid war. First the messenger tries threatening to fight, but when in response he is confronted with an Assyrian army burning for battle he quickly becomes aware that the “tablets of war” will not achieve their real aim. He turns to the “tablet of peace.” But in the wake of the failure to prevent war by threatening it, the “tablet of peace,” with its talk of peaceful relations between brothers, takes on a particular color. The Hittite appeal to brotherhood with Assyria appears as nothing more than a last ditch effort to save one’s skin. Tudhaliya’s cousin, Urhi-Tessub, had portrayed brotherhood as a sacrosanct bond,
and on that basis denied it to Tukulti-Ninurta’s grandfather following the defeat of Wasashatta. Fittingly, the Assyrian king now pulls the rug out from underneath the king of Hatti’s elevated speech. Whereas Urhi-Tessub had claimed that “force of arms” did not qualify one for acceptance as a brother, Tukulti-Ninurta—in his message to the king of Ugarit—reveals that talk of brotherhood can be a veil hiding weakness. To paraphrase Thomas Hobbes, brotherhood without the sword is but words.

IV. Baal’s Brotherhood and the Politics of Myth

If the linguistic shift in Anat’s good news signals the transformation of Baal into a brother, then the route toward brotherhood taken by Assyria would have been among the real-world experiences that an ancient Ugaritic audience could have used to process that narrative event. Familiar with such cases, they would have known what was really involved in becoming a brother. How might such an audience have synthesized their political knowledge with the events depicted in the poem? What implications for the political message of the poem might such associations have held? To address such questions, I want to consider Baal’s own trajectory toward becoming a brother.

A number of key moments in Baal’s career belong to the god’s rise to brotherhood. Most conspicuous are Baal’s violent defeat of Yamm and the prolonged negotiations to secure El’s acquiescence to a palace. It is instructive to consider these plot elements in relation to the concerns that surrounded the phenomenon of achieving brotherhood in the political world that constituted Ugarit’s actual experience.

Baal’s defeat of Yamm is the climax of the first third of the poem. Often interpreted as a mythic overcoming of chaos, details in the text recommend reading the event within the framework of late Bronze Age political ideas and institutions. As noted above, Baal’s relationship to Yamm is presented by El as that of a vassal to his suzerain. The hero of the poem is depicted as battling his rightful master and against the other gods’ will. Unlike Marduk in the Babylonian creation epic Enûma eššâl—poem to which the Baal Cycle is so often compared—Baal is not presented as the champion of the other gods, nominated by them to fight a monstrous foe. In the Babylonian poem Ea calls upon Marduk to battle Tiamat, whereas at Ugarit El tells Baal to subjugate himself to Yamm. Similarly, the gods rebuke Baal for raising a hand against Yamm’s messengers. Baal’s actions are not predicated upon a previously received legitimization. If kingship is partly about legitimacy and partly about force of arms, then Baal arrives to fight Yamm possessing only the latter. His triumph is reminiscent of Adad-nirari’s victory over Wasashatta. One might imagine Urhi-Tessub sending Baal a letter after the battle: “You conquered by force of arms; don’t speak to me about brotherhood!”
The narrative following the defeat of Yamm is broken and so it is difficult to say anything certain about the battle’s immediate aftermath. There are possible traces of the words \textit{b’l ymlk} (“Baal reigns”), but interpretation of this section requires so much reconstruction that it often reflects more what the interpreter expects than what is actually present on the tablet. Soon after the battle, Baal is found presiding over a feast—presumably in celebration of his victory. Smith and Pitard have recently noted how this victory feast “shows one outstanding feature compared to other such scenes in ancient Near Eastern literature: Baal celebrates his victory apparently without his divine peers.” Though certainty is impossible with such a fragmentary text, it seems that Baal has been left to celebrate alone.

In light of the foregoing, this plot element can be interpreted with respect to the realities of Bronze Age political life. As Hattusili’s rebuke of Adad-nirari discussed above showed, failure to attend a banquet was considered a political insult. Such behavior suggested that the invitee did not recognize the host as an equal. By portraying Baal eating alone, the poet plugs into this set of references and implies that despite his feat of martial prowess Baal has not achieved recognition from his fellows. As his lament will soon make clear, Baal is not considered an equal by the other gods. By later repeating the feast \textit{topos} following the construction of Baal’s palace—this time with the gods, now called Baal’s brothers, in attendance—the significance of the missing guests in the first account is made more emphatic. The two feast scenes act as bookends, marking-off the intervening narrative as decisive for explaining Baal’s better success the second time he hosts a party. Not the defeat of Yamm but the persuasion of El ushers in Baal’s acceptance as a brother.

By depicting the actions Baal undertakes in his quest for legitimacy in detail, the poem grants its audience a vantage from which to reflect upon what actually underlies political brotherhood. Questions arise. How necessary was it for Baal to first demonstrate his force of arms? Why doesn’t Baal confront El directly? What are we to learn from Anat’s failed attempt to win El over? Why is Athirat more successful and what are we to make of the role gifts play in getting Baal what he wants? Above all, what does it say about legitimacy that Baal must pressure El to get it? And what does it say about El that Baal succeeds? The poem opens up the possibility of such questions because it narrates the process of achieving legitimacy rather than treating legitimacy as something possessed from the start. In so doing, the Baal Cycle provides a means of thinking about the ideological claims prevalent in the Late Bronze Age and how they line-up with experienced political realities. By showing its audience how Baal became a brother, the play of power and persuasion involved in political legitimacy, yet covered over by the traditional treatment of political relations as if they were natural kinship bonds, is presented to view.
Notes

1. This essay developed out of a lecture I delivered to Holger Gzella’s Ugaritic seminar at Leiden University. I would like to thank Prof. Gzella for the invitation and all the participants for their feedback. Sophie Démare-Lafont, Daniel E. Fleming, James Nathan Ford, Seth L. Sanders, Itamar Singer, and Mark S. Smith provided valuable comments on earlier drafts.

KTU 1.3 IV 47–48 // 1.3 V 38–39 // 1.4 I 19–11 // 1.4 IV 50–51 (my translation). The formula is also attested in KTU 1.83–5 (now attached to KTU 1.3 VI) and in El’s permission to build the house at 1.4 V 62. A convenient edition of the Ugaritic poem, with facing English translation by Mark S. Smith, is available in Ugaritic Narrative Poetry, ed. S. B. Parker, 81–176; see also Pardee, “The Ba’lu Myth,” COS 1:241–74. For a detailed treatment of Baal’s lament, see UBC 2, 304–13. Marguerite Yon, who headed the French archaeological team at Ugarit for many years, provides a valuable introduction to the coastal Syrian site in The City of Ugarit at Tell Ras Shamra; for a discussion of the find-spot of the single exemplum of the Baal poem, see p. 111. On the Ugaritic language and writing system, see P. Bordreuil and D. Pardee, A Manuel of Ugaritic, esp. pp. 1–22.

2. KTU 1.4 V 27–29 (my translation).
3. UBC 2, 572.
4. UBC 2, 310.
5. For a discussion of Baal’s outsider status, see UBC 1, 91–93; Smith, The Origins of Biblical Monotheism, 63–65. See also Pardee, “The Ba’lu Myth,” COS 1:245n32 and 263n190.
6. Dennis Pardee has already hinted at the possibility of such a transformation when, in reference to Anat’s announcement, he asks: “Has Ba’lu been promoted to equality with the sons of ‘Aṯiratu, i.e., the terms are honorific, or has his rightful place been recognized?” (COS 1.86:260, n. 163).
7. KTU 1.4 VI 40–46 (my translation).
8. David Schloen has recognized that this scene in the Baal Cycle is modeled upon how a king would hold “a great feast for allied kings (his ‘brothers’),” as part of what he calls the “second level of correspondence” in which “the Ba’lu myth depicts political relations among kings” (D. Schloen, The House of the Father, 353–54). Schloen, however, downplays the importance of such correspondences, subordinating them to his “third level” in which “the relationships among the gods resemble the typical kinship relationships and factional rivalries found in Mediterranean joint-family households.” This perspective prevents Schloen from recognizing that Baal goes through a process of becoming a brother. If what is being depicted is typical sibling rivalry in a patriarchal household, then Baal must himself be a sibling; hence, commenting upon the passage here under consideration, Schloen states: “depite his title ‘son of Dagan,’ [Baal is El’s son] because the ‘seventy sons of ‘Aṯiratu’ (and of ‘Ilu) are called his brothers (KTU 1.4 VI 44–46) and there is a reference to ‘Ilu as ‘his father’ (KTU 1.3 V 35).” This ignores the dynamic aspect of these epithets. One problem with reading (at least this section of) the Baal Cycle through the lens of stereotypical sibling rivalry is that Baal is not depicted as trying to supersede the other gods through attaining a palace. Rather, he is attempting to become their equal (as is explicit in the phrasing of the lament).
10. EA 34. On the situation of Amenhotep IV’s accession, see Baines, “The Dawn of the Amarna Age,” 272.
11. CAD B, 282–295, s.v. bitu; cf. DULAT, 245–50, s.v. bt (II).

15. KTU 1.5 II 12 (my translation).
16. KTU 1.2 I 36–38 (my translation).
17. KTU 3.1:24–26 (my translation).

18. For an introduction to Ugarit’s political history, see I. Singer, “A Political History of Ugarit,” in The Calm Before the Storm, 19–146.

19. F. Stolz, “Funktionen und Bedeutungsbereiche des ugaritischen Ba’almythos,” 83–118. The position has been adopted by Mark S. Smith, who takes Baal’s “limited exaltation” to be a reflection of “Ugarit’s limited political situation lying between the great powers of the ancient Near East” (UBC 1, 105).

20. The most outspoken proponent of the Baal Cycle as “royal ideology” is Nicolas Wyatt. See, for example, his essay “The Religious Role of the King in Ugarit.”

21. For example, in EA 27:74–78, Tushratta, king of Mitanni, quotes Amenhotep IV as having said: “Just as you [always showed love] to my father, so show love to me.”

22. HDT 23 §4, obv. 7–24; cf. the language of “eternity” used in the treaty that established brotherhood between Egypt and Hatti (HDT 15 §3–5, A obv. 7–21).

23. The political motivations behind Hattusilis’s letter are complex and surely warrant a certain amount of skepticism as to the truth of his claims about the past. This does not, however, undermine the principle of “inheritable brotherhood” that he expresses—it only calls for us to be suspicious as to why he is invoking that principle here and now.

24. HDT 24A.
25. HDT 17 §11, A iv 1–3.

26. See the literature cited in G. Steiner, “Schiffe von Aḥḫiyawa’ oder ‘Kriegsschiffe’ von Amurru im Šauškamuwa–Vertrag?” For a dissenting interpretation of the erasure, see I. Singer, “A Concise History of Amurru,” 173n60. Singer argues that “the Mycenean power was erased because of its distance from the theatre of events and the improbability of its direct involvement in the political and military developments of Syria.”


28. For the etiquette of epistolary components, see Mynářová, “Akizzi of Qaṭna”; idem, “Ugarit.”

30. EA 16:26–33.

32. For the reasoning behind these designations, see Beckman’s remarks, HDT, 146.
33. HDT 24A i 1–19.

34. For example, HDT, 146–47; likewise, Bryce, Letters of the Great Kings, 83.
35. Hoffner, Letters from the Hittite Kingdom, 323.

36. The Hittite king concludes with a pair of items that he does not want to hear spoken of, one of which requires being restored. Beckman fills the gap with “about brotherhood” while Hoffner restores [u-wa-u-wa]-a[r], “coming”. Either way, the paired term is unambiguously LUGAL.GAL-UT-TA-ya, “great kingship,” suggesting that Urhi-Tessub does not accept Assyrian claims to this status.

37. HDT 24B §4, rev. 4’–10’.
38. EA 9, quoted above.


40. The texts are collected, with commentary and bibliography, in C. Mora and M. Giorgieri, Le Lettere tra i re ittiti e i re assiri.
42. RS 34.165. The letter has been edited with commentary by Sylvie Lackenbacher in RSO VII, 90–100.
44. RS 34.165:21–37 (my translation, following Lackenbacher).
45. Though the name of the addressee is missing, it is generally accepted that the letter was intended for the king of Ugarit. See Lackenbacher’s discussion, RSO VII, 95.
46. For the idea of a “word with a sideward glance,” see Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, 195–96.
47. Enuma elīš III–IV.
49. KTU 1.2 I 40–41.
50. KTU 1.2 IV 31–40.
51. UBC 2, 102.

Works Cited


KUB Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköy.

RS Ras Shamra (excavation number).


TUGENDHAFT: How to Become a Brother in the Bronze Age


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