

The Throne of El:
A Cosmic Conception



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Ugaritic 453

Oftentimes the extraordinary can detract from the subtleties of the ordinary. This is the case in *CAT* 1.5 VI 11-14; the seemingly ordinary has concealed the extraordinary. Situated in a scene depicting rites of mourning, this passage has gone largely unexamined. Distracted by a display of grief, scholars have interpreted this passage in light of mourning practices in the Hebrew bible. When viewed in a different light, however, the meaning of this passage is augmented. From a cosmological perspective, this act of mourning can be seen as describing El's sovereignty over a three-tiered cosmos.

The passage in question reads as follows. After learning of Baal's death,

<i>apnk . ltpn . il dpid</i> <i>yrd . lksi . ytb lhdm</i> <i>. wl . hdm . ytb lars .</i>	Then Friendly El, the Magnanimous descends from the throne [and] sits on the footstool and from the footstool he sits on the earth;
<i>yšq . ʿmr un . lrišh .</i> <i>ʿpr . pltt lqdqdh .</i>	He pours ashes of grief on his head, dust of humiliation upon his skull (<i>CAT</i> 1.5 VI 11-17).

The traditional view is that this passage describes a mourning ritual. T. Gaster summarizes the passage with this concise sentence: "El mourns for Baal."¹ This view was followed by N. Tromp, who noted that this was "a striking example of Canaanite mourning customs,"² and by R. Clifford who writes, "El...engage[s] in mourning rites."³ In M. Gruber's analysis, he explains that the passage describes "postures of mourning" and that "the typical posture for the mourner is for him to sit...on the ground."⁴ According to Gruber, this symbolically "points [to] the disruption of the normal state of things."⁵ In another article, the action is described in the following: "When El comes down (*yrd*) from his throne to sit on the footstool (*hdm*) and then on the ground, he is using a sign of mourning to signify his grief over the death of Ba'al."⁶ In sum, scholars agree that this action is somehow related to mourning.

¹ Theodor Gaster, *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 212.

² Nicholas Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), p. 12.

³ Richard Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1994), p. 122.

⁴ Mayer Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), p. 460.

⁵ Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East*, p. 461.

⁶ Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. 7* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 238.

In the most detailed analysis of this passage, P. Kruger situates this action within a framework of nonverbal manifestations of rank difference.⁷ He says that “viewed in the broader context of ancient Near Eastern literary evidence, this passage brings to the fore one of the most extensive examples of ritualized (mourning) gestures.”⁸ He argues that the imagery of descending from a throne to a footstool and then to the ground “contains a posture which one can perhaps typify as a ‘royal’ mourning gesture.”⁹ He further argues that this action depicts a “gradual change in status” where El’s position transitions “from that of a monarch (lines 12-14) to that of the ordinary people (lines 15-20).”¹⁰ He cites the following as a similar example of this “royal mourning gesture” in the Hebrew bible:

וַיֵּרְדּוּ מֵעַל כְּסֵאוֹתָם	And they will descend from upon their thrones,
כָּל נְשִׂאֵי הַיָּם	all the princes of the sea.
וְהִסִּירוּ אֶת־מְעִילֵיהֶם	And they will remove their robes
וְאֶת־בְּגָדֵי רִקְמָתָם יִפְשְׁטוּ	and their colorful garments they will take off;
חֲרָדוֹתָא יִלְבְּשׁוּ	[with] trembling they will be clothed,
עַל־הָאָרֶץ יֵשְׁבוּ	[and] upon the earth they will sit (Ezekiel 26:16).

Even if the Ugaritic passage describes a physical action associated with mourning, the symbolism of these actions is at least as significant as the actions themselves. Tromp states that the background for this Semitic mourning custom of “setting down in the dust and covering oneself with it...may be [that]...the stricken person feels in the clutches of death and mimes this by means of the dust, the well-known symbol of death.”¹¹ In the Hebrew bible, there are many passages that associate the dead with “dust.” For instance:

יָחִיו מֵתֶיךָ וְנִבְלָתִי יִקוּמוּן	Your dead will live and [with] my corpse they will rise,
הִקְיִצוּ וְרָנְנוּ שִׁכְנֵי עָפָר	Awake and sing, you [who] dwell [in the] dust!
כִּי טַל אֹרֶת טֶלֶד	For the dew of light is your dew
וְאָרֶץ רִפְאִים תִּפְיֵל:	And the earth will bring to life the Rephaim (Isa. 26:19).
אָכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ כָּל־דְּשָׁנֵי־אָרֶץ	They will eat and worship, all the fat of the earth
לִפְנֵי יִכְרְעוּ כָּל־יֹרְדֵי עָפָר	Before him they will kneel: all [who] descend [to the] dust
וְנִפְשׁוּ לֹא תִיָּה:	and he [who] cannot bring to life his spirit (Ps. 22:30)

⁷ Paul A. Kruger, “Rank Symbolism in the Baal Epic,” *UF* 27 (1995), p. 173.

⁸ Kruger, “Rank Symbolism in the Baal Epic,” p. 173.

⁹ Kruger, “Rank Symbolism in the Baal Epic,” p. 173.

¹⁰ Kruger, “Rank Symbolism in the Baal Epic,” p. 173.

¹¹ Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament*, p. 91.

In these examples, the dead are described as those who “dwell in the dust” and those who “descend to the dust.” This association is played upon in Genesis:

כִּי־עָפָר אָתָּה	For you are dust,
וְאֶל־עָפָר תָּשׁוּב:	and to dust you will return (Gen. 3:19).

Adam’s life will come full circle symbolically; he is described as being formed from the עפר “dust” (Gen. 2:7) and the place of his death will be the עפר “dust.”

This theme also appears in Mesopotamian literature. One well-known example comes from the “Descent of Ishtar.” Here, the underworld is portrayed as a dust-covered realm:

To Kurnugi, land of [no return],
Ishtar daughter of Sin was [determined] to go...
To the house where those who enter are deprived of light,
Where dust is their food, clay their bread...
[Ishtar arrives at the gate of the underworld]
Over the door and the bolt, dust has settled.¹²

Later in the text, word is brought to Ea that “Ishtar has gone down to the Earth and has not come up again.”¹³ “Earth” here was translated from the Akkadian *eršetu*, which in this context means “the nether world.”¹⁴ This term is cognate to the Ugaritic *arš*,¹⁵ which appears in the passage describing the descent from El’s throne.

There are even more explicit associations between *‘pr* “dust” and *arš* “the underworld” in the Hebrew Bible. The imagery of death could be invoked using these words in synonymous parallelism:

כִּי יִשְׁחָה לְעָפָר נַפְשֵׁינוּ	For our spirits sink down to the dust,
דְּבַקָּה לְאָרֶץ בְּטַנְנוּ:	Our bodies cling to the underworld (Ps. 44:26).

וְשַׁפְּלֹת מֵאָרֶץ תְּדַבְּרִי	And brought low you will speak from the underworld ,
וּמֵעָפָר תִּשָּׁח אִמְרֹתֶיךָ וְהִיא	and from the dust will be your words (Isa. 29:4a).

The most convincing connection between these two words for the purposes of this study is found in *CAT* 1.10 II 24-25. Here, Ba‘al tells Anat:

¹² William W. Hallo and Lawson K. Younger, *The Context of Scripture Vol. 1* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997), p. 381.

¹³ Hallo, *The Context of Scripture*, p. 382.

¹⁴ *CAD* E 310, s.v. *eršetu*.

¹⁵ *DULAT*, p. 106, s.v. *arš*.

ntʕn . bars . iby
wbʕpr . qm . ahk

We have planted in the underworld my enemies,
and in the dust [those] rising [against] your brother.

This association of *ʕpr* “dust” with death and *ars* “the underworld” may provide a lens through which to view the El’s earlier actions: a cosmological lens.

Tripartite Structure of the Cosmos

Before beginning an analysis and comparison of ancient world-views, some observations are in order. N. Wyatt wrote, “It goes without saying that every autonomous culture will have a particular cosmology.” Each literary culture should be examined in its own context. However, much can be gained in comparing the world-views of nearby cultures. Wyatt continues, “Neighboring cultures will have common features. In the West Semitic world, despite local particularities, it is possible to say that in the theoretical structure of the cosmos, there are bound to have been fairly close parallels among neighboring cultures throughout the region.”¹⁶ From this perspective, the present study will examine the world-view of two “neighboring” cultures in order to illuminate the Ugaritic texts.

Hebrew

The first verse of the Hebrew bible may reveal more about the world-view of its composer than first meets the eye. It reads:

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים
אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

In the beginning God created
the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1).

The terms שמים “heavens” and ארץ “earth” appear to be an antithetical parallel. However, if the phrase “knowledge of good (טוב) and evil (רע)” in Gen. 2:9, etc. is a merism indicating a totality of knowledge, then perhaps this reasoning can be applied to the first verse of Genesis. Wyatt suggests that here the term ארץ carries with it “overtone of the underworld.”¹⁷ If this is the case, he argues that this word pair “means the entire cosmos...in an incipient, provisional condition, before a third element, the middle part, habitation of the animal kingdom and man as its

¹⁶ N. Wyatt, *Myths of Power: A Study of Royal Myth and Ideology in Ugaritic and Biblical Tradition* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996), p. 20.

¹⁷ Wyatt, *Myths of Power*, p. 23.

pinnacle, has been added. When this is incorporated, the result is a threefold structure.”¹⁸ If this were true, one would expect to find other passages where a “threefold structure” of the cosmos was expressed.

Before proceeding, it is worth noting that the vocabulary used to describe this world-view does not remain constant. Instead, “*ereš* may stand for *tēbēl*, while *tāhōm* or *šā’ōl* may stand for *ereš* in its chthonian sense.”¹⁹ Despite its sometimes shifting vocabulary, the imagery of a threefold division remains constant.

A number of poetic passages do, in fact, suggest such a tripartite world-view. In the psalms, for instance, an upper element is mentioned, followed by a lower element. Then, the middle component (the inhabited world) is described:

לֵךְ שָׁמַיִם	The <u>heavens</u> are yours
אֶרֶץ-לֵךְ אֲרָץ	[and] also the <u>underworld</u> is yours;
תֵּיבֵל וּמְלֵאָה	The <u>land</u> and its fullness
אַתָּה יִסְדָּתָם:	you have founded them (Ps. 89:12).

בְּדַבַּר יְהוָה שָׁמַיִם נַעֲשׂוּ	By the word of the Yahweh the <u>heavens</u> were made,
וּבְרוּחַ פִּי כָל-צַבָּאִים:	and by the breath of his mouth all their hosts.
כָּנָס כַּנֶּסֶף מֵי הַיָּם	Gathering as a heap the waters of the sea,
נִתֵּן בְּאֻצְרוֹת תְּהוֹמוֹת:	Setting in storehouses <u>the deeps</u> .
יִירָאוּ מִיְהוָה כָּל-הָאָרֶץ	Let all the underworld fear Yahweh,
מִמְנוֹ יִגְוֹרוּ כָל-יֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֵל:	Let all the inhabitants of <u>land</u> be afraid (Ps. 33:6-8).

Using much more descriptive language, this theme also appears in Isaiah:

רְגֹזוּ שָׁמַיִם כִּי-עָשָׂה יְהוָה	Rejoice, O <u>heavens</u> ! For Yahweh has done [it]
הֲרִיעוּ תַחְתִּיּוֹת אֲרָץ	Cheer, O depths of the <u>underworld</u> !
פָּצְחוּ הַרִים רִנָּה	Break forth in a cry of jubilation, O <u>mountains</u> !
יַעַר וְכָל-עֵץ בּוֹ	O <u>thicket</u> and all the <u>trees</u> in it!
כִּי-גָאֵל יְהוָה יַעֲקֹב	For Yahweh has redeemed Jacob,
וּבִישְׂרָאֵל יִתְפָּאֵר:	and through Israel he shows glory (Isa. 44:23-24).

¹⁸ Wyatt, *Myths of Power*, p. 23.

¹⁹ Wyatt, *Myths of Power*, p. 23, fn. 9. “The underworld, according to the Hebrew conception, is constituted by the abode of the dead (or nether world) and the subterranean ocean.” Luis I. J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970), p. 166.

Just as in the framework of the creation account in Genesis, the structure of these passages describes the top, bottom, and then middle elements of creation. This structure, according to Wyatt, is significant: “The two extremes are mentioned, and a third element, [the inhabited world], centre of the universe, is sandwiched in between, in a place of security.”²⁰ The question then arises: are there descriptions of a tripartite cosmos elsewhere? And if so, are they structurally similar?

The book of Jeremiah also portrays a tripartite cosmos, but the arrangement of those three constituent cosmological elements differs from those mentioned previously:

עֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ בְּכֹחוֹ	[He who] made the <u>underworld</u> by his power,
מִכֵּין תֵּבֵל בְּחָכְמָתוֹ	establishing the <u>land</u> by his wisdom,
וּבִתְבוּנָתוֹ נָטָה שָׁמַיִם:	and by his understanding stretched out the <u>heavens</u> .
	(Jer. 10:12)

Here, the author moves from the lowest sphere, the ארץ “underworld,” up to the תבל “world” and then ascends to the שמים “heavens.” Surely this tripartite ascent was not accidental.²¹

As mentioned above, the literary structure of passages describing the cosmos is significant. In addition to the previous examples (demonstrating an upper→ lower→ middle and a lower→ middle→ upper arrangement), there is an even more frequent literary structuring of the tripartite cosmos in the Hebrew bible.

A straightforward example of this alternative structure is seen in Psalm 135:

כָּל אֲשֶׁר-חָפֵץ יְהוָה לַעֲשֶׂה	All that he pleases, Yahweh does:
בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ	In the <u>heavens</u> , and in the <u>earth</u> ,
בַּיַּמִּים וּכְלֵ-תְהוֹמוֹת:	in the waters and all <u>deeps</u> (Ps. 135:6).

Even in the familiar “ten commandments” this cosmological literary structure is used:

לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ פֶסֶל	You shall not make for yourself a divine image,
וְכָל-תְמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל	or any likeness that [is] in the <u>heavens</u> above
וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת	or that is in the <u>earth</u> beneath,
וְאֲשֶׁר בַּיַּמִּים מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ:	or that is in the <u>waters under the earth</u> (Ex. 20:3) ²² .

²⁰ Wyatt, *Myths of Power*, p. 23.

²¹ See also Job 38:16-29 where this literary ascent is present and the imagery of the tripartite cosmos is elaborated upon.

²² See also Deut. 5:7.

Two additional examples are seen in psalms of praise:

הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁמַיִם לַיהוָה	The <u>heavens</u> are Yahweh's heavens
וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לְבְנֵי-אָדָם:	but the <u>earth</u> he has given to the children of man.
לֹא הַיְמִתִּים יְהַלְלוּ-יָהּ	<u>The dead</u> will not praise Yah,
וְלֹא כָל-יֹרְדֵי דוֹמָה:	nor any who go down to silence (Ps. 115:16-17).

יְהוָה בְּהַשָּׁמַיִם חַסְדּוֹ	O Yahweh, your graciousness is in the <u>heavens</u> ;
אֱמוּנָתְךָ עַד-שָׁמַיִם:	Your faithfulness is unto the clouds.
צְדָקָתְךָ כַּהַרְרֵי-אֵל	Your righteousness is as the mighty <u>mountains</u> ,
מִשְׁפָּטְךָ תְהוֹם רַבָּה	Your judgments [are like] the great <u>deep</u> (Ps. 36:6-7a).

These examples should be sufficient to demonstrate the frequency of the tripartite description of the cosmos in the order: upper→ middle→ lower. The imagery is one of *descent*, as opposed *safety* or *ascent*.

Egyptian

Why look to Egypt for insights into the Ugaritic conception of the cosmos? Wyatt observes, “Where imperial or commercial influences were strongest, as for instance from Egypt’s interest in the Levant, we should find most evidence of cultural impact.”²³ If one could find evidence of a tripartite division of the cosmos in Egyptian thought, the argument for a similar division in Ugaritic thought would be strengthened.

In Egyptian literature, there is “a stereotyped antithesis between *p.t* and *t3*, ‘heaven’ and ‘earth,’ which means the entire cosmos.”²⁴ This twofold cosmological division “is often replaced by a threefold division, in which the underworld or water is added as the third part.”²⁵ This division is demonstrated in the following texts.

In the “Hymn to the Nile,” a New Kingdom composition,²⁶ the Nile is addressed in these words:

²³ Wyatt, *Myths of Power*, p. 20.

²⁴ Johannes G. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. I* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 389.

²⁵ Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. I*, p. 389.

²⁶ A Theban composition dated to the 19th or 20th Dynasties (1350-1100 B.C.E.), but whose “original composition may have gone back to the Middle Kingdom (2100-1700 B.C.E.)” James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 372.

“The bringer of food, rich in provisions, creator of all good, lord of majesty, sweet of fragrance. What is in him is satisfaction. He who brings grass into being for the cattle and (thus) gives sacrifice to every god, whether he be in the underworld, heaven, or the earth, him who is under his authority.”²⁷

Here is a threefold division: the underworld (lower)→ heaven (upper)→ earth (middle). This structuring is similar to that of the upper→ lower→ middle layout of the Genesis and Isaiah passages examined above. The Coffin Texts also contain an example of this literary structure:

O Lord of the Shape, greatly majestic, see, I have come, the Netherworld has been opened for me, the roads in the sky and on earth have been opened for me, and there was none who thwarted me” (Coffin Text spell 312).²⁸

Similar to the Hebrew bible, this particular literary structuring is less frequent than the upper→ middle→ lower structuring in the Coffin Texts:

O Rē^c, O Atum, O Gēb, see, N is bound for the sky, for the earth, for the waters, N is seeking his family in the sky, in the earth and in the waters, for N is incomplete (spell 141).²⁹

The desire of N is in sky and earth, in the waters and in the fields (spell 269).

O all you gods who are in sky and earth, in the waters and in the horizon, prepare a path for my soul (spell 497).

He has flown and soared as that great falcon which is on the battlements of the mansion of Him whose name is hidden, who takes what belongs to those who are yonder to Him who separated the sky from the earth and the Abyss (spell 682).

Hail to you, O you tribunals which are in the sky, on earth and upon the waters. I have come to you that I may greet you (spell 820).

As in the Hebrew psalms of praise, there is an excellent example of the tripartite upper→ middle→ lower structure in The Great Cairo Hymn of Praise to Amun-Re:³⁰

Hail to you — by all flocks,
 Jubilation to you — by all foreign lands,
 To the heights of heaven, to the breadth of the earth,
 To the depths of the ocean,
 The gods bowing to Your Majesty,
 Exalting the might of Him who created them,
 Rejoicing at the approach of Him who begot them,
 Saying to you: “Come in peace,
 Father of the fathers of all the gods,
 Who suspended heaven, who laid down the ground.”³¹

²⁷ ANET, p. 372.

²⁸ All translations of the Coffin Texts are taken from R.O. Faulkner *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts, Vols. I-III* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, Ltd., 1973).

²⁹ Compare spell 146 “...his family who are in heaven and earth, who are in the necropolis, who are in the Abyss...”

³⁰ The best preserved manuscript of this hymn is dated to the 18th Dynasty (1550-1292 B.C.E.) from Thebes. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture*, p. 37.

³¹ Hallo, *The Context of Scripture*, p. 39.

While there were many different depictions of the cosmos in Egyptian literature, these examples show that a threefold conceptual division existed. When this division was depicted, it was frequently presented in a manner structurally similar to that found in the Hebrew bible: upper→ middle→ lower.

Ugaritic

Scholars have recognized the importance that height plays in the Ugaritic literature. Wyatt notes that, “in considering [Ugaritic] mythology, the spatial image is one of height.”³² In analyzing what he perceives as El’s “royal mourning gesture,” Kruger observes that his descent from the throne consists of a sequence of vertical actions.³³ The term *yrd* “descend” is generally used to describe such movement.

Examining the context of passages where *yrd* is used, a picture emerges of the Ugaritic conception of the cosmos. A descent from the highest point, Şapan, is described in this passage:

<i>yrd . ʕtr . ʕrz .</i>	Athtar the strong descends,
<i>yrd lkḥt . aliyn . bʕl</i>	descends from the throne of Mighty Baal
<i>wymlk . bars . il . klh</i>	an rules over the mighty earth, all [of] it (CAT 1.6 I 63-65).

Here, Athtar descends (*yrd*) from the mountain Şapan to the earth. Vertical movement downward is also present in passages that describe movement towards the underworld (*arṣ*), and is seen in these two representative examples:

<i>ša . ḡr . ʕl . ydm</i>	Lift the mountain upon your hands,
<i>ḥlb . lʕr . rḥtm</i>	the hill on the back of your palms.
<i>wrd . bthpṭt arṣ .</i>	And descend to the house of fugitives, the underworld.
	[CAT 1.4 VIII 5-9 (= 1.5 V 13-16)]

<i>bʕl . mt . my . lim .</i>	Baal is dead, [and] what of the people?
<i>bn dḡn . my . hm̄lt .</i>	The son of Dagan, [and] what of the multitudes?
<i>atr bʕl . ard . bars</i>	After Baal I will descend into the underworld.
	[CAT 1.5 VI 23-25 (= 1.6 I 6-8)]

³² N. Wyatt, “The Hollow Crown: Ambivalent Elements in West Semitic Royal Ideology,” *UF* 18 (1986), p. 423.

³³ Kruger, “Rank Symbolism in the Baal Epic,” p. 174.

N. Tromp, in commenting upon the first passage, writes, “The Ugaritic text shows unambiguously the subterranean situation of the nether world in the Canaanite tradition.”³⁴ As seen in these two vertical uses of the term *yrđ*, there were two types of descents attributed to gods: a descent from mountain to earth, and a descent into the underworld. When taken together, this points to a tripartite division of the cosmos: mountain, earth, and underworld.

Along with this threefold division of the cosmos, a threefold division of deities has been postulated. This “tripartite pantheon”³⁵ has been suggested in light of CAT 1.15 II 3-7:

[<i>aliy</i>]n . b ^ʿ l	Mighty Baal,
[]mn . yrĥ . zbl	Prince Yariĥ,
[<i>k</i>]tr w ĥss	Kothar Waĥasis,
[]bn . rĥmy . ršp zbl	Raĥmay, Prince Reshef,
[w] <i>dt</i> . ilm . tĥth	[and] the assembly of the gods, [in] threes

Gaster translated this last phrase as “the company of the gods *in its tripartite division*.”³⁶ While S. Cho argues for a different interpretation of *tĥth*, he admits that this passage may indicate that these gods are “coming from the whole tripartite pantheon.”³⁷ In reflecting upon this passage, Gaster writes, “Thus we have a valuable sidelight on the structure of the Ugaritic pantheon...Baal and Yariĥ are gods of heaven; Rašap, the equivalent of Nergal, is a god of the netherworld; and Kōṭar is associated with the sea.”³⁸ While he changes the order of the deities listed in his identification of their realms, the texts list them in the order: heaven, sea, and netherworld. Gaster then notes, “Hence, we may have the familiar tripartite division of the pantheon into supernal, marine and subterranean deities.”³⁹

A similar division of cosmic sovereignty was proposed by L. Handy. He writes, “Baal, Yam, and Mot ruled as kings over particular realms within the universe (storms, the sea, and the Netherworld)...much as in Greek mythology Zeus, Poseidon, and Pluto ruled simultaneously.”⁴⁰ In a chart comparing the “Deities of the World Structure” at Ugarit, Israel, and Greece, Wyatt

³⁴ Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament*, p. 8.

³⁵ Sang Youl Cho, *Lesser Deities in the Ugaritic Texts and the Hebrew Bible: A Comparative Study of Their Nature and Roles* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias, 2007), p. 26. For a detailed discussion surveying the different opinions on this subject, see pp. 22-26.

³⁶ Theodor H. Gaster, “Review: The Canaanite Epic of Keret,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 37 (1947), p. 288.

³⁷ Cho, *Lesser Deities in the Ugaritic Texts and the Hebrew Bible*, p. 26.

³⁸ Gaster, “Review: The Canaanite Epic of Keret,” p. 288.

³⁹ Gaster, “Review: The Canaanite Epic of Keret,” p. 288.

⁴⁰ Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1994), pp. 112-113.

assigns Zeus to the heaven and air, Poseidon to the earth, and Hades to the underworld.⁴¹ Such a division of deities corresponds to the division of cosmic space into the three categories mentioned above.

Finally, Tromp argues that the following passage and its parallels contain the imagery of the three levels of a tripartite cosmos:

<i>rgm ʿš . w . lhšt . abn</i>	The word of tree and the whisper of stone,
<i>tant . šmm . ʿm . arš</i>	the conversation of the heavens with the underworld
<i>thmt . ʿmn . kbkbm</i>	the deep with the stars (<i>CAT</i> 1.3 III 22-25).

This passage exhibits a thematic structure similar to the both Hebrew and Egyptian literature describing the division of the cosmos. The “wood” and “stone” are elements representing the inhabited world and are enclosed between the *šmm* “heaven” and the *arš* “underworld.”

A Cosmological View of CAT 1.5 VI 11-14

Why look at these “royal mourning gestures” of El from a cosmological perspective? Royal furniture sometimes had cosmological overtones. Footstools, for instance, were seen as a symbol of subjugation, and thereby represented a realm beneath the heavens. Thrones, on the other hand, were associated with each of the three levels of the cosmos: the underworld, the inhabited world, and especially the heights. Each of these will be examined in order to understand why a “cosmic” context is appropriate for *CAT* 1.5 VI 11-14.

Footstools and Cosmology

The Hebrew bible contains many examples where the term “footstool” is used figuratively and provides a possible semantic range for the term in Ugaritic. Psalm 110, for instance, is an early psalm that has “a strong Canaanite coloring.”⁴² The first verse of the psalm is of particular interest to this study:

נְאֻם יְהוָה לְאֹדְנִי יָשֵׁב לְיָמִינִי	The announcement of Yahweh to my lord: Sit at my right [hand]
עַד-אֲשֵׁית אֹיְבֶיךָ הַדָּם לְרִגְלֶיךָ:	until I make your enemies your footstool (Ps 110:1).

⁴¹ Nicolas Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), p. 91. However, Wyatt assigns Baal to heaven, air and earth, with Mot assigned to the underworld. Perhaps this was done to emphasize the similarity to his assignment of Yahweh to the heaven, air, and earth (with *Šaʿōl*, *ʿereš*, and *Māwet* assigned to the underworld).

⁴² Helen Genevieve Jefferson, “Is Psalm 110 Canaanite?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 73 (1954), p. 153.

In this passage, “enemies” figuratively become a *הדם לרגלים* “footstool.” The imagery is drawn from warfare: “The literal trampling of enemies in warfare accounts for the use of ‘trampling under the feet’ as an image for any victory over one’s enemies.”⁴³ Ps 110:1 suggests that just as the footstool was under the feet of the king, so too the enemies of the king would be under the king’s figurative feet. In other words, viewing the enemies as a collective footstool signifies the submission of those enemies.⁴⁴

The case for this imagery is strengthened by another reference in the Hebrew Bible. The throne of Solomon is described in the following:

וַיֵּשֶׁב מֵעֲלוֹת לְכִסֵּא וַיִּקְבֹּשׁ בַּזָּהָב לְכִסֵּא מֵאַחֲזֵי	The throne had six steps and a gold stool attached to the throne (2 Chr. 9:18).
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Attached to the throne was a *כבש*, which means “stool.”⁴⁵ This noun comes from the verb *כבש* which has the primary meaning “subjugate.”⁴⁶ Thus, the item upon which Solomon rested his feet is etymologically related to the word expressing the concept of subjugation.

“Footstool” was used figuratively in a similar sense as it described the power and dominion of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible. This is clearly set forth in Isaiah:

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּסֵּאִי וְהָאָרֶץ הָדָם רַגְלִי	Thus says Yahweh, The heavens are my throne, and the earth is my footstool (Isa 66:1).
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This passage describes the heaven as a *כסא* “throne” and the entire earth as a *הדם רגלים* “footstool.” As the creator of both heaven and earth, Yahweh is sovereign over all. In a position of authority and majesty he sits enthroned in the heavens, with the earth subjugated under his feet.

Another instance where *הדם רגלים* is used in relation to God is in 1 Chronicles. King David expresses his desire to institute a royal building project in the following words:

⁴³ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 906.

⁴⁴ T. Boonj, “Psalm CX: ‘Rule in the Midst of Your Foes!’” *Vetus Testamentum* 41 (1991), p. 397.

⁴⁵ *HALOT*, p. 460, s.v. *כבש*.

⁴⁶ *HALOT*, p. 460, s.v. *כבש*.

אָנִי עִם־לִבִּי	It was in my heart
לְבָנוֹת בַּיִת מְנוּחָה	to build a house of rest
לְאַרוֹן בְּרִית־יְהוָה	for the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh,
וְלִהְיוֹת רַגְלֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ	as a footstool for our God,
וְהִכְנֵיתִי לְבָנוֹת:	and I made preparations to build it (1 Chron 28:2).

Along with his stated purpose to build a house for the Ark of the Covenant, David specifically mentions his intention of creating a place where God could be present. In using the phrase רגלים, he invokes the imagery of God as sovereign over the earth. This was to be a sacred place. Therefore, the imagery of the holy house as a “footstool” did not carry the same negative charge as it did in referring to enemies (Ps 110:1). This was to be a building where the God of heaven could come into contact with (rest upon) the earth.⁴⁷

In the Ugaritic literature, this imagery can also be seen. Toward the end of the Baal Epic, Baal has been killed, and El tells Athirat to select one of her sons to assume Baal’s throne. After her son ascends Mount Sapan,

<i>yṯb . lkḥt [.] aliyn bʿl .</i>	He sits on the throne of Mighty Baal;
<i>pʿnh . ltmḡyn hdm [.]</i>	His feet do not reach the footstool,
<i>rišh . lymḡy apsh .</i> ⁴⁸	his head does not reach its top.

This event is followed by Athtar’s recognition that he cannot rule from Baal’s throne. What was so significant about this act that would disqualify Athtar from ruling on Baal’s throne? As mentioned above, a footstool could be used figuratively to represent the dominion of the king. Commenting on this passage, P. Kruger notes that Athtar’s failure to reach the footstool “clearly signifies that ‘feet on the footstool’ is a position of authority.”⁴⁹ Therefore, this action figuratively described Athtar’s inability to assume Baal’s position of authority.

While the issue of authority may be evident, the author could have been invoking another figurative use of *hdm*. Athtar was the son of the god Athirat, and was therefore divine. In the Hebrew Bible, God was described as being seated in the heavens and extending his feet to the earth (Isa 66:1). If this same sort of imagery was used at Ugarit, Athtar’s sitting on the throne without his feet touching the footstool could imply that he was not fit to rule both heaven and earth.

⁴⁷ Notice the proximity of “resting place” with “footstool.” This is similar to the Ugaritic association of “rest” with footstools treated above (*CTA* 1.17 II 10-12, 1.6 III 14-15). In Biblical Hebrew, מנוחה “resting place” is especially used “in reference to a land dwelling peaceably.” Paul D. Hanson, “Zechariah 9 and the Recapitulation of an Ancient Ritual Pattern,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 92 (1973), p. 41, fn. 13.

⁴⁸ *CAT* 1.6 I 59-61

⁴⁹ Paul A. Kruger, “Rank Symbolism in the Baal Epic,” p. 175.

A Throne in the Underworld

Beginning with the lowest level of the cosmos, thrones are mentioned. As Baal and Mot are fighting, Shapash speaks the following words to Mot:

<i>šm^c . m^c lbn . ilm . mt .</i>	Hear, please, Divine Mot,
<i>ik . tmthš . šm . aliyn . b^cl</i>	How can you fight with Mighty Baal?
<i>...l . ys^c . alttbtk .</i>	Surely he will pull out the supports of your seat,
<i>lyhpk . ksa . mlkk</i>	Surely he will overturn your royal throne.

(CAT 1.6 VI 23-25, 27-28)

Shapash here declares that El has the ability to remove Mot from his throne. If Mot is the lord of the underworld, then it follows that his throne would also be in the underworld. While this passage merely suggests the presence of a throne in the underworld, the following passage is explicit:

<i>idk , al . ttn pnm .</i>	Then you will set your face
<i>< šm . bn . ilm . mt . ></i>	for Divine Mot;
<i>tk . qrth hmry .</i>	Toward his city, the deep pit,
<i>mk . ksu . tbth</i>	a well/bog, the throne of his seat,
<i>hḫ . arš nḫlh .</i>	a mire, the land of his possession (CAT 1.4 VIII 10-14).

These instructions of Baal to his messengers provide a detailed depiction of the underworld. Not only does it give a vertical orientation of the location of this realm (*wrd . . . arš* “descend . . . to the underworld”), but it also mentions a special item of furniture to be found there: a *ksu* “throne.”

This imagery of a throne in the underworld is also present in the literature of both the neighboring cultures previously examined. The Egyptian Coffin texts preserve this passage: “I have appeared on my throne, I am spiritualized with what appertains to me. I am the spirit of Horus, a possessor of offerings in the lower Netherworld” (Spell 317). Similarly, in the Hebrew bible, this imagery is used:

שְׂאוּל מִתַּחַת רִגְזָה לְךָ	Sheol beneath is trembling for you
לְקִרְאָת בּוֹאֶיךָ	to meet you [at] your coming;
עוֹרֵר לְךָ רִפְּאִים	Rousing for you the Rephaim,
כָּל־עֲתוּדֵי אֲרֶץ	all the leaders of the underworld/earth.
הֵקִים מִכְּסֵּאוֹתָם	It raises from their thrones
כָּל מַלְכֵי גוֹיִם:	all the kings of the nations (Isa. 14:9).

A Throne in the Inhabited World

Towards the beginning of the Epic of Baal, El's messengers are commanded to approach the realm of Kothar Wahasis. Their mission is described in the following:

<i>idk . al . ttn . pnm</i>	Then you will set your face
<i>tk . ḥqkpt . il . kllh</i>	toward the mighty Memphis, all of it;
<i>kptr . ksu . ṭbth .</i>	Kaptor, the throne of his seat,
<i>ḥqkpt . arṣ . nḥlth</i>	Memphis, the land of his possession.

[CAT 1.1 III 0-1 (reconstructed from 1.3 VI 12-16)]

Again, it is by association that the locale of this throne is determined. Kothar resides in *ḥqkpt* “Memphis,” in the land of Egypt. This terrain does not resemble the imagery of the underworld (see above), nor is it associated with the mountain heights; instead, it appears to be vertically situated somewhere in between those two extremities of the cosmos.

Another reference to a throne in the inhabited world is in the tale of Kirta. Towards the end of this narrative, Kirta regains his strength following an illness. The text describes his actions immediately after this ordeal:

<i>yṭb . krt . l^cdh</i>	Kirta sat on his throne-
<i>yṭb . lkxi . mlk</i>	he sat on the throne of kingship
<i>lnḥt . lkḥt . drkt</i>	on the divan, on the throne of power (CAT 1.16 VI 22-24).

Previously, the text recounts the marching of Kirta and his army across the inhabited world (CAT 1.14 IV 13-32, 44-52). As a king inhabiting this middle realm, Kirta possesses a throne.

A Throne in the Heights

Finally, there are a number of references to thrones occupied within the third and highest level of the cosmos. In this passage, not only is a throne mentioned at summit of Şapan, but its vertical height is highlighted by the use of the verb ^cly “to go up”:⁵⁰

<i>apnk . ^cttr . ^crṣ</i>	Then Athtar the Strong
<i>y^cl . bṣrrt . ṣpn</i>	ascends to the heights of Şapan.
<i>yṭb . lkḥt . aliyn . b^cl</i>	He sits on the throne of Mighty Baal (CAT 1.6 I 56-59).

Baal's throne was clearly established at the top of a mountain. El's throne was also situated in the heights (CAT 1.5 VI 1-2, 11-14). What about the other gods? CAT 1.47 gives a list of god names which are prefaced by the phrase “*il ṣpn*.” Wyatt argues that this phrase “is best

⁵⁰ DULAT, p. 159, s.v. ^cly.

construed as ‘the gods of Şapan,’ thus indicating that they all live together.”⁵¹ If gods such as Kothar Wahasis and Mot have thrones, why wouldn’t the other gods also have thrones? In light of Wyatt’s interpretation of this text, if any of the gods listed had thrones, those thrones would also be on a mountain.

Keeping with the theme of mountain heights, there are a number of parallels in the Hebrew bible that describe the throne of God. The following psalm appears at first to be a simple psalm of praise:

כִּי אֵל גָּדוֹל יְהוָה	For a great god is Yahweh,
וּמֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל עַל-כָּל-אֱלֹהִים:	and a great King over all the gods;
אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדוֹ מְהַקְרֵי-אָרֶץ	In whose hand are the depths of the underworld,
וְתוֹעֲפוֹת הַרִים לוֹ:	and the peaks of the mountains are his (Ps. 95:3-4).

The last verse contains a noteworthy merism: מהקרי ארץ “depths of the underworld” and תועפות הרים “the peaks of the mountains.” One would expect, instead, ארץ “underworld” and שמים “heavens.” In light of this verse, “mountains” can symbolically represent the highest tier of the cosmos. This imagery of the mountain/cosmic height is used in the following psalm:

וַיֵּהוּהָ לְעוֹלָם יֹשֵׁב	Yahweh sits [enthroned] forever;
כּוֹנֵן לְמִשְׁפָּט כְּסֵאוֹ:	He has established his throne for judgment.
זַמְרוּ לַיהוָה יֹשֵׁב צִיּוֹן	Sing to Yahweh, who is dwelling [on] Zion,
הַגִּידוּ כְּעֲמַלְיוֹתָיו:	announce among the people his deeds (Ps. 9:8, 12).

This depiction of God enthroned upon Zion “echoes...the ancient Near Eastern notion of the sacred mountain as the place where the divine ruler of the universe has his throne.”⁵² There are yet further echoes of this imagery in the following passages:

וַיֹּאמֶר לְכֹן שְׁמַע דְּבַר-יְהוָה	And he said, “Therefore hear the word of Yahweh:
רָאִיתִי אֶת-יְהוָה יֹשֵׁב עַל-כְּסֵאוֹ	I saw Yahweh sitting upon his throne,
וְכָל-צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם עִמָּד עָלָיו	and all the hosts of the heavens standing beside him
מִיְמִינוֹ וּמִשְׁמָאלוֹ:	on the right and on the left (1 Kg. 22:19).

⁵¹ Wyatt, “The Hollow Crown: Ambivalent Elements in West Semitic Royal Ideology,” p. 426, fn. 30.

⁵² Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 7, p. 255.

כִּי מִי בַשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁחַק יְעַרְוֶה לִיהוָה	For who among the clouds is equal to Yahweh?
יִדְמֶה לִיהוָה בְּבָנֵי אֱלֹהִים:	[Who] resembles Yahweh among the sons of God?
אֵל גִּבְעָרִץ בְּסוּד־קִדְשֵׁים	A god feared among the council of the holy ones
רָבָה וְנוֹרָא עַל־כָּל־סְבִיבָיו:	Great and terrible above all those surrounding him.

(Ps. 89:7-8)

These describe both God's dwelling in the skies and his association with other divine beings.

These themes may be seen in *CAT* 1.47 (mentioned above), but are clearly present in *CAT* 1.2 I 19-21:

<i>idk . pnm lytn</i>	Immediately they set their faces
<i>tk . gr . ll .</i>	toward mount LL,
<i>ʿm . pbr . m^cd</i>	to the council of assembly;
<i>ap . ilm . lhm . ytb .</i>	While the gods sit feasting,
<i>bn . qdš . ltrm .</i>	the holy ones to eat.
<i>bʿl . qm . ʿl . il .</i>	Baal waits upon El.

In this passage, Yam's messengers bring word to the gods who are assembled together on a mountain. While a throne is not mentioned, El is clearly in a position of authority at this assembly, as evidenced by Baal's servitude. Regardless, the heights of a mountain are a special location where gods associate with each other and from whence certain gods rule.

There are other passages in the Ugaritic corpus that underline the sacred nature of the heights by comparing the mountains themselves to thrones. In the story of Kirta, there is a unique depiction of Šapan. After learning of his father's death, the son of Kirta declares:

<i>tbkyk . ab . gr . bʿl</i>	The mountain of Baal will weep [for] you, father,
<i>špn . hlm . qdš</i>	Šapan, the holy stronghold,
<i>nyy . hlm . adr .</i>	Nanay, the powerful stronghold (<i>CAT</i> 1.16 I 6-7).

This personification of a mountain is intriguing in and of itself. Remarkably, a similar personification is described elsewhere. In a liturgical text, the narrator/officiator addresses the following possessions of the departed king Niqmaddu:

<i>ksi . nqmd . ibky</i>	O throne of Niqmaddu, weep!
<i>wydm^c . hdm . p^{nh}</i>	Let his footstool shed tears!
<i>lph . ybky . tlhn . mlk</i>	In front of it, let the royal table weep! (<i>CAT</i> 1.161 I 13-16)

Each of the items addressed in this passage were considered royal furniture and conspicuously featured a weeping throne. In light of this liturgy, is it possible that the previous passage considered mount Şapan to be the cosmic equivalent of such royal furniture?

Fortunately, there is another passage that makes the connection clear. In words of praise for Baal, the imagery of a divine mountain again appears:

<i>bʿl . ytb . ktbt . ḡr .</i>	Baal is enthroned as a mountain is enthroned,
<i>hd . r[bṣ] . kmdb .</i>	Hadad [lies down] like the ocean,
<i>btk . ḡrh . il spn .</i>	on his divine mountain, Şapan
<i>bt[k] ḡr . tlyt .</i>	on the mountain of victory (CAT 1.101 1-3).

Once again, the divine mountain is personified, this time as an entity “enthroned.”

A final piece of evidence that links a divine throne to a divine mountain is CAT 1.1 III 12:

<i>[tk . ḡrṣn] ḡr . ks .</i>	[To the mountain,] mount KS.
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Wyatt proposes the following reconstruction:⁵³

<i>[tk . ḡrṣn] ḡr . ks[i] .</i>	[To the mountain,] mount Throne.
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In addition to epigraphical evidence, he argues that this location is related linguistically to the Greek Mount Kasion. He explains, “*Kasion*, I suggest, is a Greek transcription of the West Semitic term for the ‘throne’ of a god, subsequently translated into the Greek toponym *Thronos*.”⁵⁴ This, when viewed with the other passages describing mount Şapan, suggests that these authors associated the tops of certain mountains with the thrones of gods.

Argument for viewing El’s actions symbolically in a 3-tiered cosmos

The question may be posed: If there are no explicit references to the cosmos, can cosmological imagery be present in such texts? In describing the literature of the Hebrew bible, Wyatt explains:

“It would be entirely wrong to conclude from the reticence of biblical writers on the significance of their figurative language that it is not intended to carry a symbolic burden. The whole point of a living symbolism, or for that matter a living mythology, is that the meaning is not articulated, and perhaps not even consciously experienced, but instead felt.”⁵⁵

⁵³ N. Wyatt, *The Mythic Mind: Essays on Cosmology and Religion in Ugaritic and Old Testament Literature* (London: Equinox, 2005), p. 110.

⁵⁴ Wyatt, *The Mythic Mind*, p. 111.

⁵⁵ Wyatt, *Myths of Power*, p. 104, fn. 169.

While here addressing biblical texts, given the geographic proximity and cultural similarity of the two literatures, I do not think it a stretch to apply the same logic to Ugaritic literature.

The language of symbolism, while elusive because of its subtlety, can be pursued to a reasonable degree. For instance, this paper has explored the symbolic geography of a three-tiered cosmos at Ugarit and other nearby cultures. Why would a study of such cosmic geography be valuable? Wyatt writes, “We should recognize [the Ugaritic] use of a symbolic geography, used for the framing of specifically theological constructions in terms of a broad *Weltanschauung* and the place of the divine and human realms within it.”⁵⁶ In understanding the symbolism of the Ugaritic literature, one can better understand how its authors understood the world around them as well as their relation to the cosmos.

As head of the Ugaritic pantheon, El’s influence is pervasive. In describing this influence, D. Petersen and M. Woodward wrote, “The macrocosmos is composed of many interrelated components, the most important of which...[is] El’s mountain.”⁵⁷ But what of the individual realms, the “microcosmos?” In writing on symbolic geography, R. Clifford suggests that “every microcosm had a ‘center,’ a place sacred above all...In cultures which have a heaven, earth, and [underworld], the mountain ‘center’ is the axis along which these three cosmic areas are connected and where communion is between them becomes possible.”⁵⁸

This paper has explored the three tiers of the Ugaritic cosmos- “heaven, earth, and [underworld].” Therefore, according to Clifford, this literature may be examined according to his paradigm. He states that “every microcosm had a ‘center.’” As demonstrated earlier, in each of the three tiers of the cosmos, a throne is mentioned. As the seat of a deity’s power, perhaps the throne can be considered the symbolic “center” of each realm.

Over all of these realms extends the authority of the chief god, El, who rules from the heights of his cosmic mountain. Considering this spatial image of height, “the cosmic mountain of El...overshadows all subordinate points of reference in the cosmos.”⁵⁹ This does not mean that El rules each of these realms individually. Different deities “ruled over particular realms within the universe (storms, the sea, and the Netherworld) alongside each other...At the same

⁵⁶ N. Wyatt, *Word of Tree and Whisper of Stone: And Other Papers on Ugaritian Thought* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2007), p. 87.

⁵⁷ David L. Petersen and Mark Woodward, “Northwest Semitic Religion: A Study of Relational Structures,” *UF* 9 (1977), p. 238.

⁵⁸ Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 6. Wyatt also suggests that the mountain of El “is to be construed as the centre of the world, the point of intersection of heaven, earth, and the nether world.” “The Hollow Crown,” p. 426.

⁵⁹ Wyatt, “The Hollow Crown,” p. 423.

time, of course, El ruled as *mlk* [“king”] over all three.”⁶⁰ As the ultimate sovereign over all three realms of the cosmos,⁶¹ El would have had complete freedom of movement between them.

Conclusion

To summarize, each of the three tiers of the cosmos can be symbolized succinctly. The sacred heights can be associated with thrones. From this maximum vertical position in the cosmos, deities are seated and from that lofty position reign over the next level of the cosmos:

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה	Thus says Yahweh,
הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּסֵּאֵי	The heavens are my throne,
וְהָאָרֶץ רַגְלִי	and the earth is my footstool (Isa. 66:1).

The middle realm of the cosmos, the inhabited world, can be represented with the imagery of a footstool. The deities above hold this realm in a position of subjugation “under” their feet. But one can descend even lower in the symbolic geography of the cosmos. Upon being told of his son Joseph’s death, Jacob reacts:

וַיִּמָּאֵן לְהִתְנַחֵם וַיֹּאמֶר	But he refused to be comforted, saying,
כִּי־אֶרְדָּ אֶל־בְּנֵי אָבִל שְׂאֵלָה	“For I will descend to my son in mourning to Sheol.”
	(Gen. 37:35)

The lowest realm, the underworld, is associated with earth, or dust. This is the third realm of the cosmos. Transitions to this realm are described as a “descent,” as this is the destination of the departed.

The passage that launched this investigation can be appropriately reexamined in light of this cosmological symbolism:

<i>apnk . ltpn . il dpid</i>	Then Friendly El, the Magnanimous
<i>yrd . lksi .</i>	descends from the throne [heaven]
<i>ytb lhdm .</i>	[and] sits on the footstool [earth]
<i>wl . hdm .</i>	and from the footstool [earth]
<i>ytb lars .</i>	he sits on the earth [the underworld].

When viewed from a cosmological perspective, El’s “royal mourning gesture” takes on an added significance. This action was not merely a “Canaanite mourning custom.” Instead, it

⁶⁰ Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*, pp. 112-113.

⁶¹ Cf. Ps. 139:7-8

reinforced a tripartite view of the cosmos and symbolized El's sovereignty over each of those realms. As stated earlier, the seemingly ordinary may conceal the extraordinary. Looking for the cosmological implications of seemingly ordinary actions not only provides scholars with an appreciation for their perspectives, but also opens up new avenues for understanding the worldview of the ancients.

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