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The Origins of the Last Ugaritic Dynasty *

Any effort to discover the origins of the Ugaritic dynasty attested in the Late Bronze Age archives is made enormously difficult by the scarceness of written sources. As is well known, the archives found in Ras Šamra cover a restricted chronological period, ca. 1350–1185 BCE (Van Soldt 1991: 1 ff), and there are very few documents available about the earlier history of the city. However, certain archaeological data, as well as recently unearthed king lists, make new proposals about the origins of such dynasty possible.

1. Legends concerning the origins

A set of literary and religious texts refer to a certain figure, Dīṭānu, to whom the condition of ‘ancestor of the kings’ seems to be granted. Thus, Dīṭānu is mentioned in the twice repeated passage of the Kirta epic (RS 3.343+ = KTU 1.15 III: 2 ff, 13 ff), in which god El blesses Kirta on the occasion of his wedding with Ḫurray. This passage states that the king belonged to the clan of Dīṭānu (qbš dtn). More meaningful are the references to Dīṭānu in ritual texts. RS 24.248 (= KTU 1.104): 13 reports a ritual offering for the temple of Dīṭānu (Pardee 2000: 565 ff; 2002: 34 ff). RS 24.272 (= KTU 1.124) contains Dīṭānu prescription for the healing of a sick (divine) child, that would have been the model for similar human cases (Pardee 2002: 170 ff; Wyatt 2002: 423 ff). However, the most important text in this context is undoubtedly RS 34.126 (= KTU 1.161), a funerary ritual, probably prepared for the ceremony of Niqmaddu III, penultimate king of Ugarit. Various divinities took part in the ritual, among them two former kings, now deified, ‘Ammittamru and Niqmaddu, as well as various rapa’ūma, about whom it is stated that they belonged to Dīṭānu’s clan (ulkn, trmn, sdn-w-rdn, tr’lmmn), and that have been traditionally considered as long-dead ancestors of the Ugaritic kings (Kitchen 1977: 142; Arnaud 1999: 172; Pardee 2002: 113 n. 124).

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Apart from Ugaritic tradition, Dīṭānu is a figure included in the old Amorite legends about their very origins (see Lipinski 1978). Dīṭānu, spelled Didānu, Dīṭānu, Tidanu or Tidnu, is already attested in texts from the Third Millennium, but what is probably most meaningful is his presence in the genealogy of the dynasty of Ḫammurapi and in the Assyrian king list as an eponymous ancestor of the old Amorite clan (see, for example Chavalas 1994).

However, in literary and religious Ugaritic texts Dīṭānu is always referred to as a non-historical divine figure, not even mentioned in the king lists alluded to in the following section. Its function in the Ugaritic tradition, then, is not that of a founding king, but of a legendary eponym of the kings’ tribe. In fact if as has often been suggested (see DULAT p. 283) its etymology is related to the Akkadian *dītānu* (‘aurochs, bison’)¹, then Dīṭānu’s figure is closer to the tribal totem than to a historical figure (Lipinski 1978: 109).

2. King Lists

Apart from the figure Dīṭānu, historians have basically attempted to reconstruct the ‘true’ history of the Ugaritic dynasty starting from the king lists mentioned earlier (see Čech 2002). This is essentially due to the absence of documents with information about those kings of Ugarit previous to the times of the archives. In a letter by Ḫammurapi of Ḫalab to Zimri-Lim of Mari reference is made to a king of Ugarit whose name, however, is not mentioned (Villard 1986: 410 n. 162). The other possible reference to an ancient Ugaritic king figured in a text from Alalah, AT 358, in which a so called Buruqu, PN followed by the expression LÚ URU *ú-ga-ri-it*, was mentioned; this lead to speculation about the possibility of him being a king of the city. After a thorough analysis of the document, Arnaud correctly asserts that the scribe uses the term LÚ in the sense of *awīlu* and not of *malku*, as can be gathered from the writing of the plural determinative (LÚ.MEŠ) referred to the inhabitants of Arazik (Arnaud 1997: 154).

Attention shall be now paid to the king lists; the first one to be discovered was the Ugaritic list found in the reverse of RS 24.257 (= KTU 1.113). The tablet was found in 1961 in Room 10 of the House of the Hurrian Priest. Only a fragment of 6.4 × 5.5 cm remains. According to Pardee its original dimension must have been 12 × 8 cm approximately (Pardee 1988: 165). The obverse of the tablet holds a literary text of difficult interpretation published in *Ugaritica* V 5. The reverse, where the king list figured, was not published until the first edition of KTU in 1976. According to Pardee’s proposal such king list is as follows (Pardee 1988: 166):

Reverse

[...]		
12’.	[] [l] []
13’.	[il ‘m[pl]tm[r]

¹ CAD D 164 f.; AHw 173.

14'. [il n]qmp ^c
15'. []	il [q]mph
16'. [] ^[l]	il ibrn
17'. []	il y ^c drd
18'. [] ^[l] []	il nqmp ^c
19'. [] ^[p] []	il ibrn
20'. [] ^[d]	i]l] 'mrpi
21'. [il nq]mp ^c	[il] nqmp ^c
22'. [il 'm]ttmr	il ib[r] ^[n]

Upper Edge

23'. [] ^[d]	il nqmp ^[q]
24'. []	il ibrn
25'. []	il nqmd
26'. [] ^[q]	il yqr

The first in depth study of RS 24.257 was published by Kitchen in 1977 (Kitchen 1977).² One of its most important contributions was to suggest that the two columns in the reverse of RS 24.257 were written following a retrograde order, from the latest king back through time to the founder of the dynasty, Yaqaru, the last name written in RS 24.257. Kitchen backed his proposal referring to other similar examples found in the ancient Near East, such as a section of the Assyrian king list and certain Egyptian lists, in which this retrograde order is also used. One could add to these examples two king lists from Ebla, themselves in a retrograde order³, an order common in orally transmitted lists as a resource to aid memory (Archi 2001: 4).

This retrograde order fitted with the extended belief that Yaqaru had been the first of the true kings of Ugarit. This followed from the use of the seal of Yaqaru as a guarantee of legitimacy in some of the documents from the two last centuries of existence of Ugarit.

Kitchen also tried to provide a specific historical content to the list by putting forward an approximate chronology for the various reigns. Kitchen suggested that the list must have originally contained about 30 names, and he ascribed 15/20 years of reign to each one of them. Following this, Kitchen dated the reign of Yaqaru around 1900–1800 BCE, linking it with the Amorite migrations at the beginning of the Second Millennium. Moreover, this date fitted with the analysis of the seal of Yaqaru carried out by Nougayrol, who on the basis of iconography and ductus dated it in the early Second Millennium (PRU 3 p. XLIf).

This proposal was seriously questioned after a new study of the tablet by Pardee. According to this last scholar's estimates, the list must originally have contained 26 names in each column, which amounted to a total sum of 52 Ugaritic kings (Pardee 1988: 173; dif. Aboud 1994: 3 ff); accordingly the origins of the Ugaritic dynasty went now back to the middle of the Third Millennium, thus the historical reference to the Amorite migrations and the coincidence with the dating of the seal disappeared.

² See preliminary remarks in C. Vroilleaud (1962), 94 f.; C. F. A. Schaeffer (1963), 214 f.; A. F. Rainey (1965).

³ ARET VII 150 and TM.74.G.120 [A. Archi (2001); M. Bonechi (2001)].

Singer tried to combine Kitchen's proposals with the new ones put forward by Pardee (Singer 1999: 611 ff). So granting an average of 15 years of reign to each king, Singer placed Yaqaru at the very beginning of the Second Millennium. The scholar sustained that RS 24.257 indicated that the kings of 14th–12th Century Ugarit traced back the origins of their royal house to the outset of the Second Millennium BCE. Singer concluded his analysis of the document with the traditional belief that the foundations of the Ugaritic kingdom were firmly set within the context of the Amorite expansion in Mesopotamia and Syria at the turn of the Second Millennium.

However, the image of Yaqaru as the founder of the Ugaritic dynasty has been challenged since the finding of four new Ugaritic king lists: RS 88.2012, RS 94.2518, RS 94.2528 and RS 94.2501 (Arnaud 1999). Such lists contain a great deal of differences respect RS 24.257. They are all written in Akkadian, and not in Ugaritic, as RS 24.257 is, and the four are independent lists, i.e., no text precedes them. Moreover, the lists are complete, except RS 94.2501, something which in principle allows to solve the problems posed by the fragmentary state of RS 24.257. In the four new lists, as well as in the previous one, the word 'god' (*il* / DINGIR) is placed before each name.

The sequence of kings figuring in such lists is as follows:

1. DINGIR 'ú-ga-ra-na
2. DINGIR 'am-qú-na
3. DINGIR 'rap-a-na
4. DINGIR 'lim-il-LUGAL
5. DINGIR 'am-mu-ḥa-ra-ši
6. DINGIR 'am-mu-ša-mar
7. DINGIR 'a-mis-tam-ri
8. DINGIR 'nīq-me-pa
9. DINGIR 'ma-AB-i
10. DINGIR 'i-bi-ra-na
11. DINGIR 'KAR-^dIŠKUR
12. DINGIR 'nīq-me-pa
13. DINGIR 'i-bi-ra-na
14. DINGIR 'am-mu-rap-i (RS 94.2518, RS 88.2012) / am-mu-rap-pi (RS 94.2528)
15. DINGIR 'nīq-me-pa
16. DINGIR 'i-bi-ra-na
17. DINGIR 'nīq-me-pa
18. DINGIR 'i-bi-ra-na
19. DINGIR 'nīq-ma-du (RS 94.2528) / nīq-ma-^dIŠKUR (RS 94.2518, RS 88.2012, RS 94.2501)
20. DINGIR 'ya-qa-ri
21. DINGIR 'i-bi-ra-na
22. DINGIR 'nīq-ma-^dIŠKUR
23. DINGIR 'nīq-me-pa
24. DINGIR 'a-mis-tam-ri
25. DINGIR 'nīq-ma-^dIŠKUR
26. DINGIR 'nīq-me-pa

It is particularly relevant to point out the perfect coincidence of names between lines 13'–26' of RS 24.257 and lines 7–20 of the syllabic lists.⁴ Moreover, the order of the sequence displayed by the syllabic lists between numbers 23 and 26 coincides with the attested reigns of 'Ammittamru (ca. 1350), Niqmaddu (ca. 1350–1315) and Niqmepa' (ca. 1313–1260) with the non mentioned interlude of Ar-ḫalba (ca. 1315–1313) (Vidal 2000: 558ff). These two features are particularly important because they confirm that both RS 24.257 and the syllabic lists really follow a descending chronological order. Therefore Yaqaru not only was not the first king of Ugarit, but his is in fact one of the last names mentioned in the list.

In spite of these very important facts, Arnaud has remained faithful to the belief that the lists contained the names of the ancient kings of Ugarit, as well as to the trend of trying to establish a chronology for each name. In such a way, granting 20 years for the reign of each monarch, Arnaud placed the new founder of the dynasty of Ugarit, Ugarānu, in the 19th Century, as Kitchen and Singer among others had already suggested. Moreover, Arnaud tried to solve the problem posed by Yaqaru, who according to the new lists could no longer be regarded as the founder of the dynasty. In Arnaud's opinion, the last kings of Ugarit used the seal of Yaqaru as proof of legitimacy due to the fact that he could have played the role of 'refounder' of the dynasty (Arnaud 1997: 161).

3. The Historical Origins

The aforementioned proposals share the assumption that all the characters mentioned in such lists were kings of Ugarit belonging to the same and only dynasty. However, according to our opinion, several data, both archaeological and textual, point to the existence of a dynasty preceeding the one attested in the city's archives.

According to archaeological sources Ugarit went, during the transition between the MBA and the LBA, through a period of decadence that could have led to the city being deserted for a short period of time (1650–1600 BCE) (Schaeffer 1948: 13f, 28; Courtois 1979: 1143f; Yon 1997: 28). This situation coincides with one of the most unstable and poorly documented periods in the History of the Mediterranean Levant, characterized by the Hittite destruction of the old Amorite centres of Syria, in particular Yamḥad/Ḫalab. However, in the Hittite records of the campaigns led by Ḫattušili I and Muršili I to northern Syria Ugarit is never mentioned (Singer 1999: 619). At any rate, and in spite of the silence of the sources, the obvious chronological coincidence between the crises of Ugarit and the Hittite military campaigns in the area cannot be ignored. Moreover, it can also be taken into account that one of the main reasons that fostered the Hittite military expansion in the north of Syria was to secure access to the natural and productive resources of the area, as well as control of the important commercial routes of the zone (Klengel 1992: 80), both aspects in which Ugarit was particularly outstanding, as the main Syrian sea-port. For this reason a possible Hittite action ought not to be outruled as one of the causing factors of the Ugaritic crisis.

⁴ See J. Vidal (2000) and D. Pardee (2002): 195 ff about the differences between RS 24.257 and the syllabic lists.

In our opinion, the possible desertion of the city is a factor which seriously questions the existence of a single dynasty in Ugarit, a dynasty whose origins would go back to the beginning of the Second Millennium, and that would have ruled the city even when it was not inhabited. It is more coherent to suppose that the dynasty attested in the archives was established in the city after such dark times. Given the fact that the kings attested in the archives seem to celebrate Yaqaru as the founder of the dynasty, it is very probable that the first king of Ugarit in the LBA was the Yaqaru that figures in the l. 20 of the syllabic lists, while the anonymous king mentioned in the letter found in Mari would belong to an earlier dynasty, which would have ruled the city at some time during the MBA. Moreover, if we grant an average of 20 years for the reign of each king, then Yaqaru's reign would be dated in the mid 15th Century approximately, that is, after the archaeological gap attested towards the end of the MBA.

Furthermore this possibility fits with the information contained in a letter, RS 4.449 (Arnaud 1996: 47ff), found in the temple of Ba'al in Ugarit, sent by Niqmepa' of Alalaḫ to a king of the city, named Ibira. If, as has been suggested, Niqmepa' is Idrimi's successor (Klengel 1992: 89; Arnaud 1996: 47; Singer 1999: 620), then Ibira would have ruled in Ugarit around the middle of the 15th Century, and would be the same monarch as the Ibirānu mentioned in the l. 21 of the syllabic lists as the successor of Yaqaru. If this is so, the last dynasty of Ugarit would have been formed by the following kings:

Yaqaru	
Ibirānu (I)	
Niqmaddu (I)	
Niqmepa' (I)	
Ammittamru (I)	(ca. 1350 BCE)
Niqmaddu (II)	(ca. 1350–1315 BCE)
Ar-ḫalba	(ca. 1315–1313 BCE)
Niqmepa' (II)	(ca. 1313–1260 BCE)
Ammittamru (II)	(ca. 1260–1235 BCE)
Ibirānu (II)	(ca. 1235–1225/1220 BCE)
Niqmaddu (III)	(ca. 1225/1220–1215 BCE)
'Ammurapi	(ca. 1215–1190/1185 BCE)

One of the problems of dating the origins of the Ugaritic dynasty in the first half of the 15th Century BCE is posed by the dynastic seal of Yaqaru that, as mentioned, was dated in the old babylonian period. But as Arnaud pointed out (Arnaud 1997: 158ff), an archaic syllabary could have been employed in its making, as happens with the inscription of Idrimi of Alalaḫ; if this is so, epigraphy could not be assumed to be a valid criterion for its dating. Moreover, Nougayrol himself acknowledged that the sign QA that appears in the writing of the seal was only employed with this value from the middle of the Second Millennium onwards.

The rest of the names that figure in the king lists (ll. 1–19) would in fact be not really kings but ancestors of Yaqaru. Certainly, Niqmaddu is mentioned in l. 19 as predecessor of Yaqaru, and this coincides with the writing in the dynastic seal, where it is stated that Yaqaru was the son of a so called Niqmaddu (*ya-qa-rum* DUMU *ni-iq-má-du* LUGAL

URU *ú-ga-ri-it*). Attention should also be paid to a fragmentary votive text from Nippur on an onyx vase from the old Babylonian period (Fossey 1911: 248s, pl. V; Heltzer 1981: 5 n. 33) in which the following can be read:

1. [a]-na
2. ^[d]NIN.PAD.NIR
3. [be]-el-ti-šu
4. [am]-^[l]mi-is-ta-mar
5. [x] di-da-ni-um
6. [ra-bi]-a-an MAR.TU
7. [a-n]a ba-la-ti-šu
8. i-qi-iš

“To NIN.PAD.NIR, his mistress, Ammistamar, [...] of Didānum, sheik of the Amorites, for his life donated”

If, as Heltzer points out (Heltzer 2001: § 11), the character mentioned in the inscription is the same Ammittamru mentioned in 1.7 of the syllabic king lists, then the fact that he does not have the title ‘king of Ugarit’ but only a tribal title confirms that the names previous to Yaqaru were not kings of Ugarit (Vidal 2000: 564). If this is so, the Ugaritic king lists would reproduce something very similar to what is attested in the genealogy of Hammurapi’s dynasty, where the last nine names of the first section are the well-known names of the kings of Babylon from Sumu-Abum to Ammi-Ditana, while the preceding names are, as in Ugarit, the ancestors of the dynasty.

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