Adam, Eve, and the Devil

Marjo C.A. Korpel
Johannes C. de Moor
Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam / Groningen

1
The Problem

The biblical accounts of the creation of the cosmos, the garden of Eden and the fall of Adam and Eve belong to the most beautiful and impressive pieces of world literature. Countless attempts have been made to locate the garden but on the basis of the biblical data this has only led to very diverse and contradictory results. Modern readers often balk at ideas like the first transgression by a woman, the subordination of Eve to Adam, the concept of inherited human evilness and a malicious speaking serpent. Some reject all this as antiquated mythology, others cling stubbornly to it.

After at least three thousand years of studying the written traditions of ancient Israel some Bible scholars might have become sceptical about the possibility to say anything new about these holy writings. We always encourage our students by pointing out that there are basically two ways to overcome this blockade: one can try out a new method enabling the researcher to look at the same data through new glasses, or one can make use of fresh extra-biblical data. After all, the Bible is only one book from a much richer literary tradition. Very often we do not know the contextual background of biblical texts.

With regard to Eden Eric H. Cline wrote in 2007,

> In the end, we are left with a final compelling question: How can anyone really hope to find the Garden of Eden, especially given what has been said about the Primeval History

Part of this paper is a summary of Korpel & De Moor 2014. In a different form it is also bound to be published in a volume of studies devoted to the papers read at an Adam Conference organized by Antti Laato at Turku, Finland in 2014.

> within the Book of Genesis? Even if the garden once was a real place, and even if we know the general location for where it might have been, how would we know its physical parameters, since there were no ancient signs or inscriptions at the entrance to the garden (for writing hadn't been invented yet)?
>
> So how will we know if we really found it? The answer is that we won't. As Victor Hurowitz, professor of Bible and ancient Near Eastern studies at Ben-Gurion University, once said: "I doubt we'll ever find Eden outside the pages of the Bible."
> (cf. http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/eden357918.shtml).

This stalemate is caused in part by the circumstance that next to Genesis 2–3 we have other traditions about Eden in the Bible itself. Among biblical scholars it is common knowledge that the Hebrew Bible contains traditions that differ from the Genesis narrative, for example in Ezekiel 28. In the parabiblical literature, such as the Enochitic writings, still more diverging traditions about the primeval history of humanity have been preserved, This has led to the hypothesis that these traditions may be dependent on an older story which Paul Ricoeur has dubbed 'the Adamic Myth'. However, hitherto this myth has remained elusive. To give only two quotations substantiating this statement,

> May 1962, 167: 'The Canaanite Eden or First Man myth is yet to be recovered.'
>
> Batto 2013, 83: 'There is no evidence that the paradise motif was borrowed from extrabiblical literature'.

In a recently published book we have put forward a theory which might finally fill this gap (Korpel / De Moor 2014). It is based on a fresh interpretation of a number of Ugaritic clay tablets dating from the late thirteenth century BCE. At that time Ugarit was the flourishing capital of a small Canaanite kingdom on the coast of present-day Syria, opposite the eastward pointing 'finger' of the island Cyprus. Ugarit is important to biblical interpretation because its language is closely related to ancient Hebrew and was written on clay tablets with an alphabetic script.

2
Concepts of Creation in Ugarit

In Ugarit and other Canaanite states the Creator of All was El who in Ugarit was still called Ilu. The ending *u* was a case ending which disappeared in the first millennium BCE. In order to avoid cumbersome repetition we shall cite names in this paper according to their later Hebrew form if this is possible. No other great creator or creatress in the ancient Near East bore the same name, with the exception of the God of Israel. So it seems logical to surmise that the religion of Israel should be seen as rooted in its Canaanite environment (Korpel 1990; De Moor 1997).

El created in various manners. His main wife was Ashera, mother of his seventy children and a creatress in her own right. Creation by word or thought alone is attested for both of them. However, like other creators in the ancient Near East, El also 'created' by impregnating other goddesses and earthly women. On other occasions he creates by molding clay like a potter (cf. Gen. 2:7). El creates not merely at the beginning of the cosmos, but many times after. So the Canaanites believed in a continuous process of creation, as did some biblical writers – a fact often disregarded by theologians. Some lesser deities in the Ugaritic pantheon were also able to create, be it on a lower level.

El dwelt in a 'tent' at the four headwaters of the Euphrates and Tigris. Possibly this 'tent' was the heavenly firmament itself, but in any case it is also described as a luxurious palace, both in Ugarit and in the Bible. We have strong reasons to surmise that El was thought to dwell on Mt Ararat, the highest point of Turkey/Armenia and the mountain on which according to biblical and Mesopotamian accounts the ark presumably landed. Mt Ararat is an extinct volcano with two peaks, one of which is called a 'The Beaker, Crater' in Ugaritic. People believed that the sun went down between these two peaks, taking the dead along. One Ugaritic tablet mentions a 'vineyard of the great gods' which seems to have been the Canaanite predecessor of the garden of Eden.

3

Primordial History in Ugarit

According to all major religions of the ancient Near East, the religion of Israel excepted, the first rebellion against the Creator took place not among human beings, but in the world of the deities. In the few cases where primeval humans were involved in rebellions against the highest deity they were still divine or semi-divine beings. This is an important point to comprehend the Canaanite concept of the garden of the gods. Divine status implied enormous proportions, also of their environment. The garden must have been thought of as covering the entire country of Armenia, and possibly more. Initially there was probably only one Tree of Life in the Canaanite version of Paradise, an enormously tall 'Weltbaum', the top of which touched the sky.

In Ugarit the rebel god was Horon, also known in Phoenician, Egyptian, Hebrew and Greek literature. There are strong indications that he rebelled against El and was punished by expulsion from the snow-capped, volcanic mountain of El and thrown down in the Hauran, part of the Syrian desert, where he started his own volcanic activity. His revenge seems to have consisted in making the Tree of Life inaccessible to the gods by positing himself as a huge serpent in the tree, a huge monster like the biblical Leviathan, whose poison turned the Tree of Life into a Tree of Death. As a result the whole world started to wither and a poisonous fog enveloped everything.

So the identification of the Devil with a poisonous serpent has a very long history. We believe that the serpent was a huge kind of *Cerastes*, a horned serpent. Hence the Devil's horns, up to our own days. The great gods decided to send one of them, Adam, to the earth with the assignment to undo this deplorable situation. They gave him total power over the earth (cf. Gen. 1:28), but when he arrived at the tree, the serpent bit him immediately and he started to die. However, the sun goddess took pity on Adam and summoned all the great deities to charm the serpent before it would be too late. Because his own offspring, the serpents, would also be destroyed by such a massive alliance, Horon enters the garden, uproots the Tree of Death and detoxifies it by removing its morbid growths. We quote our translation of the lines in question,

Horon's face turned pale
  because his posterity would remain childless.
He left the city in the east.
  Then he headed straight
for the Great Arashikh
  and for the Little Arashikh
[Great Arashikh and Little Arashikh are the names of two
  major tributaries of the river Tigris]
He removed the juniper from the trees,
  yes, the Tree of Death from the shrubs.
The juniper — he shook it out,
  the date-cluster — he put it away,
    the scab — he took it off,
      the wart — he carried it off.
Horon went to his house
  and proceeded to his residence.
The poison had become weak like a brook,
  it had flowed away like a ditch.

Apparently the Tree of Death was an ugly hybrid. The removal of this tree meant that life could resume its course, be it in a reduced, mortal state. The Tree of Life that had lended them eternal life was gone for ever. After his turnabout Horon became the licensed executioner of other rebels like him, both on earth and in heaven.

In his astral manifestation Horon was called Hilal, the bright star Aldebaran which is sometimes occulted by the crescent moon in the early morning so that the star seems to disappear from the night sky. The well-known symbolism of the Ottoman-Turkish flag is derived from the phenomenon of Aldebaran reappearing next to the crescent. Iconographic representations of this happening are already found on artefacts from the second millenium BCE, also from Ugarit.

As for Adam's wife, she too was a goddess in Ugarit (and many other countries) under the name of Kubaba who in the Greek tradition became Kybele, the mother of all. In the preserved parts of the Ugaritic myth no transgression of a divine commandment by either Adam or his wife is mentioned. We believe that the inculpation of Eve in Genesis 3 was the consequence of putting the blame for the fall of Jerusalem on idolatry by women. The

influence of Greek culture on early Judaism may have promoted this way of thinking which has no parallel in the ancient world. After Adam has received the lethal bite, the Ugaritic sun goddess seems to promise him 'a good-natured woman' to start the eternal cycle of procreation with her, thus ensuring the preservation of human life despite the inevitable death of every individual.

In his astral manifestation as the morning star Hilal, Horon fathered the Kotharat, seven divine midwives who became responsible for the preservation of life through conception and childbirth. In the Ugaritic text this is celebrated with a liturgy for bride and groom. So Horon was an ambiguous deity whose character had an evil as well as a positive side. This ambiguity is also discernable in later representations of the Devil (Charlesworth 2010). Several Ugaritic epithets of Horon are identical or similar to Arabic designations of Iblees, the Devil in Islam.

4
Happy Afterlife for VIPs

From very early times on, great kings and heroes in the Canaanite world could expect an enjoyable fate in the Hereafter. It is certain that the Ugaritians believed that their kings were deified after their death. As deities they got new names which ended in 'El', 'Baal' or 'Haddu/Hadad' and the like, indicating the division of the pantheon to which they belonged. These names resemble those of deified royal ancestors of the Ugaritic dynasty who were consulted by the living king in nightly sessions around standing stones representing the deceased in the cult. And they resemble the names of archangels in late biblical and Jewish literature.

When king Keret, the hero of a great Ugaritic legend, lies dying, his wife says to his friends,

> [To] the end of mortals is only a finger (away),
> Keret is on his way to join El.

The term used for the unification of the king with his personal patron El is a participle derived from the same root as the vehemently opposed heresy of *Shirk* in Islam. This is the sin of associating any

other being with God. It is most remarkable to see this term being used in a positive sense in an authentic polytheistic document from the Near East. Here it describes the merging of a human being as a lower deity – Keret was already a 'son' of El – with his creator El. Since we have reason to assume that Ilu dwelt in a luxurious vineyard on the slopes of Mt Ararat, this passage seems to imply that Keret too was allowed to dwell in Ilu's 'paradise' on the lower slopes of Mt Ararat where vines flourish since times immemorial.

5
Re-newal of Life in the Cult

Several tablets from Ugarit combine a mythological narrative with a ritual or an incantation. The connection between myth and ritual is usually very clear, lending support to the view that the myth served to explain the ritual and was recited or symbolically re-enacted in the cult.

One of the Ugaritic texts of this genre is very interesting since it describes some ceremonies of the New Year festival that was celebrated in autumn when the eagerly awaited rains marked the end of the hot, dry summer which was the season attributed to Môt, the god of death. The first of the new wine was pressed during this feast and everybody was allowed to drink his fill (De Moor 1972; 1987, 117-128). The New Year festival celebrated the renewal of life which was symbolized by a sacred marriage rite in which the king, the queen and a priestess seem to have been involved. There are many parallels of this rite in the ancient world (see especially Assmann 1982; Bottéro & Kramer 2011). Mark Smith describes the feast's purpose rather well,

> In the putatively ritual section of 1.23 (lines 1-29), it is the death of Death that permits the life of the harvest (lines 8-11). The metaphors of lines 8-11 depict Death's destruction in the language of the vine, pointing implicitly to the fuel for life that this destruction yields. Implicitly the feast celebrating life requires a harvest, the death and destruction,

> of the natural components consumed; there is no drinking of wine, or feast, without the destruction or death of the vine's fruit. With the elements of the feast coming from a process of the death of Death, life in a sense feeds on death; from death comes life (Smith 2006, 17).

In our opinion the pruning of the vine in the course of the New Year festival commemorated the pruning of the Tree of Death by Horon, the Prince (*shar*) who initially was an ally of death. It was an act which made the eternal renewal of life through procreation possible.

Mot-and-Shar is sitting,
  with the staff of bereavement in one hand,
    the staff of widowerhood in the other.
The pruners of the vine shall prune him,
  the binders of the vine shall bind him,
    they shall let him fall on the terrace like a vine!

'Death-and-the Prince' – the two are joined here to form one dual god, like many other Ugaritic deities. Horon's 'bereavement' is hinted at in another Ugaritic text. Apparently Horon, the Canaanite Devil, was represented as a kind of scarecrow made of the knotty stem of a vine during the Ugaritic New Year ritual. In any case it is clear that the Devil was not an invention of the Persians, as many would have it, but must have been an opponent of God (El) already much earlier.

6
The Defeat of the Serpent

The Ugaritic tablets describe the defeat of the primordial sea-serpent by El's son-in-law Baal and his consort Anat. One Ugaritic incantation provides us with precious details about this fight.

  you should go into the land of Mahanaim.
Solidify the Sea (whose) forked tongue licks the sky,
  you should solidify the Sea with its forked tail.
You should put the Tuna to the muzzle,

tou should bind him to the heights of the Lebanon.
Fall down! You will be shamed, Oh Sea,
your roaring is shattered, Oh Stream.
You surely will see the Pit,
you will be smeared with clay!

To the modern reader, it may look strange that the unknown deity addressed is prayed to solidify the Sea which is clearly identified here with a serpentine monster. However, in Ugaritic mythology the defeat of evil forces is never definitive. Sea, Death and Devil may always rise again. The land of Mahanaim is the Bashan mountain range that was seen as the petrified body of a huge serpent thrown down in the Syrian desert. Bashan actually means 'sea-dragon'. The word used for the solidification of the sea is freezing its water so that it turns into ice, a substance resembling crystal. We connect this with Exod. 15:2 and with Rev. 4:6; 15:2.

7

Critical Reception in the Hebrew Bible

The differences with the canonical Hebrew tradition are vast. The name of Horon survives only in geographical names, apparently because no divine rival of God was tolerated anymore. Yet many elements in the Hebrew tradition betray that the scribes must have been acquainted with the Canaanite mythology briefly sketched in the above summary. However, they did not take over these elements uncritically. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 even ridicule the religion of Israel's Canaanite neighbors, in particular their belief that after their death kings and great heroes would be united with El in his superb garden of delight. Later on this concept would be democratized so that all righteous people could attain this blissful state. The expulsion of the Canaanite Devil Horon, the antipole of El, from the mountain of the great gods offered Israelite prophets a perfect argument against the idea that divine status could guarantee indemnity against punishment for sins committed.

8

Partially Continued in Parabiblical Literature and the New Testament

We are no specialists in parabiblical literature, but we want to indicate a few correspondences between the Ugaritic material and the parabiblical writings and the New Testament which suggest that it is worthwhile to consider the Canaanite material we presented.

It is evident that the canonical tradition about Adam and Eve has had an overbearing influence on apochryphal, sectarian and pseudepigraphic works. Yet we believe that some Canaanite Adam-traditions that were omitted from the Hebrew Bible were reintegrated in these parabiblical compositions. Whether this came about via oral tradition or by consulting now lost Canaanite sources is still a moot question. In any case the Ugaritic material throws new light on the parabiblical Adam-traditions too.

8.1 *The Renewal of Life*

The restoration of paradise for the pious is a theme in parabiblical literature and the New Testament. Already the *Book of the Luminaries* (4th century BCE) 77:3 mentions the 'Garden of Righteousness' which is situated in the north from the author's point of view. The *Book of the Watchers* (3rd century BCE) describes a beautiful fragrant tree, growing on the mountain of God. Its fruit will be given to the righteous at the end of times (1 En. 24:3–25:6). Afterwards many other parabiblical and New Testament writings mention a paradisiacal garden in which the righteous will be allowed to live after their death.

It is most remarkable that Paul's jubilant taunt 'Death where is your victory? Death where is your sting?' (1 Cor.15:55) links in not only with Hos. 13:14 but with Canaanite traditions about the first Adam. The Sting was a son of Death in Ugarit and the serpent in the vineyard of the great gods killed the first man with his 'stinging fangs'.

As we have seen, the story of Adam was connected with the renewal of life during the Ugaritic New Year festival. In this connection it is interesting that even a version of the late rabbinic work known as the Abot de-Rabbi Nathan states 'On New Year's

Day, the first man was created. In the first hour, he came into existence as a thought in God's mind'.

9
Conclusion

Canaanite mythological traditions, especially those from the city of Ugarit, throw new light on passages about Adam and Eve in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and parabiblical literature. Several elements that cannot be traced back to the canonical Hebrew Bible appear to be present in Canaanite texts that are at least twelve hundred years older. This allows for the hypothesis that there has existed an unbroken chain of popular religious tradition that was deliberately repressed in rabbinic Judaism, but occasionaly cropped up in extra-canonical works. Further exploration of these hitherto elusive links might be rewarding.

10
Bibliography

Assmann, J., 1982: 'Die Zeugung des Sohnes: Bild, Spiel, Erzählung und das Problem des ägyptischen Mythos', in: J. Assmann *et al.* (eds), *Funktionen und Leistungen des Mythos* (OBO, 48), Fribourg, 13-61.

Batto, B.F., 2013: *In the Beginning: Essays on Creation Motifs in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Siphrut, 9), Winona Lake.

Bottéro, J., & Kramer, S.-N., 2011: *L'érotisme sacré à Sumer et à Babylone*Paris: Berg.

Charlesworth, J.H., 2010: *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol Became Christianized* (Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library), New Haven.

De Moor, J.C., 1972: *New Year with Canaanites and Israelites*, 2 Parts, Kampen.

Korpel, M.C.A., 1990: *A Rift in the Clouds: Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine* (UBL, 8), Münster.

Korpel, M.C.A. / De Moor, J.C., 2014: *Adam, Eve, and the Devil: A New Beginning* (Hebrew Bible Monographs, 65), Sheffield.

De Moor, J.C., 1972: *New Year with Canaanites and Israelites* (Kamper Cahiers, 21-22), 2 Parts, Kampen.

De Moor, J.C., 1987: *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Nisaba, 16), Leiden.

May , H.G., 1962: 'The King in the Garden of Eden: A Study of Ezekiel 28:12-19', in: B.W. Anderson & W. Harrelson (eds), *Israel's Prophetic Heritage – Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, New York, 166-176.

Smith, M.S., 2006: *The Rituals and Myths of the Feast of the Goodly Gods of KTU/CAT 1.23: Royal Constructions of Opposition, Intersection, Integration, and Domination* (SBL-RBS, 51), Atlanta. 28, forthcoming (preprint graciously provided by the author).