## ECHOES OF BAAL'S SEVEN THUNDERS AND LIGHTNINGS IN PSALM XXIX AND HABAKKUK III 9 AND THE IDENTITY OF THE SERAPHIM IN ISAIAH VI

by

## JOHN DAY

Durham

It is generally accepted that Ps. xxix has close parallels with Baal mythology. Yahweh's theophany in the thunder-storm (vv. 3-9), his exaltation in the divine assembly (v. 1) and enthronement as king over the cosmic sea (v. 10) are all paralleled in the Baal mythology of the Ugaritic texts 1). Certain other parallels with the Ugaritic texts have also been suggested and it has been argued that Ps. xxix was originally written as a Canaanite psalm in honour of Baal 2), but it is not my intention to evaluate these claims here. Rather, it is my purpose here first of all to draw attention to a noteworthy feature of this psalm which is paralleled in Baal mythology but which has hitherto remained unnoticed, namely the sevenfold manifestation of the deity in the thunder. It has often been noted 3) that it is a striking feature of this psalm that the voice of Yahweh (qol Yahweh) is depicted as resounding in the thunder seven times (vv. 3, 4a, 4b, 5, 7, 8, 9). However, so far as I am aware, the parallel of Baal's seven thunders has never previously been noted 4). In the Ugaritic text RS 24.245 lines 3b-4 we read of Baal:

<sup>1)</sup> Cf. especially the account of Baal's defeat of Yam in CTA 2 and Baal's theophany in the storm in CTA 4. vii. 25-37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2)</sup> Cf. T. H. Gaster, "The earliest known miracle-play?", Folk-lore 44 (1933), p. 382, n. 13, "Psalm 29", JQR, N.S. 37 (1946-7), pp. 55-65; H. L. Ginsberg, "A Phoenician Hymn in the Psalter", Atti del XIX Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalistici (Rome, 1935), pp. 472-6, The Ugarit Texts (Jerusalem, 1936), pp. 129-31 (in Hebrew); F. M. Cross, "Notes on a Canaanite Psalm in the Old Testament", BASOR 117 (Feb. 1950), pp. 19-21; A. Fitzgerald, "A Note on Psalm 29", BASOR 215 (Oct. 1974), pp. 61-3.

<sup>3)</sup> E.g., by R. Tournay, "En marge d'une traduction des Psaumes", RB 63 (1965), p. 175.

<sup>4)</sup> However, D. N. Freedman and C. F. Hyland, "Psalm 29: a structural analysis", HTR 66 (1973), p. 241 n. 5, do note that CTA 29 enumerates the name of Baal seven times in a list of gods while the Akkadian parallel (RS 20.24) has Adad bursas Hazi followed by the name of Adad a further six times.

Seven lightnings (he had), Eight storehouses of thunder were the shafts of (his) lightnings.

This, of course, is an example of the well-known phenomenon of the graded numerical sequence 5). M. Haran has pointed out that this literary device is not only employed to denote an indefinite number but can also be used to indicate a definite number-either the first or the second in the sequence—the parallel number not being intended to be taken literally but having the nature of what he calls "automatism". In this connection, he suggests that the numerical sequence seven/eight in Ugaritic and the Old Testament actually serves to indicate the definite number seven 6). I would adduce the following points in support of this understanding of the seven/eight sequence: (i) As is well-known, seven is a highly significant number in Ugaritic and in the ancient near east generally. One would therefore expect it to be frequently encountered in graded numerical sequences. This is in fact the case, but whereas the sequence seven/ eight in Ugaritic is exceedingly common, the sequence six/seven is very rare 7). This supports the view that the seven/eight sequence (and not the six/seven sequence) denotes seven. (ii) It is noteworthy that in the Aqhat text (CTA 19.i.42-4) we read that Baal failed for seven/eight years whereas in the Baal text (CTA 6.v.8-9) we read of simply a seven year cycle in the conflict between Baal and Mot (whether intended literally or symbolically being unimportant for the present purpose). (iii) So far as the particular seven/eight sequence relating to Baal's lightnings and thunders is concerned, it is surely significant that we have other evidence attesting the specifically sevenfold nature of Baal, to which attention was drawn above in note 4.

It may therefore be maintained that RS 24.245 lines 3b-4 allude to both Baal's sevenfold lightnings and thunders, just as Ps. xxix depicts Yahweh's thundering seven times. Furthermore, it is interesting at this point to note that the parallel may be drawn even closer by looking at the context in both passages. Ps. xxix is clearly related to the well-known enthronement psalms and, indeed, v. 10 actually

<sup>5)</sup> Cf. W. M. W. Roth, "The numerical sequence x/x + 1 in the Old Testament", VT 12 (1962), pp. 300-11, Numerical Sayings in the Old Testament. A Form Critical Study, SVT 13 (1965); M. Haran, "The graded numerical sequence and the phenomenon of 'automatism' in biblical poetry", SVT 22 (1972), pp. 238-67.

<sup>6)</sup> M. Haran, esp. p. 256.

<sup>7)</sup> L. R. Fisher (ed.), Ras Shamra Parallels 1 (Rome, 1972), pp. 345, 382.

states, "The Lord sits enthroned over the flood, the Lord sits enthroned as king for ever." Similarly, in RS 24.245 lines 1-3a, immediately prior to the reference to Baal's seven lightnings and thunders, we read of Baal's enthronement like the flood: b'l. yth. ktht. gr hd. r('y) 8) kmdh. btk. grh 'il spn. b(tk) gr tl'iyt, "Baal sits enthroned, having the mountain as a throne, Hadad (the shepherd) like the flood in the midst of his mountain, the god of Zaphon in the (midst of) the mountain of victory". There can surely be no doubt, in the light of these parallels, that the sevenfold thunder of Yahweh in Ps. xxix is yet a further instance of this psalm's appropriation of motifs deriving ultimately from Baal mythology which should be added to the list of those noted by earlier scholars and referred to at the beginning of this article.

Ps. xxix is not the only place in the Bible which mentions the seven thunders, for we reed in the New Testament in Rev. x 3-4 that when a mighty angel 9) "called out, the seven thunders sounded. And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down'". As the commentators point out 10), it is striking that the apocalyptist refers to "the seven thunders" (αὶ ἐπτὰ βρονταὶ) with the definite article without explanation, thus suggesting that they were known to his readers. They can therefore not be adjudged simply an ad hoc creation formed after the analogy of the numerous other sevenfold phenomena of the Apocalypse. Whether their immediate derivation was from Ps. xxix, as is often held 11), or from some independent tradition, it is clear that the seven thunders in Rev. x 3-4 constitute another example of apocalyptic's ultimate indebtedness to Canaanite mythology 12).

<sup>8)</sup> Cf. RS 24.252 line 3 for the restoration hd r(5y).

<sup>9)</sup> Probably Michael, since the angel constitutes the seventh of the archangels (cf. Rev. viii 2) which appear in Rev. viii 7 ff. and is clearly the most important of them. That the seven thunders should sound in response to the voice of Michael is significant in view of the fact that there is other evidence of Michael's possessing Baalistic features; e.g., he defeats the seven-headed dragon (cf. Leviathan) in Rev. xii 7-9. At the same time, the description in Rev. x 1 is closely related to the description of the one like a son of man in Rev. i 13-15. This too is significant in view of the probability that the imagery of the one like a son of man has its origins in the figure of (Yahweh-) Baal, as argued by J. A. Emerton, "The origin of the Son of Man imagery", JTS, N.S. 9 (1958), pp. 225-42.

<sup>10)</sup> E.g., H. B. Swete, The Apocalypse of John (London, 1907), p. 127.

E.g., A. Feuillet, L'Apocalypse (Bruges, 1962), p. 45.
Cf. F. M. Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic (Cambridge, Mass., 1973),
and 346 n. 13.

One passage in the Old Testament which is closely related to Ps. xxix is Hab. iii. Like Ps. xxix, Hab. iii alludes to Yahweh's theophany in the storm (vv. 3-4, 9, 11, and passim), including an allusion to the Sinai theophany 13) (v. 3), Yahweh's exaltation over the cosmic sea (vv. 8-10, 15), and the upheaval of nature at Yahweh's appearing (vv. 6-7, 10-11). In keeping with the close parallelism which exists between Ps. xxix and Hab. iii, I suggest that the solution to the noteworthy crux in Hab. iii 9 lies in seeing there a reference to Yahweh's seven arrows of lightning, comparable to Yahweh's seven thunders in Ps. xxix. The MT reads 'eryāh tē' or qaštekā šebū' ot mattot 'omer. The first part of the verse is to be translated, "Utterly laid bare is your bow". It is in the second part of the verse that the crux lies. The most common expedient of modern scholars is to follow the text of the socalled "Barberini" version which reads ἐχόρτασας βολίδας τῆς φαρέτρας αὐτοῦ and to emend the MT to śibba'tā maṭṭōṭ 'ašpāṭekā "you sated your quiver with arrows" 14). However, whilst this yields a tolerable sense it should probably be rejected, as it is unwise to trust the solitary testimony of the Barberini version since the supposed corruption of 'ašpātekā to 'omer is quite considerable and, it may also be noted, the Barberini version was not averse to paraphrastic rendering. As stated above, I propose to see an allusion to Yahweh's seven arrows of lightning here, comparable to Yahweh's seven thunders in Ps. xxix. This presupposes reading šib at mattot instead of MT šēbu'ot mattot and this can claim the support of the LXX which has ἐπὶ (τὰ) 15) σκῆπτρα which is surely an internal LXX corruption from έπτὰ σκῆπτρα, or perhaps better, ἐπὶ ἑπτὰ σκῆπτρα, as has often been noted 16). That the mattot, literally "rods", are Yahweh's arrows or shafts is clear from the context (cf. too v. 14) as is also the fact that they represent flashes of lightning. It is possible that we should retain the MT and render "sevenfold arrows" 17)

<sup>13)</sup> In spite of the reference to mdbr qds in Ugaritic in CTA 23.65 it is preferable to see in Ps. xxix 8 an allusion to the native Israelite Sinai theophany tradition comparable to Hab. iii 3 rather than a reference to some Syrian location.

<sup>14)</sup> E.g., W. Nowack, Die kleinen Propheten (Göttingen, 31922), p. 280.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup>) See J. Ziegler, Duodecim Prophetae (Göttingen, 1943), p. 270, for full textual details.

<sup>16)</sup> The view that the LXX originally read ἐπτὰ apparently goes back to Grevius (cf. J. Ziegler, loc. cit.) and has subsequently been followed by such distinguished LXX scholars as J. F. Schleusner, E. Nestle, F. X. Wutz and J. Ziegler.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup>) Cf. H. Ewald, *Die Propheten des alten Bundes* (Göttingen, 1868), pp. 47, 50. This view is noted as a possibility by J. H. Eaton, *Obadiah*, *Nahum*, *Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (London, 1961), p. 113, and "The origin and meaning of Habakkuk

rather than "seven arrows", but against this is the fact that elsewhere in the Old Testament šābū'ōt is only used in expressions of time. I would therefore render this verse, "Utterly laid bare are your bow and seven arrows with a word". (For the co-ordination of "your bow" and "seven arrows" without the copula one may compare the immediately preceding verse where, similarly, we find "your horses" and "your chariots" in apposition.) The idea being expressed, therefore, is that simply by the divine word of command Yahweh's bow and seven arrows are brought forth from their respective bow case and quiver. This concept is paralleled elsewhere in the Old Testament where we read of Yahweh's commanding his sword into action (cf. Jer. xxv 29, xlvii 6-7; Zech. xiii 7).

Returning now to the subject of Baal's seven thunders and lightnings I wish to point out a further Ugaritic text which, I believe, refers to them but has hitherto remained undetected. In CTA 5.v. 6b-11 the god Mot commands Baal to descend into the underworld together with his meteorological phenomena: w'at. qb 'rptk. rbk. mdlk mtrk. 'mk. sb't glmk. tmn. hnzrk 'mk. pdry. bt 'ar 'mk. {t}tly. bt. rb, "And you, take your clouds, your wind, your chariot team 18), your rain, take with you your seven servitors and your eight boars, take Pidriya daughter of dew with you, and Taliya daughter of showers with you". Baal's seven servitors and eight boars have hitherto not been identified with certainty. This is another example of the seven/eight numerical sequence discussed above, a poetic way of alluding to Baal's seven servitors. "Boars" is probably either an

3", ZAW 76 (1964), p. 152, though in the latter he expresses a preference for the rendering "Adjured are the shafts with a word" (cf. p. 145).

<sup>18)</sup> The meaning of mdl is much disputed. Often it is thought to refer to the lightning but no satisfactory etymology has been suggested which fits this meaning. J. C. de Moor, "Der mdl Baals im Ugaritischen", ZAW 78 (1966), pp. 69-71, for example, has suggested the translation "thunderbolt", comparing Akkad, mudulu "pole", but against this stands the fact that the Heb. and Aram. cognates have t, not d. Some, e.g. G. R. Driver, Canaanite Myths and Legends (Edinburgh, 1956), p. 161, favour the translation "bucket" (cf. Heb. deli, etc.) However, the best solution seems to be to connect mdl with the verb mdl found elsewhere in Ugaritic and which means "to harness" (CTA 4.iv.9, 19.ii.52, 57). Baal's mdl would then be "that which is harnessed", i.e. his "chariot team" drawing the clouds (cf. Hab. iii 8). Cf. J. Aistleitner's translation "Gespann", Wörterbuch der Ugaritischen Sprache (Berlin, 31967), no. 744a. It is interesting to note that in a hymn to Ishkur, Ishkur who "rides the storm" like Baal is commissioned by Enlil, "Let the seven winds be harnessed before you like a team, harness the winds before you" (J. B. Pritchard [ed.], ANET [Princeton, 31969], p. 578). (On the Ugaritic verb mdl, cf. J. C. Greenfield, "Ugaritic mdl and its cognates", Biblica 45 [1964], pp. 527-34, who regards it as a metathesis of the root Imd "to bind, tie", which is attested in Mishnaic Hebrew and Syriac.)

honorific animal title or a military title 19). J. C. de Moor 20) has argued that the seven servitors correspond with the stars known as the Pleiades, seven of which can be seen with the naked eye, and he compares the Akkadian name for them zappu "bristle". However, the Pleiades became invisible for only a short while at Ugarit at about the time of Baal's death, disappearing in the second half of March and reappearing towards the end of April. In view of the other things which are to accompany Baal into the underworld we should expect something which remained there for the whole period of Baal's death, not something which disappeared for little more than a month. Furthermore, since all the other things mentioned are meteorological phenomena, one has every reason to believe that Baal's seven servitors also represent meteorological phenomena. Of all the more significant of Baal's manifestations only the thunder and lightning have been omitted 21) and we should certainly expect some reference to them here. It may therefore plausibly be argued that Baal's "seven servitors . . . eight boars" represent personifications of his thunder and lightning and are to be connected with his "seven lightnings . . . eight storehouses of thunder" referred to earlier. In keeping with this it may also be pointed out that RS 24.245 immediately after the reference to the seven thunders and lightnings goes on to mention the dew goddes Taliya (line 5, r'išh. tply. tly. bn. 'n(h), "Taliya made his head wonderful between (his) eyes"), just as CTA 5. v. 10-11 immediately follows the reference to the seven servitors with an allusion to the dew goddesses Pidriya and Țaliya.

The identification of Baal's seven thunders and lightnings with his seven servitors naturally leads one to conclude that the thunder and lightning could be personified by the Canaanites and considered as constituting his servants. This recalls Ps. civ 4 where Yahweh is praised as on "who makes... fire and flame his servants". The Canaanite origin of this concept is supported by the context, for the preceding verse speaks of Yahweh's making the clouds his chariot, precisely after the manner of Baal, while the following verses (vv. 6-9) allude to Yahweh's control of the cosmic sea, a well-known Old Testament appropriation from the Canaanites.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup>) Cf. P. D. Miller, "Animal names as designations in Ugaritic and Hebrew", Ugarit-Forschungen 2 (1970), pp. 178-80.

<sup>20)</sup> The Seasonal Pattern in the Ugaritic Myth of Ba'lu (Neukirchen, 1971), pp. 187-8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup>) Cf. above n. 18 for criticism of the view that the lightning is denoted by mdl.

Similarly, in my view, the seraphim in Is. vi are to be regarded as personifications of the lightning 22). This is supported by the fact that when the seraphim called out the foundations of the thresholds shook and the Temple was filled with smoke (v. 4), which suggests that they had thunder-like voices and a fiery nature, as even their name indicates (lit. "burning ones"). Moreover, the effect of the calling out of the seraphim recalls references to Yahweh's theophany in the thunder and lightning elsewhere in the Old Testament, cf. especially Ps. xviii 8-9, "Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed from him". What is distinctive about Is. vi is that features of Yahweh's theophany have been split off on to the seraphim, just as Baal's thunders and lightnings were apparently capable of being detached from the god and personified as his servants.

The case for the seraphim's ultimate derivation from, or at any rate close connection with, Baal's seven thunder and lightning servitors is further strengthened when the close parallels between Is. vi and Ps. xxix are borne in mind. As A.R. Johnson noted 23) after discussing Ps. xxix and its Sitz im Leben in the Autumn festival, it is difficult to dissociate Isaiah's call vision in Is. vi from this background: the allusions to Yahweh's kingship (Is. vi 5), his glory and holiness (Is. vi 3) and the impression of an earthquake (Is. vi 4) all have parallels in Ps. xxix. Now, it will be recalled that in Ps. xxix Yahweh's theophany takes the form of a sevenfold manifestation in the thunder and this has been shown above to derive ultimately from the phenomenon of Baal's seven thunders. Since the seraphim in Is. vi play the theophanic role which the seven thunders have in Ps. xxix it is plausible to suppose that they have their ultimate origin in Baal's seven thunder and lightning servants. It may, in fact, not be entirely fortuitous that in 2 Enoch B xix 6 the seraphim are actually stated to be seven in number. (Though, admittedly, in the A text they are six.)

However, whilst in function the seraphim may be regarded as personifications of the lightning having a Canaanite origin with analogies in Baal's lightning servants, in form it may be accepted, as certain

23) Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel (Cardiff, 21967), p. 64 n. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup>) There is nothing new in this view which is, in fact, rather widely held. However, part of the line of argumentation pursued below is novel.

other scholars have suggested 24), that they are winged serpents (uraei) with an ultimately Egyptian origin. In this there is an analogy with the cherubim which, as winged sphinxes, are ultimately Egyptian in origin as regards form but could symbolize the clouds on which Yahweh rode in the manner of the Canaanite god Baal (cf. Ps. xviii 11) 25). That the seraphim have a serpentine body is supported by the fact that elsewhere in the Old Testament the word śārāp means "serpent", including two places elsewhere in Isaiah where a flying serpent is actually spoken of (cf. Num. xxi 6, 8; Deut. viii 15; Is. xiv 29, xxx 6) 26). However, though a serpentine body is presupposed, the seraphim in Is. vi clearly have a human head, wings, feet and hands. In this they are like the Egyptian uraei, symbols of both human and divine kingship (cf. Is. vi, where the context is that of Yahweh's kingship), which could also have these added appendages as occasion demanded 27). The winged uraeus, moreover, is attested in Palestine, including the era in which Isaiah lived 28). Further, it is probable, as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup>) Cf. especially K. R. Joines, "Winged serpents in Isaiah's inaugural vision", JBL 86 (1967), pp. 410-15, and Serpent symbolism in the Old Testament (Haddonfield, N.J., 1974), pp. 42-60. Joines was anticipated by J. Pedersen, Israel: its life and culture III-IV (Copenhagen, 1940), p. 711, and A. Reifenberg, Ancient Hebrew Seals (London, 1950), p. 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup>) On the cherubim, cf. R. de Vaux, "Les cherubins et l'arche d'alliance. Les sphinx gardiens et les trones divins dans l'ancien orient", Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph 37 (1961), pp. 93-124.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup>) The meaning "serpent" was presumably derived from "burning one' because of the burning nature of the serpent's bite; cf. Heb. bēmāb "venom" (lit. "heat"), used in connection with snakes in Deut. xxxii 24, 33; Ps. lviii 5, cxl 4. In the case of the heavenly seraphim of Is. vi there appears to be an extension of meaning in that they have a literally fiery nature, as their association with smoke, for example, indicates (v. 4).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup>) Cf. K. R. Joines, JBL 86 (1967), pp. 412-13.

<sup>28)</sup> Cf. K. R. Joines, pp. 413-14. For a study of 9th-7th century B.C. Hebrew seals bearing the four-winged serpent, cf. W. A. Ward, "The four-winged serpent, on Hebrew seals", Rivista degli studi orientali XLIII (1968), pp. 135-43, who compares Is. xiv 29 and xxx 6 but on p. 142 n. 5 denies that the scraphim of Is. vi are winged serpents. Ward finds the closest analogy to the seraphim of Is. vi in a Neo-Hittite six-winged "genie" from Tell Halaf (ancient Gozan), following the suggestion of M. Fr. von Oppenheim, Der Tell Halaf. Eine neue Kultur im ältesten Mesopotamien (Leipzig, 1931), p. 152 (cf. plate 32b). This view has also been held by K. Galling, Biblisches Reallexikon (Tübingen, 1937), col. 385 (cf. fig. 3 in col. 384), and H. Wildberger, Jesaja 1-12 (Neukirchen, 1972), p. 247, who further believe, that the figure holds a snake in each hand (cf. Hebrew śārāp). However, the, "snakes" are probably rather to be interpreted as streams of water, as the depiction is similar to what are clearly streams of water grasped by the figure of the fish-man from Tell Halaf (cf. E. D. van Buren, The flowing vase and the god with streams [Berlin, 1933], pp. 141-2 and plate XXII, fig. 80). Apart from the six wings, therefore, there is no parallel here with the seraphim of Is. vi, which, in view of

de Savignac 29) and others have suggested, that the seraphim of Isaiah's Temple vision are related to the bronze serpent Nehushtan that was apparently in the Temple until the time of Hezekiah (cf. 2 Kings xviii 4) and which is explicitly called a śārāp in Num. xxi 8.

In conclusion, then, it may be argued that echoes of Baal's seven thunders and lightnings may be detected in Ps. xxix and, less certainly, in Hab. iii 9; also, it appears that Baal's lightnings could be personified as his servants and that this or some similar conception in part lies behind the idea of the seraphim in Is. vi.

## Postscript

The recent work by O. Keel, Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst (Stuttgart, 1977), which contains a detailed treatment of the seraphim on pp. 70-115, appeared too late to be noted in the above article. Space forbids a thorough critique here, but it may be noted that whilst I totally support Keel's view that the origin of the form of the scraphim is to be sought in that of the winged uracus—and it should be pointed out that his treatment of the iconographical attestation of the winged uraeus in Palestine in the period around the 8th century B.C. on pp. 103-10 now supersedes that of W. A. Ward noted above in n. 28-I remain unconvinced by his denial of any relationship between the scraphim and lightning (p. 80), which ignores both the connection of the seraphim "burning ones" with smoke (Isa. vi 4), implying a literally fiery nature, and the force of such a close parallel to Isa. vi 4 as Ps. xviii 8-9, where the context clearly indicates that the theophanic fire and smoke are to be understood meteorologically in terms of lightning. Keel poses a false antithesis when he writes (loc. cit.), "Jahwe erscheint in Jes 6 als thronender König und nicht als Wettergottheit in Sturm, Erdbeben, Donner und Blitz."

their name, must have some serpentine connection. (I am indebted to Prof. W. G. Lambert for the reference to the work by van Buren and for discussing the Tell Halaf figure with me.)

<sup>29) &</sup>quot;Les 'Seraphim',", VT 22 (1972), pp. 320-5.