

Essay

“Afterward, Job Began to Speak. . . .”: Job’s Curse and Its Mourning and Restoration Rites

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Abstract

This article investigates how Job 1–3 may be read as a single narrative–dramatic unit shaped by a ritual process of mourning, with particular attention to the transition from the prose tale (Job 1–2) to the poetic imprecation (Job 3). The enquiry proceeds by means of a comparative analysis of the prologues of the Ugaritic epics Keret (KTU 1.14 I:1–II:5) and Aqhat (KTU 1.17 I:1–47), texts frequently invoked for contextualising Job within Ancient West Asia. In a first stage, close reading of these Ugaritic prologues identifies narrative techniques for signalling ritual practices—especially lament and *incubatio*—while remaining largely allusive rather than descriptive. In a second stage, the study turns to the canonical form of Job 1–3 and re-examines its scene arrangement, pacing, and speech-acts against that epic model, including the function of framing formulae and temporal markers. The analysis is intentionally confined to the present form of the text. The paper thus offers a controlled methodological work in comparative poetics and ritual analysis, asking how far Ugaritic epic conventions can illuminate continuity across genre and register at the opening of Job.

Keywords: Book of Job; Keret; Aqhat; ritual; curse; lamentation; prose and poetry; drama

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of the narrative and dramatic continuity between the so-called “prologue” (chs. 1–2) and the ensuing imprecation (ch. 3), both interwoven by the threads of a ritual process of mourning¹. Even while acknowledging an apparent shift in the protagonist’s mood and a formal shift from prose to poetry, identifying these threads of continuity will largely determine how the book of Job is to be understood. This ritual background of mourning at the beginning of the book of Job is already acknowledged within rabbinic tradition itself, as in the halakhah of the “condolence of mourners” (ניחום אבלים) (*cf.* Talmud Bavli, Mo’ed Qatan 28b), and, of course, it is also recognised by modern criticism². Within the latter, however, some have taken the mourning rite as the narrative framework of the entire work, for example, Medina (2008), Pang (2010), Lambert (2015), and Marschall (2023). The studies of these authors show that Job’s imprecation, in which he longs for death, and the response of his friends acting as comforters, form a natural part of the ritual framework of mourning that encloses the work from ch. 1 to 42. Hence it is crucial to investigate the ritual elements of continuity in chs. 1–3 in their present canonical form.



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(26) *y`rb.bhdrh.ybky*
 (27) *bṭn.rgmm.wydm`*
 (28) *tntkn.udm`th*
 (29) *km. ṭqlm.aršh*
 (30) *km ḥmšt.mṭth*
 (31) *bm[.]bkyyh.wyšn*
 (32) *bdm`h.nhhmmt*
 (33) *šnt.tlun* (34) *wyškb.*
nhmmt (35) *wyqms.*

wbhlmh (36) *il.yrd.*
bdhrth (37) *ab.adm.*
wyqrb (38) *bšal.krt.*
mat (39) *krt.kybky*
 (40) *ydm`.n`mn.ḡlm* (41) *il.*
mlk[.ṭ]r abh (42) *yarš.*
hm.drk[t] (43) *kab.adm[.]*

(52) *[lm]* (53) *[ank.ksp.wyrq]*

(1) *[ḥrs.]yd.mqmh*
 (2) *[w`b]d.`lm.*
ṭṭ (3) *[ssw]m.mrkbt*
btrbš bn.amt
 (4) *[- b]nm.aqny*
 (5) *[- - -]rm.amid*

The sacred dream

He entered into his chamber weeping,
 as he repeated (his) tale (of woe) he shed tears;
 his tears streamed down
 like shekels to the ground,
 like pieces of five upon (his) bed.
 As he wept he fell asleep,
 as he shed tears (there was) slumber.
 Sleep overpowered him and he lay down,
 slumber (overpowered him) and he curled up.

Theophany and dialogue

And in his dream El came down,
 in his vision the father of mankind,
 and he drew near to Keret, asking (him):
 - What ails Keret that he weeps,
 the gracious one, page of El, that he sheds tears?
 Does he wish for the kingship of the bull his father
 or dominion as (of) the father of mankind?

- GAP OF 6–7 LINES -

- [What need have I of silver and yellow metal],

Column II

[of gold] fresh from the mine
 [or of] perpetual slaves,
 of triads [of horses] (and) chariots
 from the stable of the son of a slave-girl?
 [] sons I would get
 [] I would multiply.

The narrative begins by describing the calamities that befell the protagonist, King Keret, in a gradual manner, detailing each of the familial losses (I:6–25), and outlining the dismal situation in which Keret was left in the eyes of society. As Moor and Spronk (1982, p. 154) explain, the meaning of lines 8–9 is that Keret remains the sole survivor and the only one responsible for establishing a new family line that might continue the ancestral name and royal succession. Hence, according to these same authors' interpretation of line 10, the king was now viewed as accursed by the gods. On the other hand, despite the slowness of the description, the narrative is not fully descriptive, as it offers no chronological information regarding the events: we do not know whether they all died at once under a common circumstance or not. This slow description is followed by lines 26–35, which depict Keret's reaction. Here the narrative focuses on a single action, informing us of his lamentation as his only response to the loss of his kin, suggesting that it took place immediately after the family tragedies, as though it were something spontaneous and purely personal, since it is Keret himself who withdraws to weep. Even here, the account leaves us in the dark regarding certain important elements—such as what funerary rites, if any, were performed by the protagonist—despite the Ancient West Asia's fondness for public expressions of both grief and joy. For instance, nothing is said about the nature of the chamber in which Keret shuts himself, although it was likely a sacred chamber adjoining the royal palace's temple. As for his actions within it, the narrative does not state whether his lament was ritual or not, whether it included funerary rites, or—more importantly—whether it involved a petition to El or not, despite the fact that El appears to interpret the king's lament as a desire for something from the supreme deity (lines 39ff). We are thus dealing with a typical

epic narrative of stereotyped description, which employs evocative style and leaves many elements related to the misfortunes and reactions as implied rather than explicitly stated.

It is worth emphasising here the socio-political and religious gravity encapsulated in the prologue of Keret. The protagonist is faced with two major issues: first, the lack of offspring, which—beyond the absence of heirs to tend to Keret’s remains⁶—signified political instability for the kingdom; and second, the misfortunes that befell Keret were then regarded as a sign of divine curse, which affected the fertility of the realm. It is for this reason that the prologue’s profuse lyricism—relying more on metaphorical and evocative language than on descriptive narration of events and actions—is so significant. The same can be said of El’s first speech (lines 35b–49), in which he displays ignorance of Keret’s misfortunes and manifests himself in the king’s dream seemingly without being invoked—at least, this is what emerges from the less damaged lines (I:35b–43; II:1–5). Was the divine manifestation thus sought, and therefore expected? One must “scrape beneath” the narrative in order to try to uncover what exactly Keret was doing, and what purpose he was pursuing thereby—something that will in turn help us to better grasp Job’s response in both chapters 1–2 and chapter 3.

Lines 6–25 introduce the typical Ancient West Asia motif of divine curse, whose principal content, especially in the case of kings or nobles of high rank, consists in the denial of the following elements: (1) human and agricultural fertility; (2) physical or mental health; and (3) the loss of sovereign power, expressed in the loss of military and governmental authority⁷. That Keret’s misfortunes are of divine origin is evident from the mention of two deities in lines 18–20: Rašpu (ršp) and Yam (ym), members of El’s divine council and divine agents associated with natural catastrophes. The term *šlh* (line 20) is also taken to refer to the deity Šalhu. Thus, Moor and Spronk (1982, cf. supra) are able to describe the protagonist’s situation as that of one cursed by the deity and its agents. To dispel any doubt, let us recall that elements (2) and (3) will appear later in the epic when Keret falls ill and his son Yaššibu rebels against him (cf. KTU 1.16 VI:21b ff). Given this context of divine malediction, it is inconceivable that the protagonist would not react by attempting to halt or reverse the curse by every possible means—especially through magical-ritual practices. In other words, one would expect the narrative to allude to some kind of counter-ritual intended to effect Keret’s full restoration. In this regard, it is notable that RSP III: 297–298 suggests that the entire Keret epic is nothing other than a narrative text that follows ritual models akin to a grand dramatic work, since—as in the case of Greek comedy—it is the cultic performance that gives rise to such compositions in the Ancient West Asia. As evidence, RSP III presents the following data: (1) lines 10–21a contain elements typically represented or dramatised in Ugaritic cult (e.g., devastation, bloodbath, imaginative destruction of the temple, and the death of the god-king); (2) lines 21b–31a are not merely lamentation but mourning rites; (3) lines 31b–43 conceal the performance of the rite known as *incubatio*, which consists in seeking a divine revelation (in this case by means of a dream-oracle) in response to the protagonist’s condition. Gaster (1966, p. 330) summarises the essence of this rite in the following words: “The suppliant lodges for a few days in the precincts of the sanctuary in order to entreat the god and obtain the divine oracle in a dream or by some other manner.” This response is usually positive, as is the case with Keret, who ultimately receives the announcement of the birth of sons and daughters (I.15 II:16b ff). This is important because it indicates that there is more to Keret’s reaction than a spontaneous and immediate emotional outburst; rather, his lament is part of an intentional appeal to the supreme deity for his restoration.

CML: 83 (n. 2) supports this approach, affirming that the verb *qms* (to curl up) in line 35 is a technical term associated with *incubatio*, since the foetal posture would have been the customary position for receiving a divine revelation through a dream. I would add

that the large number of verbs preceding *qms*, whose semantic field pertains to sleep and slumber, are more than a mere lyrical embellishment: they are evidence of the importance the narrator attributes to the moment of falling asleep. Thus, terms such as *mṯt* (bed)⁸, *yšn* (to sleep), *nhmmt* (slumber, faintness)⁹, *škb* (to lie down), *qms* (to curl up), *hlm* (dream), and *dhrt* (vision), which appear in a cascading sequence (lines 30–37), point to the rite of *incubatio* and the expectation of a divine response, since in the Ancient West Asi the gods revealed themselves through dreams, and individuals could hope for such a revelation by preparing for it with the appropriate rituals¹⁰. In this regard, one should mention the study by del Olmo Lete (1973) on biblical vocation narratives, in which he observes that in 1 Sam 3:1–4:1 and 1 Kgs 19:1–21 the elements relating to overnight stay are recurrent, leading him to conclude that the rite of *incubatio* is present in all of them (pp. 141ff and 156ff). Particularly noteworthy is his observation concerning the call of Samuel, since the “professional” Eli, upon realising that Samuel is being called by God, instructs him to lie down as a means of preparing for the theophany. Here again, it must be emphasised that, despite the ritual content, the narrative does not make explicit the ritual element or the intended meaning of the act, even though it is clearly implied. Further confirmation of the presence of *incubatio* in the Keret epic is provided by the use of the verb *tny* (to repeat) in line 27, which may refer to a ritual act involving a certain repetition. If we also consider that this verb is followed by one of three terms—*rgm* (speech, voice, roar), *ʿgm* (complaint, lament), or *p gm* (wound, loss)¹¹—this would confirm the ritual use of *tny*. Indeed, even if *rgm* did not mean “complaint, lament,” its use in a context of mourning or ritual lamentation is attested elsewhere in the same epic (1.15 V:13 *passim*); hence CML: 83 rightly translates *rgm* as “tale (of woe).” And if the preferred term were *ʿgm*, the meaning would be all the clearer. For its part, TOu: 507, which supports *p gm*, translates line 27 as follows: “tandis qu’il répète les pertes, il verse des larmes”. That is to say, it refers to a kind of rosary-like recitation before the gods listing the deceased relatives, with the aim of moving the deities by the magnitude of what has happened. MLC: 248 notes that this form of rosary or repetition also appears in the Psalms of Lamentation. We also find it in Anat’s lament over the death of Aqhat in KTU 1.19 I:12–19a (a text that almost literally repeats what had already been narrated in 1.18 IV:12b–13). MLC: 248 n. 38 also suggests that the verb *rb* (to enter) may likewise have a ritual sense throughout the Keret epic, as its use is always linked to the performance of some sacred rite by the characters in the narrative. This would confirm that the protagonist entered a sacred place and not merely his private chamber. One may conclude, therefore, that although all the events narrated in the epic have a deep liturgical or ritual background, the author’s narrative or dramatic interests—centred on the psychology of the protagonists—cause this background to remain only hinted at or alluded to. In the case of Keret, it seems quite clear that this ritual background included a rite of *incubatio* involving lamentation for the tragedies suffered and a plea to the deity for restoration, all of which would have been tacitly understood by the readers (or even spectators) of the epic¹².

3. The “Prologue” of Aqhat (KTU 1.17 I:1–26)

I transcribe the text along with Gibson’s translation (CML: 103f):

[Gap of unknown extension]¹³

Column I

Rite of incubatio

- (1) [apnk] (2) [dnil.mt.rpi] aph.ğzr (3) [mt.hrnmy.] uzr.ilm.ylhm.
 (4) [uzr.yšqy.bn.qdš. yd (5) [sth.y`l.]wyškb. yd (6) [mizrth] pynl. hm.ym (7) [wtn.] [uzr.]ilm.dnil
 (8) [uzr.ilm].ylhm. uzr (9) [yšqy.bn.qdš. tlt.rb`ym
 (10) [uzr.il]m.dnil. uzr (11) [ilm.y]lhm. uzr.yšqy. bn (12) [qdš.] [h]mš. tdt.ym. uzr (13) [il]m.dnil. uzr.ilm.ylhm.
 (14) [uzr].yšqy.bn.qdš. yd.sth (15) [dn]il. yd.sth.y`l.wyškb
 (16) [yd.]mizrth.pynl.

[Thereupon Daniel, man of Rapiu],
 thereat the hero, [man of He-of-Harnam],
 gave the gods to eat,
 [gave] the holy ones [. to drink].
 He put aside [his cloak, he ascended] and lay down,
 he put aside [his loincloth], and so he passed the night.
 Behold 1 a day [and a second]
 Daniel (gave) the gods [.],
 he gave [the gods] to eat,
 [he gave] the holy ones [to drink].
 A third, a fourth day
 Daniel (gave) the gods [.],
 [he] gave [the gods] to eat,
 he gave the [holy] ones to drink.
 A fifth, a sixth day
 Daniel (gave) [the gods],
 he gave the gods to eat,
 he gave the holy ones [.] to drink.
 Daniel put aside his cloak,
 he put aside his cloak, he ascended and lay down,
 [he put aside] his loincloth, and so he passed the night.

Theophany of Baal

- mk.bšb`ymm
 (17) []yqrb.b`l.bhnth. abyn at (18) [d]nil.mt.rpi. anh.ğzr (19) mt.hrnmy. din.bn.lh (20) km.ahh. w.šrš.km.aryh.
 (21) bl.it.bn.lh.wm ahh. w.šrš (22) km.aryh. uzrm.ilm.ylhm
 (23) uzrm.yšqy.bn.qdš
 (24) ltbrknn ltr.il aby
 (25) tmrnulbny.bnwt
 (26) wykn.bnh.bbt. šrš.brb (27) hklh.

Then on the seventh day
 Baal drew near with his supplication:
 The misery of Daniel, man of Rapiu!
 The groaning of the hero, [man] of He-of-Harnam
 For he has no son like his brothers,
 nor offspring like his kinsmen.
 (Because) he has not¹ a son like his brothers,
 nor offspring like his kinsmen,
 he gives the gods to eat,
 he gives the holy ones to drink.
 Do you indeed bless him, o bull El my father,
 do you fortify him, oh creator of creatures,
 that he may have a son in (his) house,
 offspring within his palace;

(The text continues with the description of the ideal son's actions)

Flores (2008, pp. 197–206) offers an excellent comparison of the narrative structure of Job with Aqhat, in which he also identifies the rite of *incubatio* (Flores 2008, pp. 199f). MLC: 367f identifies the following components in this prologue: a rite of *incubatio* (lines 1–15) and a theophany of Baal (lines 16–26). Obermann (1946) had already argued for the presence of the *incubatio* rite in lines 1–15¹⁴. And although, unlike Keret, Aqhat features an extended repetition of ritual activity, the same author (Flores 2008, pp. 9f) observes that this epic too is not interested in a detailed description of the rite, but rather in providing sufficient references for it to be recognised by the reader or spectator—as is the case here with *incubatio*. This phenomenon explains the repetition or narrative reiteration

that is evident throughout these cultic-dramatic compositions, since many scenes would have been performed by different voices forming a chorus. del Olmo Lete (1984, pp. 115f) likewise supports the ritual background of dramatic texts in which numerical structure is significant, as is the case here, although he cautions that it is difficult to equate lyrical narrative—fond of repetition—with an actual description of the rite and the precise number of times it would have been performed in real life. In Aqhat, the repetition of the rites is based on the number seven, and both Obermann (1946, p. 10) and Loewenstamm (1965, p. 132) highlight the importance of the duration of the *incubatio*. It appears that this rite could not be fully effective until the exact number of prescribed days (or acts) had been completed. Only after the final repetition—on the seventh day in this case—possibly with the addition of a ritual element not previously performed, could the rite be deemed fully executed and therefore efficacious¹⁵. In this regard, it is worth noting that the interjection *mk* (behold) in line 15 draws the attention of the reader or spectator to the seventh day and what takes place therein (lines 16–34): essentially, an intervention by Baal or by Daniel himself, depending on the interpretation, in which the purpose of the preceding ritual activity is now made explicit.

Not only are the religious elements reduced to allusion, but the setting surrounding the character is described idyllically—that is, with the narrative’s focus concentrated entirely on the protagonist, to the extent that no external factors (e.g., history or customs) are openly depicted. According to Margalit (1989, p. 490), this centrality of the character serves, among other purposes, to portray his unmediated communication with the deity, without the intervention of cultic elements. This same author cites as a biblical parallel the patriarchal narratives. Yet the most fundamental feature of this narrative form is its ironic and critical character. Regarding Daniel, Margalit (*ibid.*, pp. 477f) explains it as follows:

Dan ʿel is at once the symbol and the embodiment of its values, a staunch upholder of its traditions. A well-to-do landowner, noble and pious, he is a humble servant of the high-gods and a devoted caretaker of the ancestral cult, providing amply for the material needs of his divinized ancestors [. . . .]. On the surface of things, Daniel is a picture of virtue and righteousness, leading the “good life” in harmony with Nature and the Gods. This is also the picture fostered by the sacred tradition preserved by Raphaite society of LB Ugarit, and the one which reached the Hebrew poet Ezequiel several centuries later. But the author of Aqht is unimpressed. Casting a perspicacious and critical eye on his/her contemporaries, (s)he sees beneath the glittering and harmonious exterior. (S)he perceives the enormous gulf between the pretenses and reality, the formal piety devoid of feeling, the fancy military titles concealing a flaccid body and weak mind. *Dan ʿel* is conventionally addressed as *mt* and *ḡzr*; yet he cannot mount a mule unassisted! He shouts bloody curses, but he sends his daughter to redeem his son’s blood

In short, according to this author, the portrayal of the protagonist is entirely ironic and critical of many political-religious ideals—particularly those founded upon the cult of Anat—which the author of Aqhat sees as an apology for brutal violence. Hence, the epic is a critique of the noble classes of Ugarit¹⁶. Moreover, he argues that the *raison d’être* of this epic is “an urgent, anguished call to Raphaite society to rid itself completely and irrevocably of *šml*-Anat¹⁷ and her cult of violence” (*ibid.*, p. 485). On the other hand, we find a similarity with Keret: both protagonists seek total restoration, and more specifically, a successor—although in the case of Aqhat, the concern is not royal succession but that of a landowner “belonging to the patrician class known as *adrm*, charged with the public administration” (*Ibid.*, p. 257). Although this is not as clearly stated in Aqhat as in Keret, the protagonist is also implicitly portrayed as experiencing a negative situation, and he

too performs rites resembling mourning or lamentation¹⁸ and utters a complaint before the deity. However, unlike in Keret, here the description of the lament is only indirectly alluded to in lines 17–19 through terms such as *rpi* (shade), indicating the protagonist's near-death state (though this may have been a cultic representation rather than physical illness); *abyn* (misery); and *anh* (to sigh or groan)—which is also translated as “groaning” (CML: 103)—referring to Daniel's continual complaint and lamentation, and corresponding to its Hebrew cognate *'nh*¹⁹. That there is an indirect allusion to a petition made by Daniel to the deity seems clear if we follow the explanation of line 16 given by Dijkstra and de Moor (1975). According to these authors, the form *bhnth*, generally taken to be a preposition *b* + infinitive + pronominal suffix as subject (*b-hnt-h*), is in fact a nominal derivative of *hnt*, from the G-stem of the root *hmn* (grace, mercy), whose Hebrew cognate is *hn* or *hnn* (attested only in Jer 16:13), the Arabic *hannah*, the Aramaic *hinnah*, and the Akkadian *ennû*. The interesting point here is that the G-stem connotes a generous and gratuitous inclination of a superior toward subordinates, while the D-stem denotes a supplicatory act aimed at obtaining such grace or generosity (cf. Gen 42:21; Ps 30:9; 142:2–3, etc.). In other words, line 16 implies a prior supplication on Daniel's part to the deity²⁰.

Obermann (1946, pp. 8–12) outlines the structure of a rite of *incubatio* in Ugarit and in the broader Ancient West Asia according to the schema attested in Aqhat: (1) sacrifices, either liquid or solid; (2) overnight stay in a designated precinct; (3) purification rites for the space, its furnishings, and the officiant along with his garments; and (4) supplication in the form of lament or mourning. However, even in Aqhat we encounter difficulties in identifying these components due to the lyrical style of the text, which is more allusive than descriptive—just as we observed in Keret. Regarding element (4), we have already seen a possible solution in the previous paragraph. Concerning (1) and (3), we must note that the precise meaning of the term *uzr* (lines 2–15, 21–22) is much debated, with its translation ranging from “liquid sacrifice” to “mourning garments”²¹. In support of the latter interpretation, one may cite 2 Kgs 1:8, where the term *'ezôr* is used as a semantic equivalent (cf. 2 Sam 6:14), though it is not a cognate of the Ugaritic term²². The words *yd* (lines 3, 5, 13–15) and *y l* (lines 4, 14) are also marked by a degree of ambiguity. Dijkstra and de Moor (1975), MLC, *TOu*, and others believe that *yd* is the perfect form of *ydy*, usually rendered as “to throw away” in the sense of undressing or disrobing. Obermann, by contrast, considers it a derivative of *ndy*, a cognate of Hebrew *nāzāh*, and interprets it here as referring to the sprinkling of liquid as a ritual act—possibly the purification of the chamber in preparation for the theophany expected to follow the *incubatio* rite. A third position is represented by Loewenstamm (1965, p. 124), who understands the term as the preposition “with,” hence his translation: “with his covering he mounts (his couch).” As for *y l*, it clearly denotes an act of ascension, but scholars disagree about its prepositional complement: did Daniel ascend to another chamber (cf. CML: 103, n. 4), or simply mount his bed to lie upon it (cf. Obermann 1946, p. 9)? The latter seems more plausible, as Obermann notes a clear parallel in *l rš y l* (line 38), which he translates “to his couch he shall ascend,” and there is no apparent reason to suppose that Daniel changed rooms—particularly if he was already in a sacred space offering sacrifices to the deity.

In summary, I believe there are several aspects of Aqhat that can be affirmed with some certainty: whether Daniel is offering sacrifices or taking part in a sacred banquet, it is clear that the food has a cultic significance. As for the location, it is not certain whether the overnight stay took place in a palace or a temple, but in any case, there can be no doubt that it was either a space already consecrated for worship or one ritually prepared for that purpose. Concerning the clothing, we know that certain special garments had to be used during such rites, since *myzrt* (lines 15 and possibly 5) has a clearly technical meaning. What is less certain is the exact nature, usage, and timing of this attire. Were they garments

to be worn, or coverings for sleep? In any case, it is clear that in the rite of *incubatio*, clothing played an important role. Finally, we observe that *incubatio* takes on forms identical to those of mourning and lamentation, although its basic function is to petition for the full restoration of the petitioner or to seek a resolution to a specific affliction. It seems evident that Daniel had no need to mourn anyone's death, since his only problem was the lack of offspring. It is thus notable—especially in contrast to the importance of lamentation in Keret—that here lamentation is more suggested than described, whereas the narrative offers more detail regarding particular ritual acts, though never with sufficient clarity to amount to a full description, owing above all to the epic style, which is more lyrical and allusive than descriptive²³.

4. Comparing the 'Prologues' of Aqhat and Keret

Between Keret and Aqhat, the following parallels may be identified: (1) the same *incubatio* ritual and the same petition for a successor; (2) an identical divine response to the rite: favourable²⁴; (3) in both works, the theophanic response sets in motion the entire narrative development of the epic; (4) both are set in ahistorical and idyllic environments, although Keret may reflect certain historical data in its plot; (5) a shared prophetic spirit is projected, particularly against the ruling classes, who are portrayed as weak pillars of Ugaritic society; (6) although the two works narrate the rites differently, they share the same basic element: the theophany only occurs after the lament has been recounted, and it is this lament that truly moves the deity. Thus, *MLC* notes that the texts of Keret and Aqhat elaborate more on the lament than on the description of the *incubatio* rite that frames the lament. In practice, it would be difficult to separate one from the other, but from a narrative standpoint, it is the lamentation that stands out²⁵. Additional specific elements are also shared: the reference to *hḏr* (chamber, room) in Keret, which matches the chamber or space in which Aqhat performs his cultic activity; and the expression *km ḥmšt.mṯth* (line 30) in Keret, usually translated as "precious bedding of his couch," corresponds with the description of clothing or ritual attire in Aqhat. Even accepting Gibson's rendering, "like pieces of five upon (his) bed" (*supra*, p. 2; *cf. MLC*: 291), this remains a lyrical and metaphorical expression for a purificatory rite similar to that described in Aqhat, since in Keret the act of "weeping and shedding tears" over the bed and the floor (lines 28–30) is not merely an expression of mourning and lamentation, but a kind of merism indicating that the washing or purification rite encompasses both the chamber (floor) and its furnishings and garments (bed). This suggests that when narrative becomes lyrical, the rite is concealed beneath metaphor or indirect language. It is also worth noting that the sacrifices narrated in 1.14 II:6–26a—which include the pouring of wine and honey—may serve as a parallel to the offering of food and drink found in Aqhat (1.17 I:4–16), thus compensating for the absence of explicit reference to sacrificial acts in the prologue of Keret. This difference in the placement of the sacrificial element suggests that the narrative order of ritual components does not follow a predetermined or fixed sequence across different accounts.

5. Comparing the 'Prologue' of Job, Aqhat and Keret

From the analysis of Keret and Aqhat, I concluded that their narrative structure—characterised by dramatisation, idyllic settings, and lyricism—obscures detailed description of narrative elements. That the prose section of Job has an idyllic character is a common observation among commentators (e.g., *Seow 2013*, p. 27), who note the clear intention to situate the work in the patriarchal era (e.g., *Witte 2021*, p. 21), an era idealised in the later periods of Israel but capable of being reread with a critical purpose under a guise of "false naivety" (*Clines 1985*), something similar to what we saw in Keret and Aqhat. We may thus observe the following similarities: (1) the absence of precise chronology; (2) the lack

of detailed description of rituals and of certain important events; and (3) the absence of specific geographical settings; (4) the presence of a significant numerical structure in the narrative, which may carry ritual or non-ritual connotations, but which in any case is typical of epic texts²⁶. That chs. 1–2 of *Job* display characteristics of the epic genre has been shown by Sarna (1957), citing, for instance, the regular cadence, verbal repetition, and conventional round numbers. As Gray (Gray and Clines 2010, p. 119) has noted, the narration in these chapters has a cadence almost as regular as poetry²⁷. And as to dramatisation, the narrative sections set the scene in which the drama will unfold, so that the mourning rituals structure dramatically the entire book of *Job*. In this regard, Moore (R. D. Moore 1983, pp. 20, 22) suggests that the opening chapters of *Job* are the most dramatised part of the work, insofar as they stage both a complex psychology of *Job*, and a complex situation whose outcome is unpredictable and thereby contributes to the dramatic tension of the work²⁸. It is worth recalling here that “in Israel and Babylonia, texts were an extension, so to speak, of the oral performers” (Toorn 2009, p. 14).

Since these features are shared by all three works, we may conclude that they share an epic character. There is also a clear narrative parallelism among them, as all highlight the miserable state of their protagonists—each one a king or nobleman of high rank—although there appears to be a closer affinity between *Daniel* and *Job*, as both would be large landowners with significant legal-administrative or governmental responsibility. In all three, this lamentable state is attributed to divine curse. In fact, between *Job* and *Keret* we even find terminological parallels, as the divine agents who bring misfortune—*Yam* and *Resheph* in *Job* 3:8 and 5:7—correspond to the deities *Rašpu* (*ršp*) and *Yam* (*ym*) in *Keret* (cf. supra). Furthermore, in none of the three are we told that the protagonists are directly addressing God or El in prayer, whether as lament or supplication. The great difference lies in the fact that in *Keret* and *Aqhat* the deity provides a favourable response or intervention, while in *Job* there is no immediate divine response. Instead, prior to the theophany in ch. 38, we encounter only human speech. Thus, following Bechtel (2023, pp. 219f), we might suppose that the present dramatic structure of *Job*, built on the alternation “upstairs (heavenly council)—downstairs (earthly events and *Job*’s reaction),” is intended to awaken in the reader or spectator the expectation of a divine intervention (“upstairs”) following the final “downstairs” movement, which could have concluded in 2:10 but is deliberately extended until 2:13 to include the tense silence of the seven-day *incubatio*, thereby prolonging the “downstairs” with the extended human dialogue and delaying the divine response. It is worth noting here that many *incubationes* are structured as theophanic dialogues that culminate in a divine command (cf. del Olmo Lete 1973, pp. 156ff), though it would be more accurate to speak of a sequence “lamentation before God—divine theophany with a specific command,” this latter being what enables the supplicant to emerge from his miserable condition. Such is the structure we find in the El–*Keret* and Baal–*Daniel* dialogues, and also in *Job*, albeit with a delayed theophany that allows space for human dialogue²⁹.

Given that this human dialogue arises from *Job*’s imprecation, one might ask: was it an inappropriate action within the ritual framework of mourning, and so totally unexpected? There are examples in Ugaritic literature that attest to lengthy lamentations being uttered following the recipient’s reaction to bad news. Such is the case of a fragment of the Baal Cycle in KTU 1.5 VI, where, upon receiving news of Baal’s death (lines 3*–1*.1–10) and performing rites of mourning (lines 11–22), El pronounces a lament or dirge (lines 22–25) that culminates with his desire to descend to “the earth” (*arš*—line 25)³⁰. According to Margalit (1980, p. 134), the components of this text are: (1) prostration on the ground; (2) dust upon the head; (3) self-laceration; (4) shaving of the head; and (5) cries for the deceased (dirge, lament). As we shall see later, all these elements correspond to chapters 1–2 of *Job*, except the last—unless we associate it with chapter 3, which, rather than being

a lament over someone who has died, is a self-imprecation to descend to Sheol, the counterpart of “the earth” in the lament of El and of Anat. It is thus plausible to view Job’s imprecation as the natural continuation of the prostration scene (1:20), extending into the ashes (2:8) and culminating in the silent mourning of the friends for seven days (2:11–13), inasmuch as the imprecation gives voice to the inner turmoil that remained suppressed in chapters 1–2³¹. At the same time, however, the adverbial expression אַחֲרַיִיכֵן (after this, thereafter) that introduces the imprecation (3:1) separates it narratively, creating suspense for the reader or spectator regarding what Job will say after the narrator has declared that Job “did not accuse God of foolishness” (לֹא־נִתַּן תְּפִלָּה לְאֱלֹהִים) (1:22b) and that “Job did not sin with his lips” (לֹא־הִטָּא אִיּוֹב בְּשִׁפְתָיו) (2:10b). If the reader or spectator was awaiting divine intervention following the friends’ mourning, they must now wait to see whether that intervention will come after Job’s imprecation. But they would not be necessarily surprised by it.

6. Job 1–3 in the Light of Keret and Aqhat

Based on what has been analysed thus far, it may be said that—regardless of how the composition of Job 1–3 is interpreted—the redactional unity of these chapters is designed to provoke increasing anticipation regarding divine intervention. Likewise, Eliphaz’s apparently startled response (chs. 4–5) to Job’s words is intended to further delay that anticipated intervention. Undoubtedly, for Eliphaz, Job’s externalisation of his inner emotions—experienced throughout his mourning and supplication rites—poses a danger to Job himself.

Let us begin with the chronology of the events. Michel (1987, pp. 5–6) holds that the banquet of the sons (1:4–5) is none other than the feast occasioned by the celebration of the family’s annual sacrifices (cf. Pope 1973, p. 4). Whether cultic or not, it is reasonable to assume that it was a periodic family celebration. Thus, the phrase כָּל־יְהִימִים (1:5b) should be understood here as “each time/regularly” rather than “every day/all the time”³². That is, Job would perform the sacrificial rites periodically, in keeping with the rhythm of the banquets. To this is added the adverbial expression וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם (1:6), which is repeated in 1:13 and 2:1. On the basis of the definite noun הַיּוֹם, Blommerde (1969, p. 37) translates: “And the day arrived when” rather than the more customary rendering: “It happened one day that” This would suggest that the expression introduces a periodic cycle of events, as though the heavenly council and the family banquet coincided in their celebration cycle. In fact, the family tragedies would occur on the first day of the banquet, as implied by the near-verbatim repetition in v. 18b of v. 13b: “his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their firstborn brother” (וּבְנָיו וּבְנוֹתָיו אֹכְלִים וְשׂוֹתִים יַיִן) (בְּבֵית אֶחָיהֶם הַבְּכוֹר), which suggests that the banquet round began with the eldest son. A strong irony is thereby achieved: everything takes place when Job’s children have barely had the chance to curse God—as Job had feared they might.

From the above, it follows that וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם (“the day arrived [when]”) in 2:1 introduces the second heavenly council after a year has passed—assuming that the banquet had an annual rhythm—or at least after a prolonged period. This implies that, although they share the same underlying aim of regaining divine favour, the rites performed by Job in chapters 1 and 2 are distinct: those in 1:20–21 are primarily rites of mourning for his deceased children—which does not preclude lamentation for the totality of his misfortunes—and would have continued until the onset of his illness. The rites in 2:8–13, by contrast, concern his illness and possible recovery, and likewise appear to extend over a period, culminating in the seven days of mourning with his friends. Indeed, the sequence of narrative verbs in vv. 8–13 includes certain durative verbal forms that suggest an indeterminate duration. This is the case, for example, with the participial clause וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב בְּתוֹךְ (“while

sitting/dwelling among the ashes" —2:8) and the *yiqtol* form in *הגבולות תדברי כדבר אהת* ("you [usually] speak like one of the infamous women" —2:10). Added to this is the report concerning the origin of the friends, which—though not specified—suggests that they came from various distant locations (2:13), and therefore implies a considerable lapse of time between their reception of the news about Job's illness and their arrival at his location, not to mention the seven days they spent seated on the ground with him "without speaking a word" (*ואין־דבר אליו דבר*—2:13).

With regard to the meaning of the events that befell Job and his actions in response, there is no doubt that, in keeping with the patriarchal setting in which Job is portrayed, he is depicted as especially scrupulous in matters of religion, faithfully fulfilling all cultic obligations in accordance with the religiosity of the Ancient West Asia—a religiosity deeply marked by fear of divine wrath should any ritual norm be knowingly or unknowingly transgressed. Such divine wrath would typically manifest itself in the form of natural calamities, such as drought, torrential rain, earthquakes, sterility, and so forth³³. This mentality, so prevalent in Ancient West Asia literature, entails the concept of covenant. In fact, it is a social covenant formulated as a religious covenant whereby the human party undertakes to offer praise to the deity, and the deity to provide protection to the human party³⁴. Within this context, the phrase *והיה האיש ההוא תם וישר וירא אלהים וסר מרע* ("And that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and turned away from evil" —1:1b; cf. 2:3) should be understood chiefly as a cultic judgement, upon which the moral or ethical judgement depends. From a more properly moral perspective, one might suspect—along with the Satan (1:9–11)—that Job was simply fulfilling his cultic-religious obligations to the letter in order to secure divine favour. And for the same reason, it is likewise plausible—again following the Satan (2:4–5)³⁵—to suppose that Job's response to his initial misfortunes was not entirely sincere, but rather that he was methodically performing the rites and norms prescribed in the covenant for occasions of suffering or apparent divine absence (or breach of covenant) in order to recover divine favour³⁶.

At this point, it is worth offering a brief exegesis of Job 1:20–21. The statement *ערום יצאתי מבטן אמי וערום אשוב שמה* ("Naked I came out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there" —v. 21aα) may be understood as a form of dramatisation, whereby the survivor ritually reenacts the descent of the deceased into the netherworld. That is, the mourner symbolically follows the path of the dead, as an expression of grief and above all of solidarity. This may be confirmed by the use of terms such as *שמה* (there), which—parallel to Egyptian *ym* and Greek *ἐκεί*—may function as a euphemism for the underworld, as it does in other explicit instances in Job (cf. 3:10, 11; 31:15; 24:20; and 38:8). As for *בטן*, its typical pairing with *רחם* (cf. 3:11), in line with Ugaritic word-pair conventions, suggests a meaning broader than that of mere metaphor; it likely alludes to the myth of Mother Earth, according to which all humans are born from the womb of the earth and return to it in death. This pairing is thus common in ritual dramatisations for the dead. Verse 20 is also significant in this respect: *ויקם איוב ויקרע את־מעלו ויגז את־ראשו ויפל ארצה וישתחו* ("Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell to the ground and worshipped"). Here we find a stereotypical expression of the narrative model of "reaction to bad news," in which the king or noble, typically seated on his throne, rises and engages in acts of mourning or lamentation. Within this pattern, it is important to consider the possible double meaning of the verb *שחה/חזה* (II)³⁷: the common biblical sense "to worship" or "to bow down," and the Ugaritic cognate "to crouch" or even "to roll (in the dust)"³⁸. These rites symbolise the foetal posture characteristic of both the newborn and the deceased returning to the maternal womb of the earth. It should also be noted that the mourner is practically naked, as implied by the verbs *קרע* (to tear [garments]) and *גזז* (to shave), which form a word-pair referring to the act of undressing. In short, the rites narrated here correspond to the descent-

into-the-underworld rite, paralleling those in KTU 1.5 VI:11–25 (*cf. supra*, §16), where El descends from his throne to the ground, throws “straw of mourning” upon his head (CML: 73), covers himself in dust, and tears his garments—all as a dramatic representation of the descent to the underworld within a funerary context. Thus, in his first mourning ritual, Job merely follows the ritual norms appropriate to the patriarchal setting in which he is placed. It is within this framework that he utters the words of loyal devotion to the deity (v. 21b), יהוה נתן ויהוה לקח יהי שם יהוה מברך (“Yahweh gave, and Yahweh has taken away; blessed be the name of Yahweh”), which highlight the “and he worshipped” sense of וישתחו over that of “and he prostrated himself.” Yet the narrator’s gloss (v. 22) keeps both Job’s ritual actions and his words within the framework of an outward expression of loyalty to the deity: בכל־זאת לא־חטא איוב ולא־נתן תפלה לאלהים (“In all this Job did not sin; that is, he did not accuse God of foolishness”)³⁹. בכל־זאת does not refer to everything that happened to Job, as the LXX has it (ἐν τούτοις πᾶσι τοῖς συμβεβηκόσι αὐτῷ—“in all that had happened to him”), but rather to all the actions performed by Job following the calamities, thus anticipating the narrator’s second gloss in 2:10b.

It is now appropriate to address the rites performed by Job in 2:8, 12–13, together with their context and purpose—but not without first mentioning that the disease inflicted upon Job by the Satan (v. 7) closely parallels the curse pronounced by Yahweh in Deut 28:35. This connection illustrates the extent to which the depiction of Job’s calamities would have led him—who is unaware of the heavenly scenes—to interpret them as a sign of divine malediction, which ought to be countered through the appropriate rites. In this respect, Habel (1985, p. 96) suggests that 2 Sam 12:16 may offer valuable insight into these verses, as it shows David performing rites of supplication for the restoration of his sick child. In 12a we read that David sought God on behalf of the ailing child, and to this end he undertakes concrete rites such as fasting, entering an unspecified place, and lying on the ground throughout the night (12b). There is no doubt that the combination of elements—“an unspecified place,” “the night,” “lying on the ground,” and “fasting”—together with the clear intent stated in 12a, point to a rite of *incubatio*, just as we have seen in the epics of Keret and Aqhat. It is true that Job 2:8 makes no mention of fasting, location, or night, but according to the same author, fasting is a rite of humiliation that involves punishing the body—and is therefore comparable to Job’s act of scratching himself with a potsherd (ויקה־לו חרש להתגרד בו—“He got himself a piece of rubble to scratch himself”) as a rite of self-laceration. In my view, we may well be dealing here with another instance of calculated ambiguity, playing upon echoes of ancient rites evoked by the otherwise practical act of scratching⁴⁰. The verb גרד is a *hapax legomenon* that finds a parallel—though not a cognate—in the Ugaritic verb *grdš* (to lacerate; *cf. (del Olmo et al. 2015: 304)*), and a synonym in the Hebrew verb גרד, used in 1 Kgs 18:28 in reference to the rites of self-laceration performed by the priests of Baal in their petition for his theophanic manifestation, which corresponds to KTU 1.5 VI:17, where El also appears lacerating himself with “stone and flint”. Moreover, it is likely that 2:12–13 describes part of the same act as 2:8, and thus also contains a nocturnal element (v. 13). In fact, although v. 8 places Job in ashes (אפר) and v. 13 seems to situate him on the ground (ארץ), Muenchow (1989, pp. 608f) and Michel (1987) have shown that these two terms may be synonyms or even *by-forms* (*cf. Gen 18:27; Job 30:19; 42:6*). Nonetheless, the use of אפר may not merely denote earth or ground, but a location already ritually prepared for such acts—that is, one in which ash was already present on the ground as a symbol of the underworld⁴¹. In short, both in Job and in 2 Samuel we are dealing with rites of mourning, which undoubtedly correspond to the rite of descent to the underworld before the deity, with the aim of pleading for someone’s restoration—just as we observed in Keret and Aqhat⁴².

With regard to this, the words spoken by Job's wife in 2:9b are particularly noteworthy. She asks him: עֲדָךְ מִזְחִיק בְּתַמְתָּךְ ("Are you still holding on to your integrity?"). The *hiphil* of *חזק* in Isa 56:4, 6 is used as a technical term in the context of a divine-human covenant. In both passages the background or context is the same—namely, individuals or groups who stand outside the covenant with God. In Isaiah, the reference is to eunuchs and foreigners who are exhorted to follow and obey the covenant, despite never having been included in it, but rather excluded by it. In Job, it appears that his wife believes that all the events that have occurred place her husband outside the covenant, and that he has no alternative but to "renounce" it and die in peace. Yet this very assumption suggests that Job clings more tightly to the covenant—something that clearly does not indicate passive resignation to his situation, but rather a fighting spirit aimed at his restoration and the recovery of divine favour. Isaiah's exhortation, in fact, carries precisely this promise of restoration to all who hold fast to the covenant, including those excluded from it. This "fighting spirit" for restoration is barely perceptible, due both to the allusive style of the narrative and to the fact that the rites appear so similar in both form and meaning. That is, both funerary rites and those of supplication and lamentation (motivated by adverse circumstances) seem to share very similar basic structures, since all involve "rites of humiliation." A comparison of two texts will help us grasp the extent to which similar rites could serve distinct purposes. Thus, although Gen 37:35b is clearly a funerary text, while 2 Sam 12:23b refers to the intercessory supplication on behalf of the son described in 12:16b, both share the rite of "descent to the underworld." Indeed, the former reads: אֲרַד אֶל-בְּנִי אֲבֵל שְׂאֵלָה כִּי ("Surely, I will go down mourning to my son in Sheol), taking the son's death for granted; while the latter, which refers to a rite on behalf of the still-living child, reads: אָנִי הֵלַךְ אֵלָיו וְהוּא לֹא-יָשׁוּב אֵלַי ("I went to my son, but he couldn't return to me"). In both cases, there is a rite of descent into the underworld, but the intent expressed in the second text is to halt the child's journey toward Sheol. We must therefore conclude that rites with very similar structures may, at the same time, conceal different purposes. In fact, [del Olmo Lete \(1984, p. 86\)](#) lists various functions for the *incubatio*.

Just as David pleaded for his dying son, so too Job's friends may have arrived with the same intention: to intercede on behalf of their friend. Hence their ritual identification with Job. Following previous proposals, [Habel \(1985, p. 97\)](#) associates 2:12bβ (וַיִּזְרְקוּ עָפָר עַל-) ("and they threw dust upon their heads toward heaven") with Exod 9:10, where Moses performs a rite similar to that of Job's friends in order to bring about a "boil" (שַׁחֲחִי) like the one afflicting Job (Job 2:7). Habel argues that the friends, by this act of casting dust heavenward (הַשְׂמִימָה), are invoking Job's illness upon themselves as a gesture of ritual solidarity with the sufferer—something that formed part of their consolatory and intercessory role⁴³. This would mean that the friends join the rites which Job himself was performing at that moment (2:8), acting as "pure" intercessors—i.e., ones who suffer no affliction or curse and who can therefore be heard by the deity. In a sense, they may represent Job's final hope for halting the curse, regaining divine favour, and obtaining restoration⁴⁴. The question, then, is the following: is the imprecation in chapter 3 Job's reaction to the failure of his "ritual loyalty" aimed at restoration, or is it simply the continuation of those rites—albeit now in a different scene—in order to highlight the element of lamentation and, consequently, the more personal and internal aspect of the rite?⁴⁵ Whatever our answer, it is important to conclude that the elements presented here support—or at least point to—the existence of a well-constructed narrative framework linking the prose and poetic sections, a relationship that has been thoroughly studied and that can certainly be compared to the narrative structures of Keret and Aqhat. Yet Job introduces a distinct hypothesis not found in those texts—namely, that the deity might not respond at all, or might delay the response even after the full ritual process has been exhausted. Moreover,

the ritual context of chapters 1–2 is made abundantly clear—though it is narrated with “false naivety”⁴⁶, a strategy that serves precisely to underscore its limitation when faced with the profound anguish expressed in the imprecation. As Polzin (1977, pp. 57ff) notes, if this contrast were removed, the book’s message would effectively disappear.

It is now time to turn our attention to chapter 3. This chapter consists of two sections: (a) the curse, clearly introduced in v. 1 and extending through vv. 3–10, and (b) the lament, introduced by the characteristic למה (Why?), and covering vv. 11–26. In other words, the chapter follows a “curse–lament” (or vice versa) structure, prompting us to ask whether we are dealing with a true curse or whether the curse itself forms part of the lament. Fishbane (1971) demonstrated that the curse text follows the structure of the creation narrative, just as Jer 4:23–26 does. Indeed, in Ancient West Asia, creation accounts were often based on the myth of the impersonal and primordial matrix from which everything was created—including the gods. This matrix, the seat of all disorder, could only be accessed through magic. This means, in relation to our subject (i.e., the literary form of curses), that a perfectly formulated incantation—especially in its numerical structure—was essential for the curse to be effective. In our case, the incantation is built around the number six, corresponding to days 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 of the creation narrative. This number stands in opposition to seven as the number of completeness and is thus the most suitable for conjuring the primordial chaos⁴⁷. Furthermore, as Gevirtz (1959, pp. 104, 235) has shown, the entire grammatical formulation of the curse conforms to the traditional Ancient West Asia scheme. Moreover, the hypostasis of acts or events that we encounter in this chapter—such as the “day” of Job’s birth—is also a typical feature of curses. Yet the most pressing question is: to whom is the curse directed—or in other words, what is its meaning? For if it is truly a curse against God, then Job has ultimately followed his wife’s advice, thereby enacting a genuine but inexplicable shift in tone. According to Blank (cited in Brichto 1963, p. 9), a curse is intrinsically effective: it requires neither divine nor demonic agents to be realised—its mere utterance suffices. However, in 3:8 Job appears to invoke personal beings in order to give his curse effectiveness. These beings—those who curse the day or the sea⁴⁸, those who rouse Leviathan—could be members of the heavenly council, specialists in magic, whose role was precisely to empower curses (cf. Pope 1973, p. 30). A parallel figure would be the god Koshar of Ugarit, who was the expert in magical arts within the city’s pantheon. That is, it would appear that the curse is aimed not directly at God but at the created order, summoning third parties to carry out its aim. Another possibility is that the beings invoked are deified ancestral spirits, a plausible interpretation especially if we consider the royal or noble context—social classes whose dead were believed to attain a semi-divine status. Indeed, numerous references to darkness appear in this curse (vv. 4–6), notably צלמית (v. 5). Additionally, the verb קבב (to curse) in v. 8 is a cognate of the Ugaritic *qba*, the technical verb used in incantations and necromantic rites (cf. Lewis 1989, pp. 11ff), so it is not difficult to imagine Job performing a necromantic rite to summon the dead, who would act as mediators before the supreme deity and as bearers of his affliction before him. Another piece of supporting evidence is the term קדשים (holy ones) in 5:1, whom, according to Eliphaz, Job has invoked, and who therefore must correspond to the beings mentioned in 3:8. On the basis of Psalm 116, Lewis (1989, p. 166) argues that in 5:1 these are indeed the dead. In short, I believe that the act of appealing to “other beings”—whoever they may be—presenting them with his miserable condition and desire to end his life, clearly implies an intent to provoke God to jealousy. According to Uffenheimer (1966), the עתידים (those prepared) of 3:8 could be priests responsible for invoking the forces of evil against the enemies of the king they serve. Although, given the necrophilic language of the chapter, I do not believe these are the priests in question, I do find highly relevant what this same author says about the verb ערר (to awaken) in biblical tradition. Indeed, this verb is used as a tech-

nical term to stir or rouse God (who is presumed distant or absent) against his enemies. I would therefore argue that Job intends to “awaken” God through the intercession of these beings and through a shrill, resounding curse–lament that conveys the raw force of his complaint. Mediators between the supreme God—El in the Canaanite context—and human beings, whether semi-divine, divine, or human, had the primary role in Ancient West Asia of drawing that deity’s attention to human events. This is precisely what happens in the opening lines of the Aqhat text we studied earlier, where Baal draws El’s attention to the poor condition of Daniel (line 16), as if the most exalted deity had not even noticed⁴⁹. This confirms that, after performing the rites narrated in chapter 2, Job believes God to be absent—that is, God has not responded to the petitions for restoration embedded in those rites. It is therefore not surprising that Job intensifies his provocations and appeals to other beings in a final attempt to induce the divine presence. That Job does not intend to curse God directly is well explained by Moore (R. D. Moore 1983, p. 24), who argues that Job does not wish to curse God, since the Ancient West Asia attached great importance to oral expression and to the power conferred upon properly formulated words. All the more significant, then, is what remains unsaid or unspoken—as in our case, where Job deliberately avoids uttering God’s name. For this reason, the curse must be regarded as the “strongest” part of Job’s lamentation, yet a lamentation–complaint that ultimately aims to be heard by God. Indeed, as Pohl (2018) argues, following Yu (2011, pp. 197–215), the rhetorical strategy behind Job’s harsh imprecation is not aimed *against* God, but *toward* God, in an explicit search for theophany and restoration. It is Job’s last available recourse.

Although Habel (1983, pp. 104ff) argues against this interpretation, the existence of an Ancient West Asia liturgical tradition that included lament or complaint before the deity—expressed in harsh words and accusations—cannot be denied. In the Hebrew Bible, the clearest parallels to such liturgies are the Psalms of Lament. According to Westermann (1983, pp. 16, 19) and Seybold (1998), God is the implied addressee throughout the progression of Job’s speeches. More specifically, the series of laments extending from chapter 3—including 6:4; 7:11–21; 9:5–7, 12–13, 21–31; 10:3–7, 18–19; 13:23–27, and so forth—culminating in the complaint and legal plea of 31:35–37, ought to be regarded as a single lament addressed to God. Thus, from the moment God appears to have broken the protective covenant with Job, the latter is permitted to complain against Him while remaining within the bounds of that covenant—precisely because he has avoided cursing Him openly. For this reason, the “Rib” model (cf. Gemser 1969), or legal dispute within a judicial framework that structures the Job–friends dialogue, is directed not only at the friends but ultimately at God. In the case of chapter 3, the reference to God becomes particularly clear in vv. 23–26, which contain a sharp, albeit bitter, irony aimed at God. The accusation לגבר אשר־דרכו נסתרה ויסך אלוה בעדו (“To the man whose way is hidden and whom God has fenced in”—v. 23) is a clear reference to 1:10, except that now God’s “hedge” of protection is seen as oppressive. Job perceives the divine absence—the very creation he curses is evidence of God’s absence—as not only unbearable, but also as an obstacle to dying, leaving him trapped in a miserable, intermediate state (cf. Clines 1989, pp. 100–2 on 3:23). Hence the importance of provoking divine jealousy by exposing his wretched condition to other beings—an act tantamount to accusing God of abandoning the covenant and His obligations toward Job⁵⁰. Equally ironic is v. 25: יבא לי כי פחד פחדתי ויאתיני ואשר יגרתני (“For I was afraid, and it came to pass; and what I feared has come to me”). Although the root ירא (to fear) used in chs. 1–2 (1:1, 8, 9; 2:3) does not appear here, the synonyms פחד and יג are an ironic echo of the “fearful Job” of those earlier chapters. It is as though Job was acknowledging that his reverent fear of God was driven by ritual scruples toward an arbitrary deity, in line with ancient religious concepts of Ancient West Asia. The irony may be even sharper if Michel (1987, pp. 76ff) is correct in taking פחד not merely as a noun (dread)

but as the personal name of an ancient terrifying deity. He thus offers the following translation: “Indeed, Dreed I dreaded—He overtook me, and the One whom I feared has come for me.” This interpretation gains support from the fact that פחד (terror, dread) appears to function as a hypostasis of the God of Isaac in Gen 31:42, 53, and possibly in Job itself (cf. 31:23b: וּמִשְׁאֲתוֹ לֹא אֹכַל אֶל אִיד אֵלֵי פַחַד כִּי—“For dread [came] to me, calamity of God, and His majesty I could not endure”). Furthermore, the verb אָהָה (to come) is used in 37:22 to describe the approach of God’s golden and terrifying radiance. Job’s sense that his situation is met with divine silence—even after his supplications as narrated in chs. 1–2—or at least that God appears absent due to a sustained silence, is also conveyed by the term אָנָּה (sigh, grievance) in v. 24. This term recalls the Ugaritic cognate verb *anh* (cf. supra, §12), which appears in Aqhat in the context of supplication for restoration. Job’s lament over divine silence culminates with the terminology of v. 13, which in turn recalls the dream-related language used in Keret to describe the *incubatio* rite (cf. supra), expressing his lack of peace (לֹא שְׁלוֹתִי), quiet (וְלֹא שְׁקֵטִיתִי), and rest (וְלֹא נִחַתִּי), and affirming instead that only disquiet has come upon him (וַיָּבֵא רִגְזִי). In other words, Job openly channels the darkest feelings and emotions experienced throughout his mourning in the form of an imprecatory prayer.

Brichto (1973, pp. 8–10) speaks of curses as “prayers, whether direct or obliquely addressed to God,” which take on an imprecatory tone; thus, one may speak of a curse–lament (or vice versa) pattern of prayer. In KTU 1.19 III:42–56, for example, we see Daniel, mourning for Aqhat, uttering a curse. Immediately thereafter, in IV:1–27, we find the lament, so that a “curse–lament” pattern emerges, also attested in Sumerian literature, such as *The Curse of Agade* (J. S. Cooper 1983), which introduces a curse with the words: *e-en-ra-zu-ta ba-ab-be-ne* (“and he prayed to him”). This curse (lines 210–272) is preceded by a lament (lines 196–209). Moreover, in the aforementioned text of KTU 1.19, there is no transition between the curse and the lament. According to Janzen (1972, p. 27), lament and curse converge “where, in the face of violent death, mourning for the dead shades over into cursing of the guilty.” In the case of Job, the curse directed against God’s creation constitutes an accusation—albeit indirect—against God⁵¹, and not merely an expression of his desire to die. Furthermore, and significantly, it appears that the lament–curse—or imprecatory content more generally—was, in the Ancient West Asia culture, the normal response to bad news. In the case of the death of relatives, family members would throw themselves desperately into rites seemingly designed to identify with the deceased (descent-to-the-underworld rites), whereas in the case of illness, similar rites existed, particularly lamentation expressing the desire for one’s own death. Hillers (1965, pp. 86–90) and Clines and Gunn (1976, p. 407) argue that “self-curse” is part of this reaction to bad news, since by cursing “his day,” Job effectively curses himself. More precisely, such a self-curse consists in a rite of self-abasement or self-humiliation—i.e., a return to the womb of the earth. Therefore, once again, the transition from the rites described in chs. 1–2 to the imprecation of ch. 3 should not surprise so much the reader or spectator, since the boundary between the apparently calm ritual expression of mourning and the self-curse is more formal than real, as can be seen from the relation that the “sigh, grievance” (אָנָּה) and the “groan, wail” (שֹׁאגָה) of 3:24 have with the “pain, sorrow” (כָּאֵב) of 2:13. Indeed, commenting on the cursing scene of KTU 1.19 III:45–IV:7, MLC: 351 points out that the abruptness of the transition between this scene and the previous one reveals a type of narrative sequence that demands a re-evaluation of some prevailing criteria regarding the literary unity of a narrative⁵².

At this point, it is worth noting what Muñoz Iglesias (1984, pp. 415–17) has said regarding poetic insertions within prose texts. According to this author, every divine oracle inserted into the patriarchal narratives was composed in a “rhythmic oracular” form. But—what is even more relevant for our present concern—this same form was also used

for blessings or curses pronounced by human beings, since, in appealing to divine powers, such individuals would be mere “instruments” of the divine words. It is thus reasonable to think that, in the case of a curse–lament, the lyrical form of chapter 3 is entirely to be expected. Moreover, given that Job’s speeches are in fact laments, the use of the lyrical genre also seems appropriate. For this reason, in the words of the same author, “to assume a priori, as has often been done—for example, in the case of the Book of Job—that the simple juxtaposition of poetic compositions and prose narratives within a single text necessarily requires multiple authors is critically untenable” (*ibid.*, p. 413)⁵³.

In the light of the foregoing, the transition from chs. 1–2 to chs. 3ff may be read as a “scenic shift” within the ritual plot of mourning. Accordingly, the adverbial phrase *כִּן אַחֲרָיו* (after this, afterwards) in 3:1 should not be taken as the abandonment of the ritual framework and the beginning of a new plot framework, but as a narrative divider or “scene divider” (*cf.* Michel 1987, p. 39) that heightens the expectation of the anticipated outcome once the seven days necessary for the efficacy of the *incubatio* with the friends have elapsed. The expectation could be placed either in an effective divine intervention or in the friends’ effective consolation, but in either case one would expect Job to emerge from his state of mourning. For this reason, the narrative gloss of 3:1 directs that expectation towards what Job is going to say (*פִּתַּח אִיּוֹב אֶת־פִּיהוּ*—Job opened his mouth) in clear contrast with the silence maintained by his friends (by Job too?—*cf.* 2:13) in the previous scene⁵⁴. And what Job utters remains closely unified with the mourning rites of chs. 1–2, though now explicitly described as a descent to the netherworld, a peaceful and desirable place for the mourner (3:13–22) (*cf.* in KTU 1.5 VI *El*’s pleasant description of the grave, especially in lines 5–8). Job, therefore, reaffirms his suffering state, thus prolonging his mourning by means of his imprecation and thus making manifest the absence of divine intervention, which will then give rise to the intervention—now likewise explicit—of the friends in their role as consolers. Lambert (2015, pp. 559–64) sets out masterfully many instances in the Hebrew Bible that illustrate how the mourner may cling to his state of mourning, in which case the consolatory function also includes an agonistic action with the mourner to attempt to draw him out of his state and reintegrate him into society and life. That is, from Job’s imprecation onwards, the plot develops as an agonistic relationship between Job and his consolers, so that the plot remains within the ritual framework of mourning.

7. Conclusions

The underlying point of departure for this study was that, just as research into the redactional formation of Job contributes significantly to our understanding of the work, so too the study of implicit or explicit threads of continuity contributes as much to that understanding. On this presupposition I have sought to show that, in its canonical form, the narrator deliberately exploits the narrative delay of the divine response in order to intensify the inner drama of mourning. Thus, the false naïveté of the ritual narrative in chs. 1–2—more evocative than descriptive—prepares the ground for the extreme expression of pain in chs. 3. So, the rite functions as one of the transversal axes for reading chs. 1–3 as a whole by activating in the reader the expectation of a divine intervention all throughout the subsequent agonistic development of the dialogue with the ‘condoling’ friends.

Narrative and dramatic continuity might appear to be called into question by the formal leap from prose to poetry and by the apparently radical change of mood and tone in the protagonist that we observe between chs. 1–3. Nevertheless, the study of the ‘prologues’ of the Ugaritic epic narratives of Keret and Aqhat—reference works for the archaizing literary and religious strategy of Job—makes it possible to identify a continuity understood as the progressive unfolding of a ritual process of mourning. Both narratives show that, in epic narratives, the ritual element may be suggested rather than described,

and yet still structure the plot precisely through mourning scenes such as the *incubatio* performed with a view to a divine response. Indeed, in these narratives the sequence ‘calamity—mourning/*incubatio*/lamentation—theophany’ functions as the dramatic script for the quest for restoration (e.g., the succession or reversal of a real or perceived curse). On the other hand, Ugaritic epic also makes clear that the juxtaposition of scenes, however abrupt it may be, does not of itself require one to posit compositional complexity, nor does the juxtaposition of prose and poetry; such juxtaposition may respond to conventions of poetic insertion and to the dramatic requirements of the rite represented, especially when the prose part displays a lyrical cadence, as in Job 1–2. Such is the case with the imprecation of ch. 3, introduced by the stage direction “After this, Job opened his mouth [. . . .].”, which functions narratively as a framing utterance or, dramatically, as a scene-divider (*didascalia*) that shifts the focus of attention from the protagonist’s external rituality (chs. 1–2) to his internal pain verbalised in the imprecation. This is not merely an emotional or psychological inconsistency, but an intensified verbal expression of what is not said in the ritual actions of mourning themselves.

Finally, this study shows that the literary and cultural milieu of Ancient Western Asia serves the book of Job—specifically Job 1–3—to create the “drama of reading” that Greenstein (2000) identified in other episodes of Keret and Aqhat different from those examined here. That is to say, the interest of Job 1–3 (and of the book as a whole) lies in “the emotional or non-cognitive effects of reading, or hearing, a text” (Greenstein 2000, p. 143), so that the identification of the reader or spectator with the protagonist’s experiences becomes one of the fundamental keys to its interpretation. It is precisely this dramatic interest that leads Job to address the problem of suffering in general, and in particular that of the suffering of the innocent, from an existential perspective that transcends religious or theological particularisms or localisms.

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Abbreviations

CAT	<i>The Cuneiform Alphanumeric Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places</i> (KTU second enlarged edition)
DULAT	<i>A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphanumeric Tradition (2 Vols): Third Revised Edition</i> ³
KTU	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i>
MLC	<i>Mitos y leyendas de Canaán</i>
RSP	<i>Rash Shamra Parallels. The Texts from Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible, vols. I, II, III</i>
TOu	<i>Textes Ougaritiques I: Introduction, Traduction, Commentaire</i>
UDB	<i>Ugaritic Data Bank</i>

Notes

¹ Although I argue for reading Job as a narrative and dramatic unity, I do not deny the complex compositional character the work may have had, as historical-critical analysis suggests. Since the proposals are too numerous to survey here, I refer to Vermeylen (2015), whose study is entirely devoted to this issue, including a review of the most significant proposals for Job as a whole on pp. 35–53, and for the relationship between the sections termed “prologue” and “dialogues” on pp. 57–63. In any case, even

- from a properly historical-critical perspective, the principal thesis of Cooper (A. Cooper 1990) is applicable; I summarise it as follows: both the redactional consonances and the redactional dissonances of chs. 1–3 contribute to the ultimate purpose of pressing the reader or spectator to enter into the mystery of the great questions of life and religion.
- 2 For example, Terrien (S. L. Terrien 1963, pp. 57, 62); Clines (1989, pp. 34–36, 49–50, 60–66); Olyan (2004, pp. 28–61); Halbertal (2015, pp. 37–46); Witte (2021, pp. 43, 95, 101, 109f). Also noteworthy are the contributions from the exegetical-pastoral field of Randriambola-Ratsimihah (2024), or from the medical-psychiatric field of Lyon (2000).
- 3 For these two works I shall normally use the following editions of the Ugaritic texts: *CML* (Gibson and Driver 2004), *MLC* (del Olmo Lete 1981), *RSP I-III* (Fischer and Rummel 1972–1981), *TOu* (Caquot et al. 1974), *UDB* (Cunchillos et al. 2003) and *KTU* (Dietrich et al. 1976), or its later revision *CTA* (Dietrich et al. 1995).
- 4 See also Moor (1994, especially pp. 246–57) who surveys the echoes of the book of Job within the Ugaritic literary context.
- 5 The archaic flavour of Job responds to a theological-literary strategy that does not necessarily determine the dating of the work, but it is crucial for its understanding. Cf. Seow (2011); Young (2009); Greenstein (2003); Hurvitz (1974).
- 6 Cf. Brichto (1973). The author describes how descendants were expected to take responsibility for burying their predecessors in the family tomb and caring for their remains, thereby enabling them to continue some form of existence in the netherworld.
- 7 Cf. Merrill (1968, pp. 8ff), where all these elements are thoroughly addressed.
- 8 This term, however, has been disputed ever since Dahood proposed a new reading in *RSP* II: 35.6. The more traditional interpretation links the term to “bed” (cf. *DULAT*: 595; *CML*: 83 n. 2; *TOu*: 507; *RSP* I: 35.6; and Moor and Spronk 1982, p. 157), an interpretation supported by comparison with lines 26 and 30, as well as with 2 Sam 4:7 (וַיִּבְאוּ הַבַּיִת וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב עַל־מִטָּתוֹ בַּחֲדָר) — “When they entered the house, he was lying on his bed in his chamber”). However, Dahood’s view—based on a comparison with Qoh 3:21 and Job 15:29, and according to which לַמַּטָּה might be translated as “downwards”—is not without merit, as the text from Qohelet aligns perfectly with that of Keret (lines 29–30).
- 9 This term derives from the Semitic root *nwm*, and is cognate with the Hebrew *tʿnûmāh* (cf. *DULAT*: 617).
- 10 Cf. Job 33:15: בְּהַלֹּם הַזִּיּוֹן לַיְלָה בְּנֹפֶל תְּרֻמָּה עַל־אֲנָשִׁים בְּתַנּוּמוֹת עָלֵי מִשְׁכָּב (“In a dream, a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, as they slumber upon their beds”). Note the presence of a similar terminological chain as in the Keret text, as well as the revelatory element (vv. 16ff) surrounding these dreams.
- 11 *CAT*, *MLC*: 290, and *UDB*: 132 consider *ʿgm* to be the most likely of the three options, while Gibson favours *rgm*. For its part, *TOu*: 507, based on the Talmudic term *PéGām* meaning “injury, blemish” (Jastrow [1903] 2012, p. 1134), supports *pgm*.
- 12 My examination of the prologue of Keret has focused on the linguistic dimension. Another approach that supports the presence of *incubatio* in Keret is that of Kim (2011, pp. 89–162), who identifies in this work a deployment of the *incubatio* “type-scene,” which does not aim to describe the ritual practice itself, but rather to evoke it by employing its motifs with considerable freedom in line with the narrative purpose (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 261f).
- 13 *CAT*: 47 and *MLC*: 367 suggest a length of 10 lines.
- 14 del Olmo Lete (1984, p. 115 n. 251) provides an extensive list of scholars who support this interpretation. Those who oppose it argue that the text lacks explicit data. One example is Margalit (1989, p. 42), who criticises the absence of concrete evidence in “Obermann’s ‘incubation hypothesis’” (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 260–66).
- 15 One may consider, as a similar biblical example, the ritual activity undertaken to bring down the walls of Jericho (Josh 6), in which two new elements are added on the seventh day compared to the previous days: seven circuits instead of one, and the war cry (6:15b, 16). Cf. Taylor (1988).
- 16 Also with regard to Keret, it is worth noting that Wyatt (1983, p. 316), following Parker (1977), suggests that the episode concerning the son’s rebellion is a later addition whose purpose was to criticise certain Ugaritic notions of kingship, nobility, and religiosity upon which the upper classes of Ugarit sought to base their legitimacy—particularly their excessive fragility, which rendered them unfit to serve as the fundamental support of society.
- 17 *šml* is a “mythical animal, mother eagle” (*DULAT*: 785).
- 18 For instance, Aistleitner (1959, p. 65) points out that in the prologue of Aqhat we find mourning or funeral rites (Trauerriten).
- 19 Cf. Dijkstra and de Moor (1975) for a clear defence of both the etymological connection between this term in Hebrew and Ugaritic, and its parallel use in lamentation contexts.
- 20 Regarding line 16, Obermann (1946) suggested that *b l* (Baal) should be taken as a cognate of the common Semitic root *p l* (to work), offering the following translation: “(when) he (Daniel) draws near to perform his supplication.” In this way, the explicit supplication that follows in the subsequent lines—generally attributed to Baal—is placed in the mouth of Daniel. This would have resolved the problem of the absence of an explicit petition in the text, but not a single scholar has followed this argument; therefore, the traditional translation, with Baal as the subject, must be maintained.
- 21 Wensick (1917, pp. 64, 67, 70, 76) offers an insightful description of the rites of mourning and lamentation performed with special garments considered suitable for communicating with the deity.

- ²² *DULAT*: 134 presents the extensive debate surrounding the meaning of *uzr*, which may be summarised in three main options: (a) “clothed,” “girded”; (b) “offering”; (c) “with honour,” with option (a) appearing to enjoy the greatest support, and therefore it will be adopted in my interpretation.
- ²³ Here too it is worth mentioning the study by Kim (2011, pp. 89–162) on Aqhat, which—despite the specific features of that composition—arrives at the same conclusion concerning the use of the *incubatio* type-scene.
- ²⁴ For a somewhat detailed analysis of some of these comparisons, see Obermann (1946, p. 10 n. 3).
- ²⁵ *MLC*: 144 remarks that even the gods must resort to supplication and lamentation in order to move El, as is the case with Baal interceding on behalf of Daniel (cf. further examples in KTU 1.1 IV and 1.12 I:9–11).
- ²⁶ Olyan (2004, p. 29) explains the more evocative than descriptive character as a synecdoche for the ensemble of rites.
- ²⁷ Polak (1996, p. 97) reaches an important conclusion in this regard, following his detailed comparative study of the prose and poetry of Job: “with respect to those parameters that are relevant for prose and poetry alike, the diction of the tale turns out to be rather close to the poetic style. The narrator of the Job tale is a highly sophisticated poet, whose prose truly resembles a dance”.
- ²⁸ With S. Terrien (1969, p. 222) I likewise assume the dramatisation of the character also throughout the dialogical part of the book. Alonso Schökel (1977, p. 46) considers “that when the Book of Job is read as drama it becomes intelligible and comprehensible in its unity; it recovers its force of expression and its appeal”. Witte (2021, p. 2) refers to the dialogue cycle as a “dialogisch-dramatischen Geschehen”. An excellent treatment of Job as drama is offered by Mies (2006, pp. 237–63). See also Hirschfeld (1995); Shelton (1999); Ararat (2005); Seow (2013, p. 48); Morla (2017, pp. 56–64); and Folifack (2020, pp. 49–60).
- ²⁹ In this regard, Pang (2010, pp. 19–21) offers a different, but interesting, proposal for a dramatic unity: Job would be structured in four episodes (1:4–5c; 1:6–22; 2:1–10b; 2:11–42:7), each of them sketched according to the following pattern: action/event → Job’s mourning → Job’s utterance → verdict (of the narrator or of God). Yet it is precisely the fourth episode that deviates from this pattern through the intervention of the friends, which delays the expected verdict.
- ³⁰ Anat will follow El in a similar action (KTU 1.5 VI:26–1.6 I:9).
- ³¹ Linafelt and Davis (2013, pp. 634f), arguing that the term *hinnām* in 1:9 and 2:3 bears a single meaning—“without effect”—used to leave Yahweh, the Satan, and the reader or spectator without a resolution to Job’s dilemma, observe that poetry is the preferred form in the Hebrew Bible for expressing interiority, even within a prose framework. In other words, the use of *hinnām* serves to highlight the insufficiency of Job’s external reaction and thereby raises the question of his inner response
- ³² The forms ימים and הימים mean “year/annual” in Lev 25:29–30; Judg 17:10; 19:2; and 1 Sam 27:7; 29:3, from which it follows that ימים כלהימים may also convey this sense of periodicity or habitual practice.
- ³³ Huffmon (1959, pp. 290–94) notes that natural phenomena—both celestial and terrestrial—function as witnesses to the covenant established between the deity and human beings (ibid., pp. 258ff). Hence, in the curses pronounced for covenant violation, these elements are invoked to act against the human party.
- ³⁴ As to the functions of mourning rituals as part of the ‘cultic/social covenant’, see Moore (M. S. Moore 1993, pp. 667–69); Olyan (2004, pp. 60f); Pang (2010, pp. 24–26); Medina (2008, pp. 194–97).
- ³⁵ Cf. Kluger (1967, pp. 118–36) for a description of Satan in the Old Testament and the Ancient West Asia.
- ³⁶ In accordance with the myth of the *deus absconditus* or the sleeping god, rites and liturgies were developed with the aim of locating or “awakening” such a deity. A similar phenomenon is found in the Psalms, with imperatives such as “arise” or “awake,” and related expressions. Cf. Uffenheimer (1966) on this Hebrew tradition, and Parker (1989, pp. 186f) on the “absent god” motif in Keret, specifically in KTU 1.16 III.
- ³⁷ Jenni and Westermann (1985, pp. 740ff.) support the now widely held view that the verb שח derives from the *hishtaphal* conjugation of the verb חוה, whose Ugaritic cognate is the verb *hwy* (II) in its Št form, meaning “to crouch, to prostrate oneself.”
- ³⁸ Medina (2008, pp. 205–7) treats this verb in detail, favouring the Ugaritic sense for Job 1:20. In my view, the calculated ambiguity makes a great deal of sense, especially in view of Job’s subsequent imprecation.
- ³⁹ I take the conjunction וּלְאֵי־נֶתַח as an expegetical *waw* (cf. Waltke and O’Connor 1990, pp. 652ff).
- ⁴⁰ There is no scholarly consensus regarding the meaning of this act. For example, Morla (2017, p. 116, n. 186) rejects the idea that it involved self-laceration, whereas Seow (2013, p. 294) does not rule it out, and Witte (2021, p. 101) does not even address the possibility.
- ⁴¹ del Olmo Lete (1984, p. 89) analyses texts possibly related to *incubatio*, such as Gen 28:10–19 (20–22), where he detects an implicit sacrifice, or 1 Kgs 19:1–21, which features a tree beneath which the prophet sleeps—leading the author to conclude that it is in fact a sacred tree. That is to say, in these narratives, concrete details are once again relegated to allusion or to the reader-spectator’s background knowledge. For the same reason, it may be assumed that Job followed the full ritual procedure customary in *incubatio*, which would also have required a special location or the consecration of an otherwise ordinary space.
- ⁴² See KTU 1.161:27–33 [RSP 34126], which represents the conclusion of the descent rite of the god Shapshu (the sun) into the netherworld, according to Lewis (1989, p. 43) interpretation of lines 18–26. This netherworld is referred to specifically as *ʾrṣ* in line 21 and *pr* in line 22.

- ⁴³ Sicre Díaz and Alonso Schökel (1983) provide a comprehensive list of various interpretations of הַשְׁמִימָה, ranging from those that omit the term on the basis of textual criticism, to those that deny it has any ritual meaning, and finally to those that perceive some kind of ritual significance.
- ⁴⁴ Pang (2010, pp. 58–69) proposes the opposite: the friends' purported ritual solidarity is nothing other than a public denunciation of Job's sins in accordance with the concept of the cultic covenant's retributive justice that undergirds society; this would explain Job's harsh reaction of cursing his life. It is an interesting proposal, but it is somewhat forced and does not explain an imprecation that does not allude to the friends and has nothing to do with the issue of retributive justice.
- ⁴⁵ Pang (2010, pp. 26–29) shows that the rite is not merely a formality to be fulfilled but entails—and even induces—profound personal emotion. Thus, he states “[. . . .] when Job sits on the ash heap (2:8) [. . . .] establishes in and around him, though the text is silent on this, an aura of death” (ibid., p. 27). Hence, we may speak of the imprecation as the verbal externalising of the feelings experienced in the rite.
- ⁴⁶ It is worth quoting a remark by Clines (1989, p. 34), commenting on 1:20 but applicable to the entire prologue: “Job's actions in response to the news have been few: there has been no gashing of the body, no donning sackcloth, no scattering dust, no lamentation, no weeping, no fasting. Is this simply the economy of the 'naïve' narrative style, or does it signal a disproportionate restraint that will be burst open in the passion of the dialogue?” Although, as I have noted, all these elements appear in allusive form within the narrative, I believe Clines is right in discerning a deliberate narrative *restraint*, whose function is precisely to contrast the prologue with the lament of chapter 3. As Vogels (1994) observes, this contrast may serve to highlight that the Job of the prologue is not merely a passive actor (i.e., a passive subject of misfortune), but rather someone actively seeking a way out. Natan-Yulzary (2012) shows that the use of contrast in Aqhat is applicable to biblical narrative and functions to prompt the reader or spectator to generate meaning.
- ⁴⁷ For a comparative schema of Job 3 and Gen 1:1–2:4, see Hartley (1998, p. 101). On the other hand, Fuchs's (1993) thesis has shown the extent to which the Book of Job reutilises the ancient myth of the *Chaoskampf*.
- ⁴⁸ There may be an intentional ambiguity here between יום (day) and ים (sea), the latter being the domain of Leviathan.
- ⁴⁹ As can be seen, ancient mythological models continually underlie the text of the Book of Job (a heavenly council composed of numerous divine or divinised beings, governed by the supreme God), especially in the latter's speeches, despite the book's clearly monotheistic context. It may thus be said that Job draws upon very ancient concepts from the Ancient Near East, so that the supposed “revolution” of ideas found in the dialogue would, in fact, consist in a return to very old traditions (cf. Fuchs 1993).
- ⁵⁰ According to ancient conceptions—especially the archaic ones employed by the Book of Job—the otherworldly beings were members of the heavenly council, each with a specialised function. Moreover, the entire heavenly council played the role of witness in the covenants between God and human beings. Hence the narrative tension involving the protagonist, Job, as he turns to these beings. Cf. Huffmon (1959, pp. 289ff) for a thorough treatment of the judicial function of the heavenly council.
- ⁵¹ Witte (2021, p. 115) argues that chapter 3 follows the pattern of the individual complaint prayer found in the Psalter, which is directed to God, but that it omits, among other features, “the elements of direct address to God in the second person singular, and above all, the plea directed to God for a change in the distressing situation or for deliverance from suffering or death (cf. Ps 88:2–14)”.
- ⁵² Clines (1989, pp. 64f) surveys various examples of the great diversity of lament expressions in Ancient West Asia—some that include silence and others that do not—which would allow the components of the rites described to be linked together with considerable freedom, as MLC notes. Moreover, as Witte (2021, p. 109) observes regarding the seven days of silence, this short scene represents a pastoral behaviour that transcends cultures and eras.
- ⁵³ In a similar vein, Bezuidenhout (1994) argues that the entire narrative of Job exhibits a semantic rhythm that reflects greater unity than the narrative structure itself, with its alternation between prose and poetry. Moreover, he highlights that the Job of chapter 3 is just as reverent as the Job of chapters 1–2, only that he now emphasises the critical dimension of piety.
- ⁵⁴ Something similar occurs in Eliphaz's intervention in 33:2: הִנְהִינָא פִתַחְתִּי פִי (Pay attention, I opened my mouth).

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