Life and Mortality in Ugaritic: A Lexical and Literary Study

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The introduction explains the work’s lexicographical and comparative philological approaches. Chapter 1 is devoted to an analysis of words for “life” in Ugaritic. McAffee conducts a thorough discussion of the roots hyy/hwy in different texts. This includes a discussion of the verbs, nominal forms, and adjectives of the roots. For each text he provides a transcription, translation, and discussion. The chapter considers ideas such as eternal life (as in the Aqhat legend), as well as the words blmt, it, and other relevant issues. Most of the examples are taken from mythological and ritual texts, but some are from correspondence and other sources. Chapter 2 deals with the npš. McAffee discusses the concepts of life and mortality at length. The term qsr npš is also analyzed, along with the elusive word brlt. Next, some relevant body parts (lb, kbd, ʾap) are mentioned in context of the concept of life. Chapter 3 deals with the concept of death. McAffee opens with a lexical discussion of the root mwt and its appearances in famous texts such as the Baal Cycle, the stories of Kirta and Aqhat, and other sources. This chapter also deals with issues such as the underworld, the afterlife, the question of the death of deities (e.g., Yam and Baal) in myth, the god Rešep and his affiliation to the notion of death, the cosmogonic function of deities in the seasonal pattern, and other relevant theories. Chapter 4 deals with the rpʾum in Ugaritic literature. McAffee
provides full texts that mention the *rpʾum* in myth and ritual. The chapter has a detailed discussion about the nature of the *rpʾum* in Ugaritic texts: their name and their function in Ugaritic society in the context of concepts such as divinization postmortem, the royal dead, myth, the afterlife, rituals, and more. Chapter 5 provides a synthesis of the ideas of life and mortality that have been presented thus far. This is the heart of the book, where different arguments are presented and discussed in order to reach several conclusions. The chapter also contains some archaeological information about burial practices in Ugarit. The appendix provides information about first-millennium BCE funerary inscriptions in the context of some of the issues mentioned earlier.

This is a good lexical review intended for both experts and the general public. It can be used for lexicographic and literary comparison with other ancient Near Eastern texts and biblical literature. It shows that ideas of life and death cannot be depicted as opposites, as black and white, but rather as a long continuum of different shades of gray. Both concepts define each other, so one cannot be taught without the other. McAffee presents his views clearly and provides numerous examples to support his points.

McAffee mostly synthesizes various opinions from previous studies, and he sides with one opinion over the other while explaining his choices. There are not many innovative ideas or new conclusions that enlarge our knowledge of this very popular subject, in comparison with other extensive and innovative works devoted to these issues, such as K. Spronk’s *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 219 [Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1986]) or B. B. Schmidt’s *Israel’s Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), to which McAffee often refers.

Chapter 4 deals with the Ugaritic *rpʾum*. McAffee’s view of these beings is rather one-sided, as he refers mostly to their chthonic nature, as do K. Spronk, J. C. de Moor, and others in various studies; he interprets texts such as KTU 1.20–1.22 and other places according to this view, although the only certain place where the *rpʾum* are seen as dead in Ugaritic texts is KTU 1.161. The complex nature of the *rpʾum* as living and dead receives a more profound discussion in Schmidt’s study, as well as in C. E. L’Heureux’s *Rank among the Canaanite Gods: El, Baʾal, and the Rephaʾim* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979) or B. R Doak, *The Last of the Rephaim: Conquest and Cataclysm in the Heroic Ages of Ancient Israel* (Boston: Ilex Foundation, 2012).

In my view, one subject that needs further research regarding the concept of life is fertility and childbirth. The concern for an heir, a šrš (offspring) is expressed by both Kirta and Daniʾilu, as if their lineage itself is a living being that needs to be preserved and everlasting. This can also be seen in the character of the mother goddess *aṯrt* or the symbolic way in which a female goddess (*ʿnt*) easily overcomes the god of death (*mwt*).
The appendix, which focuses on inscriptions on funerary monuments (some of which were written hundreds of years after the fall of Ugarit), should be integrated into the general work or added as footnotes.

In conclusion, the main virtue of this book is its lexical analysis. McAffee provides a deep look into the philological discussion of the semantic field of words that directly or indirectly refer to life or death. The book may also be used as a textbook for students wishing to find a concise work that deals with these issues. Although it lacks a new perspective on these subjects, the book can be also used by scholars for other studies of Semitic languages and comparative literature.