A Reassessment of the *Marzēaḥ* at Ugarit

Caro Liikanen
015307361
Master's thesis
Muinaisen Lähi-idän kielet
Kielten maisteriohjelma
University of Helsinki
June 2025

Abstract

Title: A Reassessment of the *Marzēaḥ* at Ugarit
Author: Caro Liikanen
Month and year: June 2025
Number of pages: 58
Keywords: rituaalit, naiset, historia, myytit, Ugarit, assyriologia, akkadi, ugarit, myöhäispronssikausi

Abstract:
This thesis examines the concept of the *marzēaḥ* in Ugarit, a Late Bronze Age city-state on the coast of Syria. The primary goal is to define and characterize the phenomenon in Ugarit based on primary sources from Ugarit. This thesis additionally investigates two specific common claims from scholarship: that the *marzēaḥ* was religious, cultic, or ritual, and that the *marzēaḥ* excluded women.

Nine primary sources are used, four in Akkadian and five in Ugaritic. This includes five legal texts, two economic texts, and two myths. The method of close reading is used to analyze the primary sources, and the information from them is synthesized. This synthesis shows the *marzēaḥ* to have been an institution of associations situated within the social and economic elite. The members of these associations were called "men of the *marzēaḥ*", who could act as a collective legal entity in legal and economic contexts.

Building on this synthesis, a variety of sociological theories are applied to the material to investigate the claims that it was religious, cultic, or ritual, and that it excluded women. The findings show that claiming the *marzēaḥ* to have been cultic goes beyond the evidence, and trying to label it religious is an anachronistic imposition. However, calling the phenomenon ritualized and stating that it involved rituals can be justified. The idea of male exclusivity in the *marzēaḥ* is brought into question, and it is demonstrated that the evidence does not prove either women's inclusion or their exclusion.

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1 Introduction

It is approaching a century since clay tablets were first unearthed at the site of the ancient city of Ugarit that mentioned the *marzēaḥ*, a word already known from its attestations in the Hebrew Bible. Scholarship on the topic has been plentiful, but also varied: researchers—who are usually Hebrew Bible scholars—have differed radically in their interpretations of the

term, and have agreed on hardly anything. For some the *marzēaḥ* was a feast for the veneration of ancestors (Pope 1981, 176), involved sexual orgies and the veneration of specific deities (Dvorjetski 2016, 18), or simply "extensive alcohol consumption by members of the upper class in a religious context" (McLaughlin 2001, 214). However, the state of the art is overwhelmingly plagued by a lack of cultural specificity. The evidence for the *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit has been made subservient both in the study of the *marzēaḥ* in the Hebrew Bible and in attempts to reconstruct some cross-cultural phenomenon that spans the many locations, millennia, and cultures the word is attested in. While those are worthwhile endeavours in their own right, the fact remains that there has not been a study that investigates the *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit based on the sources from Ugarit, without bringing in assumptions from the phenomenon as attested elsewhere. As such, we do not know what can be definitively said about the *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit without generalization.

The purpose of this thesis is to attempt to ameliorate the flaws in the current scholarship, laid out in Section 1.2 'State of the Current Scholarship'. In short, scholars have made so many (often unjustified) claims about the *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit that even the most basic nature of the phenomenon is unclear. As such, the primary research question is simply "what was the *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit, based on the sources from Ugarit?" To answer this, I will apply the method of close reading to every primary source from Ugarit that mentions the word. The methodology is explained in Section 2 'Methodology,' and it will be applied to each of the primary sources in turn in Section 3 'The Primary Sources.' Section 3.1 'Excavation and Publication History' explains where the Ugaritic tablets originate and how they have been published. After that, each subsection from 3.2 to 3.10 is dedicated to applying the method of close reading to one of our primary sources.

After I have discussed the texts by themselves, I will synthesize the evidence into a general description of the *marzēaḥ* in Section 4.1 'Synthesizing the Evidence.' The goal of that section is to state everything that we can claim to know about the phenomenon with a degree of certainty. After that, I will interrogate two specific claims that scholarship often repeats about the *marzēaḥ*: that it was religious, cultic, or ritual, and that it was exclusively male. As my analysis will show, both of these questions require a great degree of interpretation and extrapolation, and my results should therefore be interpreted as cautious suggestions rather than statements of fact. In truth, we can claim to *know* little about either matter.

Section 4.2 ‘The Marzēah as Cultic, Religious, or Ritual?’ is dedicated to tackling the question of the *marzēaḥ* having a religious, cultic, or ritual character. I will explain these terms in detail in Section 4.2.1 ‘Theoretical Frameworks.’ As that section will show, we do not have evidence for the *marzēaḥ* being cultic, and the question of whether it was religious is of little use within the ancient Near Eastern context. However, that section also finds that certain theories of ritual might be usefully applied to the phenomenon. This application is then attempted in Section 4.2.2 ‘Analyzing the Marzēah via Ritual Theory,’ which reads the *marzēaḥ* via the lens of ritual and ritualization. The placement of the theory chapter is unusual for a thesis, but necessary: the choice of ritual theory as a theoretical framework can only be properly justified once we know the phenomenon and sources we are studying, so it cannot come before Sections 3 and 4.1. Furthermore, the theories are only used in sections 4.2 and 4.3.

This thesis primarily uses theories of ritual and ritualization as formulated by religious studies scholar Catherine Bell in her books *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992) and *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (1997) as well as her journal article “The Ritual Body and the Dynamics of Ritual Power” (1990). She herself follows from the works of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and historian Michel Foucault, among others. As relevant, their theories are introduced in Section 4.2.1.

Section 4.3 is dedicated to interrogating the question of the gender of the *marzēaḥ* participants. Scholarship has overwhelmingly painted the *marzēaḥ* as exclusively male, but as I hope to demonstrate, the matter is not at all conclusive. Much of the evidence for male exclusivity is more inconclusive than it has been presented, often there is no evidence at all, and we conversely do have some evidence supporting women’s participation. The analysis is done in two parts. Section 4.3.1 ‘The Language’ examines the language used to refer to the *marzēaḥ*-participants in order to prove that they are not necessarily indicative of male exclusivity. Section 4.3.2 ‘Women in the Myths’ examines women’s roles in one of our primary sources, a myth involving a *marzēaḥ*, and compares this to women’s roles in certain other myths. The discussion in this section also uses some of the theories introduced in Section 4.2.1 in order to analyze how these mythic portrayals may be used to learn about women’s lived realities.

Section 5 ‘Conclusions’ will summarize what we definitely know, what we can justifiably infer, and what we can only guess at regarding the *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit. This is followed by Appendix 1 ‘Reference Table for Primary Sources.’ It will list for each primary

source its standard name or names; language; primary publication; rough archaeological context, when known; genre; and a brief description of the contents, noting when a text is too fragmentary for proper interpretation. Appendix 2 contains a list of Akkadian and Ugaritic terms used in the linguistic analysis of Section 4.3.1. Finally, there is a List of Abbreviations and a Bibliography.

This thesis was inspired by a course paper I wrote in 2024 for a course on religions of the Ancient Near East in literature and archaeology. In that course, I attempted to apply the theories of ritual taught in the course to the *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit, theorizing that the *marzēaḥ* served in the creation of group identity within each *marzēaḥ*-association. During the writing process, I was disappointed by the state of the current scholarship, motivating me to tackle the issue in depth.

1.1 An Overview of Ugarit and Its Languages

The city of Ugarit is located on the northwestern coast of modern-day Syria, 12 kilometres north of the modern city of Latakia. While the site was occupied for 6000 years (Yon 2006, 7), we are only concerned with the last two centuries leading up to the city's fall circa 1190–1185[1]. As is the case with many things in ancient history, the date of Ugarit's destruction can only be roughly estimated. Our knowledge of its timing is based on textual sources from the time of the destruction, but the dating of the sources themselves is difficult. According to Singer (1999, 714–15, 729–30), the earliest possible date is between 1194 and 1186 and the latest possible date is 1176. He himself estimates the date to be between 1190 and 1185, and Yon (2006) agrees. This period corresponds to both the written history of Ugarit and the status of the city as the capital of a kingdom by the same name, covering some 2000 square kilometres. The fact that our sources are from the capital limits our ability to talk about the outlying regions; where those regions do show up, they are always filtered through the interests of the capital. For example, one of the texts used in this thesis is about a land ownership dispute between two local groups in a rural area. The reason for its inclusion in an archive in the capital is that the dispute took place at an international border. This made it not only a local matter but also an international one and therefore relevant to the state[2]. In this

[1] All dates are BCE.

[2] In this context, I am using the word "state" to refer to the administration governing the region of Ugarit, not to the modern concept of a nation-state.

way, we can expect rural communities to show up in our sources only when people in the capital had reason to care about their activities.



Figure 1. An approximate map of the ancient Near East circa 1200 BCE, showing the locations of relevant kingdoms and cities. Image: Caro Liikanen.

While Ugarit was a prosperous kingdom in its heyday, its fates were always tied to those of the region's powerful empires. Early in its history, Ugarit maintained cordial ties with Egypt to the south: Ugarit's written record literally begins with a letter that promises allegiance to Egypt.[3] Unfortunately for Ugarit, its friendship with Egypt did not translate into military assistance, and so when the kingdom found itself under threat from the armies of several neighbours, it turned its back on Egypt and asked for help from Egypt's long-standing rivals, the Hittite Empire, based in Anatolia, modern-day Turkey. This cost Ugarit its autonomy: the kingdom became an official vassal state of the Hittites, who used their power to draw the kingdom's borders and arbitrate international litigation. One of the most significant losses Ugarit suffered as a result was Siyannu-Ušnatu, a client state that made up a third of Ugarit's landmass before the Hittite king accepted a petition to separate the kingdom. The new border

[3] The exact date is uncertain, but Singer (1999, 622) places it to either "the late reign of Amenophis III" or "the first years of Akhenaten": in either case, at 1350 BCE at the latest, possibly in the few years previous.

between Ugarit and Siyannu ran through an important agricultural region, and border disputes between the two kingdoms, ultimately overseen by their Hittite overlords, also appear in the sources for this thesis.[4] Aside from the loss of territory, however, Ugarit continued to be treated favourably by the imperial courts. This is because of the kingdom's status as an international trading hub: gemstones, textiles, foodstuffs, raw metals, metallic objects, and other goods were traded from or through Ugarit to its neighbours and beyond, and the Hittite Empire profited off the taxes. (Singer 1999)

The texts from Ugarit represent many ancient Near Eastern languages, including Ugaritic, Akkadian, Sumerian, Hittite, Hurrian, Egyptian, and Cypro-Minoan (van Soldt 1999, 28; Yon 2006, 8). Of these, Ugaritic and Akkadian are by far the most attested, with Sumerian a strong third and the others far behind (van Soldt 1999, 28). Most of the languages are written on clay tablets using some variation of the cuneiform script, which is characterised by wedge-shaped signs pressed into the clay with a stylus.

Cuneiform originated in Mesopotamia, modern-day Iraq, where it was first used by the Sumerians to write Sumerian. The script was then adopted into several other languages, most notably Akkadian, the East Semitic language of the Assyrians and Babylonians, but also Hittite and Hurrian among others. Hittite was the language of the Hittites, while Hurrian was a language spoken in Upper Mesopotamia, especially in the kingdom of Mitanni (Wilhelm 2008, 81–82). The cuneiform script is logosyllabic, meaning that it was written using logographic and syllabic signs, and it has an inventory of several hundreds of signs[5]. In the context of Ugarit, this writing system is often called 'syllabic' cuneiform to differentiate it from 'alphabetic' cuneiform, a separate writing system which uses the same technique of pressing wedges into clay to write an alphabetic script comprising 30 signs (Sivan 2001, 9), shown in Table 1.

[4] See Section 3.5, discussing the text RS 18.01.

[5] Out of the most commonly-used sign lists in the field, René Labat's *Manuel D'Épigraphie Akkadienne* (1976) lists almost 600, while in Rykle Borger's *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon* (2004 = *MZL*) the numbering reaches about 900. The difference is accounted for by the question of what constitutes a distinct sign as opposed to, for example, a combination of signs.

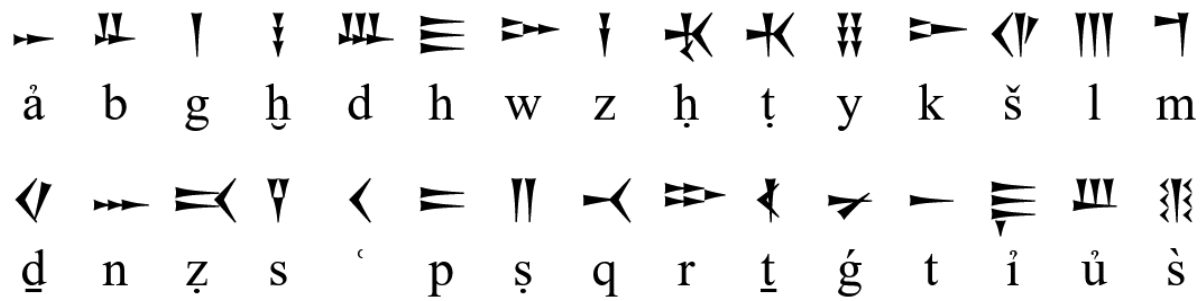


Figure 2. The Ugaritic alphabet. Image: Caro Liikanen. Noto Sans Ugaritic font Copyright 2022 The Noto Project Authors (https://github.com/notofonts/ugaritic), licensed under the SIL Open Font License, Version 1.1.

Alphabetic cuneiform was used to write Ugaritic, the Northwest Semitic language local to Ugarit.[6] Despite being called an alphabet, the script is perhaps better described as an impure abjad: there are 27 signs for consonantal phonemes plus three *aleph*-signs for *ʾa*, *ʾi*, and *ʾu*, with vowels otherwise left unmarked (Sivan 2001, 9–10). One feature of alphabetic cuneiform we can be grateful for is the use of word dividers, which are not found in syllabic cuneiform. Their use is inconsistent, but generally words are divided from each other by a small vertical wedge (Sivan 2001, 11). For the benefit of the reader with no prior knowledge of these languages and writing systems, I have included sample texts below, beginning with the Akkadian.

1	*a-na* AMA—LUGAL EN-*ia* *ana um-šarri bēlīya*[7]	[1] To the queen mother, my ‘lord’:
2	ARAD-*ki* ^{md}U-GUR—MAN-*an-ni* *urdiki Nergal-šarrani*	[2] your servant, Nergal-šarrani.

This is the beginning of a Neo-Assyrian letter to the queen mother, SAA 13 076.[8] It shows the three main ways signs can be used in syllabic cuneiform: phonetically, logographically, and as determinatives. Syllabograms, transliterated here in lowercase and italicized, represent syllables. Logograms, transliterated here capitalized and non-italicized, represent words.

[6] Within Ugarit, the script was also sometimes used to write Hurrian (Curtis 1999, 12). Conversely, Ugaritic words were sometimes written syllabically when appearing in Akkadian texts (Huehnergard 1987, 1–2).

[7] A possible alternative reading is *bēltīya*, ‘lady’ or ‘mistress’. The *CAD* (s.v. *bēltu*) does not include this spelling for the word, but Borger (2004, 285) accepts it as a reading.

[8] Transliteration, transcription and translation from SAA Online: http://oracc.org/saao/P334244.

Determinatives, transliterated as lowercase non-italicized superscript, appear before or after (usually before) a noun and indicate a category into which the thing denoted by the noun belongs (Huehnergard 2005, 113). For example, the ^{m} in ^{md}U-GUR—MAN-*an-ni* indicates that the word is a masculine personal name (Borger 2004, 417), and the ^{d} indicates that the first part of the name, *Nergal*, is the name of a divinity (Borger 2004, 249).

A single cuneiform sign frequently has several different possible values. For example, the determinative ^{d} and the syllabogram *an* on line 2 are both written using the same sign, , known by the name AN (Borger 2004, 248). In addition to its determinative and syllabic values, AN can also stand logographically for several different words. Multiple logograms can be combined to write a single word, as in U-GUR for *Nergal*, and syllabograms can be added to the end to clarify the intended reading, to mark noun case, or to show a pronominal suffix (Huehnergard 2005, 109). For example, the *-ia* in EN-*ia*, the *-ki* in ARAD-*ki*, and the *-an-ni* in ^{md}U-GUR—MAN-*an-ni* are possessive pronominal suffixes. Next is a similar example in Ugaritic.

1	*l . mlkt* *li malkati*	[1] To the queen,
2	*ådty* *ʾaddatti-ya*	[2] my lady,
3	*rgm* *rugum*	[3] speak:
4	*tḥm . tlmyn* *taḥvmmu talmiyāna*	[4] a message of Talmiyānu,
5	*ʿbdk* *ʿabdi-kī̆*	[5] your servant.

This is the beginning of a Ugaritic letter to the queen, *CAT* 2.12.[9] You can see how the only vowels marked in the writing system are those appearing with aleph, the glottal stop. The locations, phonetic values, and lengths of unmarked vowels have been deduced mostly through comparison with other Semitic languages and from phonetically-written Ugaritic words found in Akkadian texts (Sivan 2001, 37). The vocalisation of many words and grammatical forms is still uncertain, which is reflected in the sample text: in *taḥvmmu*, the *v* signifies a vowel of unknown phonetic value, and in *ʿabdi-kī̆*, the combined macron and breve over the *i* signifies unknown length. The writing system also does not mark gemination

[9] Transliteration and transcription from Huehnergard (2012, 100–101), original translation.

(Sivan 2001, 12). The lack of vowels and gemination leads to myriad homographs that can make reading alphabetic cuneiform difficult (Sivan 2001, 12–13).

As per Rowe (1999, 393), Akkadian enjoyed the status of *lingua franca,* and scribes in Ugarit were generally "biscriptal", writing in both Ugaritic and Akkadian. While one might expect the language of the Hittite overlords to be popular within Ugarit, we actually have no evidence of scribes in Ugarit ever producing texts in Hittite, according to Singer (1999, 650). The political dominance of the Hittites did not translate into cultural dominance. One kingdom whose language and culture influenced Ugarit much more was Mitanni. While Mitanni lost much of its power and land in the 14th century BCE (Wilhelm 2008, 82), it was a cultural powerhouse at the beginning of Ugarit's written history, and Hurrian-speaking scribes are believed to have worked and taught in Ugarit (van Soldt 1999, 41). They left their mark in the way both alphabetic and syllabic cuneiform was written in Ugarit: it has been suggested that one of the letters in the alphabetic script was developed for writing Hurrian (Curtis 1999, 12), and the orthography of Akkadian texts from Ugarit has features reminiscent of letters from Mitanni (van Soldt 1999, 43).

1.2 State of the Current Scholarship

In general, scholarship on the *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit has suffered from a tendency to generalize and assume. In his introduction to the Ugaritic material evidence, Curtis (1999, 5) mentions one of the most prevalent forms these generalizations and assumptions take: using Ugaritic sources for studying the Hebrew Bible without being sufficiently critical about their relevance and suitability for this task. This has been done "at the expense of an appreciation of Ugarit and its texts in their own right" (Curtis 1999, 5). At the same time, studies concerning Ugarit will frequently use the Hebrew Bible as a source without explicitly evaluating its suitability and relevance. While Ugaritic evidence can absolutely be useful and valuable for studying the Hebrew Bible, and Hebrew sources can conversely offer important supplementary information for studying Ugarit, the matter calls for methodological rigor to ensure that cultural specificity is not lost.

Since the *marzēaḥ* is found within the Hebrew Bible, it has been of great interest to Hebrew Bible scholars, leading to a great amount of literature on the subject. However, since these scholars have been mostly interested in the *marzēaḥ* because and as it exists in the Hebrew Bible, non-biblical attestations have largely been placed in a subordinate position.

They exist to help interpret what is found in the Bible, but in a turn of circular logic, they are themselves interpreted with presuppositions based on biblical material. This creates obvious methodological questions: how can we use the *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit to study the *marzēaḥ* in the Bible if we are simultaneously approaching the *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit with presuppositions based on the Bible? While there may have been great historical continuity in the *marzēaḥ* across time and place, it remains problematic to derive any specific features of the Ugaritic *marzēaḥ* from analogous phenomena attested elsewhere. It would be fallacious to claim that something we know to be shared between other *marzēaḥ* must have applied in Ugarit as well. At the same time, it is true that when the sources from Ugarit indicate or suggest a feature without completely confirming it, extra-Ugaritic evidence can make it more or less likely. That would be a valid next step after a careful analysis of the evidence from Ugarit, but outside the scope of this thesis.

2 Methodology

According to a study by Leinhardt and Young (1996), the schemas used in close reading can be divided into schemas of identification and interpretation. Identification involves *classifying* a document into a genre and finding its actors and subject; *corroborating* it to evaluate its reliability and usefulness; *sourcing* its author, time, and place; and *contextualizing* it historically and in relation to any other related documents. In short, identification aims to find the facts regarding a document. Interpretation, on the other hand, looks for meanings in a document. *Textual interpretation* analyzes things like the semantics of words and the structure of a text, while *historical interpretation* either applies different theories—such as those discussed in this section—to the text or approaches it via the different goals of historiography, such as preserving knowledge or "voicing the voiceless" (Leinhardt and Young 1996, 449). These schemas are not wholly and neatly separate, and they overlap and rely on each other. One cannot perform successful interpretation if identification was not completed satisfactorily.

This is the process that I will use in this thesis to study the Ugaritic *marzēaḥ*. Some of the groundwork to allow us to do this has been done in the introduction, where I laid out the rough historical context of Late Bronze Age Ugarit. In Section 3.1, I will introduce the specific loci in which the texts were found. This will help with the process of identification.

Then I will move on to discussing each text in turn and attempt to classify, corroborate, source, and contextualize them.

As we will see, finding all the relevant information for identification is not always easy or even possible. Some of the tablets are highly fragmentary, making it difficult to identify the subject matter or genre. We usually have little information on who the actors are, other than their names and some possible family relationships. While all of the texts save for one have at least some findspot information—giving us at least the building they were found in—the exact context they were discovered in is usually uncertain. Even when we do know quite exactly where archaeologists found an object, three millennia of destruction and erosion mean that shelves have rotted away, floors caved in, and walls collapsed. As such, we can only guess as to how, where, why, and with what other objects they were originally stored.

Having applied the schemas of identification to the texts, I will then bring in the schemas of interpretation in Section 4 'Analysis.' For this, I will make use of both textual and historical interpretation together. I will apply the theories introduced in Section 2.1 'Theoretical Framework' as well as an approach of "voicing the voiceless" in order to specifically look for women in the *marzēaḥ*, since the possibility of their involvement has not been properly investigated in scholarship. Especially the latter goal will necessarily involve careful analysis of the language of the texts. Throughout this process, I will seek to maintain the primacy of the primary sources. While existing scholarship on the *marzēaḥ* will be discussed, its claims will be analyzed critically and challenged.

As the close reading schemas of identification and interpretation are overlapping and interconnected, so will they be used in this thesis. The identification in Section 3 will necessarily involve some interpretation, and the interpretation in Section 4 will occasionally necessitate returning to identification.

3 The Primary Sources

3.1 Excavation and Publication History

The ruins of Ugarit were discovered in 1928. The site's main archaeological mound or *tell* is known by its Arabic name Ras Shamra. Owing to the French mandate for Syria and Lebanon, excavations at the site were carried out by French archaeologists with Claude F.A. Schaeffer at the lead (Curtis 1999, 6). Despite Syria becoming independent in the forties, the

excavations continued as French until 1999, when they were made officially Franco-Syrian (Yon 2006, 5). As a result, many of the finds, especially the early ones, were taken to the Louvre in Paris, and much of the literature is in French.

The tablets from Ras Shamra have excavation numbers beginning with RS, such as RS 14.16, one of the primary sources of this thesis. The first number denotes the archaeological season—also referred to as campaigns[10]—and the second number distinguishes tablets within seasons: for example, RS 14.16 is tablet 16 from the 14th campaign in Ras Shamra. While syllabic cuneiform texts from Ugarit are usually called by their RS-numbers, alphabetic cuneiform texts are more commonly referenced by their *KTU*-numbers. The abbreviation stands for *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*, a source reference collection edited by Dietrich, Loretz, and Sanmartín in 1976. A second, expanded edition, sometimes called *KTU*^{2} or *KTU2,* came out in 1995, and a third, *KTU*^{3} or *KTU3*, in 2013. The series classifies texts into genres: class three is legal texts and class four is economic texts, for example. This is represented in the *KTU*-numbers: since KTU 4.399 is considered an economic text, its number begins with a four. Where the *KTU* is a comprehensive collection of all of the alphabetic cuneiform Ugaritic texts, there does not exist an equivalent work for the syllabic cuneiform sources. As such, editions of the syllabic texts are scattered across different primary publications and thematic collections.

Prior to 2019, the standard inventory of the Rash Shamra texts was *La Trouvaille épigraphique de l'Ougarit* (TEO), published by Pierre Bourdreil and Dennis Pardee in 1989. Since 2019, however, Pardee has been working together with Miller Prosser to bring an updated database of the texts online in the form of the Ras Shamra Tablet Inventory (RSTI). The RSTI lists basic information about each object, including but not limited to their language, findspot, museum number, primary publication, size, and excavation season. The website also hosts the RSTI Web Map, which allows you to view a map of Ras Shamra with the different regions, such as residential blocks, streets, courtyards, buildings, and rooms, displayed. The estimated findspots of all objects in the RSTI database are marked on the map and color-coded to show the languages of the objects. As the website points out, some objects have uncertain find spots, and so the locations marked on the map only represent best guesses.

[10] For example, in Curtis (1999) and del Olmo Lete (2018). Both of these works also occasionally use the word *season*, which exemplifies the interchangeability of the terms. The use of the word *campaign* is generally unusual in English, and its popularity in Ugaritic studies could be a holdover from the French term *campagne*.

While texts have been unearthed from all over the excavated parts of the city of Ugarit (del Olmo Lete 2018, 9), a few locations stand out for containing especially large collections of texts. This thesis uses primary sources from several locations, which will now be discussed.

The first is the very large Royal Palace,[11] located in the northwest corner of the city, from which about 1100 texts have been found (del Olmo Lete 2018, 10; van Soldt 1991, 133–41). The palace is made up of dozens of rooms of different sizes, but the texts were mostly found separated by genre into five areas called the Western, Eastern, Central, Southern, and Southwestern Archives (van Soldt 1991, 141; 1999, 29–31). Many parts of the palace had multiple storeys which have since collapsed, making it uncertain where and how exactly tablets had been stored.[12] However, in at least the southwestern archive, tablets were found piled on top of each other in a way which suggests that they had fallen there from collapsed shelves (van Soldt 1991, 123). Van Soldt (1991) does not mention any actual shelves being found in the excavations. This can largely be attributed to wood rotting over the millennia, but the shelves might also have been destroyed in a fire which burned through large parts of the Royal Palace, including at least the Eastern Archive (van Soldt 1991, 61), Southern Archive (108), and Southwestern Archive (114). In addition to the fire, van Soldt (49) also claims that other signs of "violent destruction" were found "in every part of the palace and the rest of the city."

Texts from the Royal Palace usually have their primary publication in the six-part series Le Palais Royal d'Ugarit (PRU), itself part of the series Mission de Ras Shamra. The second volume of the series was the first to be published and came out in 1955, and according to the website for the Mission archéologique syro-française de Ras Shamra – Ougarit, the intended first volume of PRU was never released.[13] Volume six came out in 1970. In addition to transliterations, the series also includes French translations, line drawings of the cuneiform, and information on the size and find spot of each tablet.

In the northeastern part of Ugarit is the "acropolis." Located within the acropolis is the House of the High Priest,[14] where some 100 tablets were found (van Soldt 2000, 239). In addition to being a private house, the building also functioned as a scribal school for both

[11] The Royal Palace is not to be confused with the "Southern Palace", located immediately south of it, which is in fact not a palace at all but a large mansion belonging to some high-ranking elite (van Soldt 1991, 149)

[12] Van Soldt (1999, 49–123) gives an analysis of the stratigraphy of each archive in the Royal Palace.

[13] https://www.mission-ougarit.fr/parutions/serie-palais-royal-d-ugarit/

[14] Sometimes translated as *great priest*.

Ugaritic and Akkadian (van Soldt 2000, 240) and might have served as a temple library (Curtis 1999, 10, 15). While van Soldt (1991, 213–20) discusses the archaeological data from the House of the High Priest, quite little is said about how the tablets themselves were found. Some of the older tablets are said to have been reused as floor material, but it seems like most of the tablets found in the house were actually deliberately stored there (van Soldt 2000, 239–40).

North of and below the "acropolis" is the "Ville Basse", literally 'Lower City' (Curtis 1999, 11; del Olmo Lete 2018, 12). There is very little information available about this area: van Soldt does not discuss it in either his 1991 monograph or his 2000 article on private archives. Del Olmo Lete (2018, 99) mentions that there were scattered archives found in the area, mostly "in different trenches and tombs." It was primarily excavated during the 7th to 9th seasons (del Olmo Lete 2018, 99, 124), but also briefly during the 14th; one of the primary sources for this thesis, RS 14.16, was found at that time.

There are also objects for which no findspot at all is known, including KTU 3.9 in this thesis; such objects might have been looted and sold on the illegal antiquities market, destroying information about archaeological context. The specific history of KTU 3.9, as it is known, will be discussed in Section 3.8. Publishing unprovenanced and illegally acquired tablets is a major ethical problem because the practice makes researchers part of the destination market of the antiquities trade (Bonnie 2024, 500).

All texts which the word *marzēaḥ* shows up in are found in McLaughlin (2001) with transliteration, English translation, and commentary. In addition to attestations from Ugarit, McLaughlin's monograph also includes attestations from Ebla and Emar as well as biblical and post-biblical attestations.[15] More attestations from Ebla have come to light since the book's publication,[16] but for Ugarit the list should still be exhaustive.

The *marzēaḥ* is mentioned in nine texts from Ugarit. The group comprises four Akkadian legal texts, two Ugaritic economic texts, one Ugaritic legal text, and three Ugaritic myths. Their state of preservation varies significantly, from completely preserved to so fragmentary that we are left guessing as to their genre. There are additionally some texts which have, based on their preserved contents and relationship to other texts, been

[15] McLaughlin's work is part of the tradition of using Ugaritic material in Hebrew Bible studies. Specifically, his goal is to study all known attestations of the *marzēaḥ*, build a cross-cultural understanding of the institution, and evaluate certain possible allusions and references to the *marzēaḥ* in the Prophetic literature. As such, while he also reads through each of the attestations from Ugarit like this thesis does, he is not doing so with the

[16] For a brief overview of the texts from Ebla, see Archi (2005).

reconstructed to mention the *marzēaḥ*. I will go through those nine texts in which the word actually appears. This includes an overall description of the contents, the archaeological context, and what the text tells us about the *marzēaḥ*. The order is the same as in McLaughlin (2001), where Akkadian texts come before Ugaritic ones. Below is an in-depth discussion of each primary source, their archaeological contexts, and what they tell us about the *marzēaḥ*. For convenience and reference, their basic information can be found in tabular format in Appendix 1.

3.2 RS 14.16

RS 14.16 is an Akkadian text found at the Ville Basse Ouest. The left side of the tablet has broken off, most severely at its lower half, meaning that especially the middle of the text is fragmentary.[17] The fragmentation makes it difficult to identify either the function or the genre of the text, but the second line mentions witnesses and the reverse contains a list of fourteen or so names, possibly the names of these aforementioned witnesses. Their presence shows that we are looking at a legal document (Rowe 1999, 390). The operative clause likely begins on line 3, which mentions the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" (LÚ-MEŠ *ma-ar-zi-ḫi*). Then follows a list of personal names, ending on line 8. Taken together, lines 3–8 likely contain the names of the participants in the legal dealings at hand. However, it is unclear whether the names after line 3 are the names of the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" or the names of other additional participants.[18] Some of the names are mentioned in familial relationships: there are "sons", *mârê*, an "elder brother", *aḫu rabû*, and a "younger brother", *aḫu ṣiḫru*. These lines are too broken for us to count the participants or get an image of the relationships between them: might they all be family members? Whatever the relationship between the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" and these people, RS 14.16 does demonstrate that the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" could act as a "recognizable collective entity under law," as formulated by McLaughlin (2001, 13). The keyword is "collective"; they are not acting via a representative in this legal agreement.

The nature of the legal dealings documented in RS 14.16 cannot be reconstructed exactly, but we know from the remaining lines that it involved fields and a silver *lîm*. This

[17] This can be seen in Virolleaud's (1951, 175) drawing of the tablet. When you are reading a cuneiform tablet and you reach the end of the obverse side, you do not turn the tablet like you would turn the page on a book. Rather, you flip it on its horizontal axis, so that the bottom of the obverse becomes the top of the reverse. It is for this reason that damage to the bottom edge is damage to the middle of the text.

[18] McLaughlin (2001, 12) also identifies these two possibilities and does not take a stance on which one is more likely.

might suggest business involving the use, sale, or lease of agricultural land. The connection between the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" and agricultural land will prove to be a recurring theme in our primary sources. A *lîm* has been interpreted by different authors as either 10 000 or 1000 shekels.[19] Either is a great amount, indicating that the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" were involved in legal dealings of significant economic value. In addition to simple economic significance, these legal dealings were also of significance to the community, as evidenced by the large number of witnesses. McLaughlin (2001, 14) takes it to mean that "this *marzēaḥ* was an important group in Ugarit", but this does not necessarily follow: the amount of witnesses is sufficiently explained by the significance of the dealings recorded in the text without the participants having to be significant in their own right.

Van Soldt (1991, 26) makes notable observations on the witnesses mentioned in RS 14.16. Witness Munaḫḫimu, son of Gurpānu, also appears in another text, RS 16.126B+. Van Soldt dates that text to the latter half of the reign of King ʿAmmiṯtamru II[20], allowing us to tentatively date RS 14.16 to thereabouts. He then goes on to identify two other witnesses attested elsewhere as fathers of priests, which he connects to the *marzēaḥ* being a "cultic institution." Two witnesses out of fourteen being known relatives of priests is by itself not evidence of any cultic character in the *marzēaḥ*, but this connection is worth keeping in mind for later.

3.3 RS 15.88

Our second primary source is RS 15.88, an Akkadian legal text, specifically a royal writ of possession. It was found in the Central Archive of the Royal Palace, by the south wall of a room bordering the Central Court,[21] in what van Soldt (1991) calls the "northern wing" of the Central Archives. Three other texts were found in the same room, all likewise legal texts (van Soldt 1991, 86). Van Soldt (1991, 91–92) suggests that based on the elevation of the tablets, they were stored on shelves, on an upper storey, or both. In it, King Niqmepa[22] grants ownership of a house to "the men of the *marzēaḥ*" and their "descendants" (*mârî*), or possibly

[19] Virolleaud (1951, 177) gave its value as 10 000 shekels in the original commentary on the tablet. He was followed by several authors discussing the text after him (see McLaughlin 2001, 13–14n11) until Lewis (1989, 81), who cites the *CAD* (s.v. *līmu* B) to say that the real value is 1000 shekels. In RS 14.16 the word is written syllabically as *li-im*, but it bears noting that the logographic spelling uses IGI, a sign that can be broken down into the signs for 10 and 100, making it literally ten hundreds (see Borger 2004, 406–7).

[20] Reigned circa 1260–1235 (Singer 1999, 678).

[21] See the map in Nougayrol (1955b). RS 15.88 is in room 21, topographic point 182.

[22] Reigned circa 1313–1260 (Singer 1999, 638).

confirms their existing ownership. The final clause states that the house cannot be taken from them (literally 'from their hands', *ištu qâtišunu*) by anyone. The subject matter is typical of the archive the tablet was found in: according to van Soldt (1991, 93), almost all of the texts in the northern wing of the Central Archives were "legal texts concerning the transfer of land by or in the presence of a king." The dates of the rest of the northern wing vary, with six different kings of Ugarit being attested (van Soldt 1991, 92).

The tablet has a cylinder seal impression on its obverse side,[23] showing a person, presumably a king, seated on a throne. In front of him stand two figures, one of whom appears to be a goddess, and above them floats the symbol of a sun in a circle.[24] The seal is inscribed with the name of king ʿYagarum, son of Niqmaddu (Schaeffer 1955, xxiv; Rowe 1999, 396), known from the Ugaritic King List as a supposed Amorite-era dynastic ancestor to Ugarit's royal line (Singer 1999, 610). Every king from Niqmaddu II[25] onwards "signed" royal legal texts using either this seal, called the "dynastic" seal, or an official replica of it (Rowe 1999, 396). Indeed, the dynastic seal impression has been identified as the characteristic feature of Ugarit's royal legal texts, since its presence on the tablet implies the presence of the king at the transaction, according to Rowe (1999, 395). Unless the impression was made after the fact[26], the dynastic seal itself was at least present. This might not equate to the physical presence of the king: perhaps the transaction was presided over by a royal representative with the authority to use the dynastic seal on the king's behalf?

If ownership of the house in RS 15.88 belongs to the "descendants" (*mârî*) of the "men of the *marzēaḥ*", we must ask what a "descendant" is in this case. McLaughlin (2001, 15) identifies two possible interpretations. The first is that ownership is passed down to the members' biological children—he specifically says "sons"—which raises the question of what would happen if these children were unqualified or unwilling to be "men of the *marzēaḥ*." How would group property be handled if a share were owned by such a person? What about if a member died with no heirs, what would happen to his share? Because of these problems, McLaughlin prefers the second option, in which "descendants" refers to subsequent "men of the *marzēaḥ*." His interpretation finds support in the nuances of the word

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[23] For a photograph of the impression on this tablet, see Schaeffer (1956, 74, fig. 97).

[24] The cylinder was rolled in such a way that the goddess ended up on the right side, as if standing behind the king, but we know from other tablets in the archive that she is supposed to be standing in front of him.

[25] Reigned circa 1350–1315 (Singer 1999, 624).

[26] Rowe (1999, 395) claims that close examination of legal tablets shows seal impressions to have been made before the text was written, but he does not explain how this is shown.

māru. While the word does mean "son, descendant, offspring", including in legal contexts like this one (*CAD* s.v. *māru* 1.a.5'), McLaughlin points to the meaning "member of a religious group" (*CAD* s.v. *māru* 4.c), but the word can also be used for members of other kinds of groups, including professional or social ones (*CAD* s.v. *māru* 4.b). The word further carries the meaning "subordinate" (*CAD* s.v. *māru* 3, 4.a), which might explain why it would be used to specify *future* members, who would naturally be junior to the current ones.

As for interpreting the word as "descendant" in the sense of "child", this is somewhat supported by the kinship terms in RS 14.16. If the "sons", "elder brother", and "younger brother" in that text were indeed "men of the *marzēaḫ*", that would be evidence in support of membership, and therefore ownership of shared assets, being hereditary. There are at least two counterarguments to this line of reasoning. Firstly, if the people listed really were "men of the *marzēaḫ*" (which we cannot know for sure), the kinship terms might have been used to denote their status in that group, not their family relationships. *Aḫu* can refer to "real" brothers (*CAD* s.v. *aḫu* 1), but also to colleagues and associates in "social, political, legal, or emotional" relationships (*CAD* s.v. *aḫu* 2). This includes a widely attested usage in legal contexts where "co-partners" have shared ownership of property (*CAD* s.v. 2.b). The fact that they are *aḫu rabû* and *aḫu ṣiḫru* does make this less likely, since the *CAD* includes no examples of these terms being used in the context of colleagues or associates. If it were, it would probably be in the sense of senior and junior. The second counterargument is that even if the "sons" and "brothers" in RS 14.16 are men of the *marzēaḫ* and actually family members, this still would not prove that "men of the *marzēaḫ*" must be kin as a general rule.

3.4 RS 15.70

RS 15.70 is a similar writ, this one ascribed to king Ammiṯtamru II, son and successor of Niqmepa.[27] The document records the transfer of the house of the "men of the *marzēaḫ* of *šatrana*" to a *sākinu*[28]. In turn, they and their *mârî* 'descendants' are given the house of a man identified simply as Ibramuzi. The familiar closing clause stating that this property cannot be

[27] McLaughlin (2001) uses an alternative regnal numbering system created by Kitchen (1977), according to which this is Ammiṯtamru IV, son of Niqmepa VI. Kitchen's system includes kings attested only in the Ugaritic King List, adding 17 or so to the 11 we know from elsewhere. This is not the standard in Ugaritic studies: usually only those kings known from outside the List are considered when assigning regnal numbers.

[28] Translated 'vizier' by McLaughlin (2001, 15). The *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies* (Watson and Wyatt 1999) uses 'prefect', and the *CAD* (s.v. *sākinu*) declines to translate the word at all, instead giving the definition "a high official."

taken away from the "men of the *marzēaḥ* of *šatrana*" or their *mârî* follows. The obverse has been pressed with the dynastic seal.[29]

One question raised by this text is the identities of the parties involved. Ugarit had two distinct offices called *sākinu*: the singular *sākinu* of the country and the several *sākinu* who acted as village governors, called *sākin āli* '*sākinu* of the village.'[30] The lack of a modifier makes it likely that this is the *sākinu* of the country. This was a very high office indeed: private letters sent to the *sākinu* were stored in the Royal Palace, and the *sākinu* was involved in official correspondence with foreign powers (van Soldt 1999, 37–38) and overseeing international trade (Heltzer 1999, 444). If the house of the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" was fit to serve as a gift to one of the most powerful men of the country, one is inclined to think it must have been quite a building. On the other hand, it is possible that the building did not serve as a residence or similar for the *sākinu*, or to the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" for that matter: it could have also been a storage space, for example.

The meaning of *šatrana* is unclear. The word is written syllabically *ša-at-ra-na* with no determinative, but some scholarship has taken it to be the name of a deity.[31] This connection seems to trace back to god lists from the time of King Esarhaddon of the Neo-Assyrian empire. These god lists mention the divine names KA.DI, AN.GAL, and […]-*ra-an* (Landsberger and Bauer 1927, 73). According to Landsberger and Bauer (1927, 73), KA.DI and AN.GAL are thought to be the same god, and […]-*ra-an* has been presumed to be a reading for AN.GAL. Then, Weidner (1933, 99) suggests restoring […]-*ra-an* as *sa-a-at-ra-n*(*a*). However, the reasoning behind this restoration is unknown.[32]

At the very least, we know that KA.DI is almost certainly the name of a god, since it appears in the text RS 16.157 preceded by the determinative DINGIR.[33] Therefore, the question becomes whether KA.DI is correctly read as *šatrana*. Borger's (2004, 257) and Labat's (1976, 49) sign lists do not think so, instead suggesting *ištaran*. The *CAD* (s.v. *ištaru*

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[29] As noted by Nougayrol (1955a, plate xvii) in his drawing of the cuneiform.

[30] As well as *hazannu āli*, 'chief magistrate of the village' (Heltzer 1999, 434–35; *CAD* s.v. *ḫazannu*, *ālu*).

[31] This is the opinion accepted by McLaughlin (2001, 16), for example.

[32] Weidner credits Erich Ebeling with suggesting this restoration and says that Ebeling plans to discuss the matter in detail in the second volume of his work *Tod und Leben*. The first volume of Ebeling's *Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Babylonier* was published in 1931, and I have not been able to find any indication that the planned second volume ever made it to publication. When Weidner (1952) wrote a brief contribution on the topic of *šatrana* to the *Archiv für Orientforschung* 20 years later, he cited his own 1933 article when mentioning Ebeling's restoration. This leads me to believe that the second volume of *Tod und Leben* never saw the light of day, and thus neither did the justifications for Ebeling's restoration.

[33] Published in *PRU* III, p. 83–84 with transliteration and French translation. There it is read as *šatrana*, probably for the reasons detailed above.

4) says that the meaning of *ištarān* is uncertain and suggests it may be the name of a goddess. The entry then notes that KA.DI is a "variant or popular etymology of the name Sataran, god of Dēr", Dēr being an ancient city in the east Tigris region (Novotny 2023, 93) and therefore very far from our region of concern.[34] Of course, the fact that these different names differ only in their vowels (and sometimes the exact quality of the sibilant) means that these might plausibly be different versions of the same word. Further investigation of this issue would fall outside of the possibilities and scope of this thesis: for our purposes, the meaning of *šatrana* is not known, but the possibility that it is the name of a deity is worth considering. If that is the case, then this is our first attestation of a *marzēaḥ* being associated with a god.

The tablet was found in the "northern wing" of the Central Archives[35] in a room next to the one from which RS 15.88 originated, with just six or seven meters of horizontal distance between the two objects.[36] However, while RS 15.88 likely originated on an upper storey, this one is from what van Soldt (1991, 75, 91–92) calls the "ground-floor." In general, older texts originated on upper floors and newer texts on lower floors, possibly because the newer texts were still in everyday use while the older ones were simply being kept in storage (van Soldt 1991, 75, 92–93). This implies that the arrangement recorded in RS 15.70 was still current and relevant when the Royal Palace was abandoned, while RS 15.88 was less so. This, together with the tablets being kept in such close proximity—adjacent rooms of the same wing of the same archive—might support identifying the two *marzēaḥ* with each other. If RS 15.70 had overruled the writ in RS 15.88, 15.88 would have been moved into long-term storage as it was no longer current. This connection can only be made very tentatively, especially since, as van Soldt (1991, 93) points out, we cannot actually prove the practice of storing in-use tablets on a lower level than ones in long-term storage.

3.5 RS 18.01

Our last Akkadian source for the *marzēaḥ* is RS 18.01. While the tablet was discovered in the Southern Archives of the Royal Palace of Ugarit, it was probably written in the kingdom of Siyannu. In this royal writ, ascribed to and bearing the seal of King Padiya of Siyannu, the

[34] Notably, Novotny (2023) uses the form *Ištarān* for the name of this deity.

[35] The RSTI and *TEO* give this object's findspot as being located within the Eastern Archive, but this seems to be a mistake. Both the tablet's original publication in *PRU* 3 (see the list on page 273) and van Soldt (1991, 75) list it as part of the Central Archives, and the room number given even in RSTI itself is also very much in the Central Archives. A note has been added to the RSTI on the issue.

[36] Distance estimated on the map in Nougayrol (1955b). RS 15.70 is in room 30, topographic point 195.

"vineyards of Hurrian Ishtar" (A-ŠÀ-MEŠ GIŠ GIŠ-GEŠTIN *ša* ^{d}EŠ$_4$-TÁR *ḫur-ri*) in Šuksu[37] are divided between the "men of the *marzēaḥ* of Ari" and the "men of the *marzēaḥ* of Siyannu." As mentioned in Section 1.1, Siyannu was a past client state of Ugarit, and land ownership at the border of the two kingdoms was often disputed. While these disputes could begin as minor issues between local farmers, they could and often did escalate into major conflicts that could require arbitration by Hittite overlords (Singer 1999, 662). As Ari[38] was a coastal town belonging to Ugarit, located at the kingdoms' frontier (Rowe 1999, 410–11; Singer 1999, 662–63), we know this text to be referencing a border dispute. Since it was relatively common for these disputes to require international diplomacy, the involvement of two royal courts in resolving this one is not evidence of the overall importance of these "men of the *marzēaḥ*" or their landholdings. As McLaughlin (2001, 17) points out, royal involvement in this case was incidental.

The main question brought up by this text is the significance of the "Hurrian Ishtar" associated with the vineyards. Firstly, who is this referring to? Ishtar is a well-known, originally Mesopotamian goddess of warfare and sexual love (Heffron 2024), but the meaning of the epithet *ḫur-ri* in this context is unclear. Puech (1993) discusses three possible interpretations based on attestations in Phoenician, Ugaritic, Akkadian, and hieroglyphic Egyptian: "at the tomb" (*du tombeau*), "at the window" (*à-la-fenêtre*), and "Hurrian" (*ḫurrite*). Puech argues for the reading "at the window" and interprets goddesses with this epithet as being connected to healing. Nonetheless, "Hurrian Ishtar" is how most scholars translate the name.

Secondly, and more importantly, we must ask what connection the two *marzēaḥ* in RS 18.01 had to this ^{d}EŠ$_4$-TÁR *ḫur-ri*, if any. McLaughlin (2001, 18) considers the vineyards' dedication to the goddess indirect evidence that she was the divine patron of the two *marzēaḥ*. Some other scholarship draws an even stronger connection. Puech (1993), for example, apparently considers the goddess to have been involved with the ritual activities of the two *marzēaḥ*. I find this line of reasoning to be overstated, since it does not necessarily follow that a *marzēaḥ* which owns land dedicated to a deity must itself be dedicated to the

[37] Šuksu (or Šuksi) has been identified with Tell Sukās (van Soldt 2005, 42), located about 35 kilometers south-southwest of Ugarit as measured on a map. Because Šuksu is not mentioned in Ugarit's administrative records, it is believed to have belonged to Siyannu (van Soldt 2005, 69).

[38] This toponym is normalized variously as Ari or Aru. In this text it appears as part of the phrase LÚ.MEŠ mar-zi-i ša ^{uru}a-ri 'men of the *marzēaḥ* of Aru'. This implies that the *-i* at the end is the genitive ending, making Aru the basic form of the word. However, some authors (such as Singer 1999) prefer to keep the *-i*, possibly because genitive was often the preferred case for toponyms in Ugarit in general (van Soldt 2005, 160–61). I have opted to keep it as well.

same deity. The vineyards were apparently already "vineyards of the Hurrian Ishtar" before this land dispute. Do the *marzēaḥ* become associated with the goddess as a result of their acquiring the land? Or is the idea that land dedicated to a specific deity could only be acquired by an owner with the same patron? On the other hand, it could be that these groups had already owned these vineyards for a longer time and this dispute was about nailing down the details of where their respective claims begin, rather than about anyone receiving new land. This is somewhat supported by the fact that in other records of land disputes near Šuksu and elsewhere on the border, ownership has been granted on the basis of tradition (van Soldt 2005, 69): each kingdom kept those fields which had historically belonged to it. It is difficult to speculate what the background might have been in the case of RS 18.01. While it is certainly notable that these *marzēaḥ* owned land dedicated to a deity, I do not find this to be sufficient evidence for identifying the *marzēaḥ* with that deity.

RS 18.01 also importantly tells us that a *marzēaḥ* could be associated with a specific location, and that they were found both in the periphery of Ugarit and in other kingdoms (although we must keep in mind how closely Siyannu was related to Ugarit). A *marzēaḥ* located in one kingdom could be recognized as a legal entity by the officials of another kingdom, which speaks to their legitimacy. This is also the first concrete evidence we have of a *marzēaḥ* owning land other than real estate. While this text talks about vineyards, it stands to reason that they could own other kinds of agricultural land as well. This is useful context for texts like RS 14.16 above and KTU 4.399 and KTU 3.642 below, all of which might have mentioned a *marzēaḥ* owning agricultural land, but which are too fragmentary to say this for certain.

3.6 KTU 4.399

The *KTU* classifies our first alphabetic text, *KTU* 4.399 = RS 18.138, as a record of fields owned by individuals, within the genre of economic texts. McLaughlin (2001, 19) considers it a "record of fields and an enumeration of their produce." While the text is too fragmentary to ascertain the genre, these interpretations seem most believable. There are two parts that might be related to the *marzēaḥ*.

The first is on line 6, which has the word *ʿšrh*, 'his/her banquet'. According to McLaughlin's translation, this banquet is being given olive trees. There are two things to note about this. Firstly, the word translated as 'olive trees' is *zt*, which can also mean 'olive' and

‘olive grove’ (*DUL* s.v. *zt*). Since the tablet otherwise talks about “fields”, it would be odd to discuss individual trees here: the scale is very different. It is therefore more believable that these were entire olive groves. Additionally, only the last letter of the word *tn*, translated by McLaughlin as “[you] give”, remains. The reconstruction is therefore dubious, especially since the verb *ytn* ‘give’ is not used anywhere else in this text, indicating that no one else is being “given” anything.

Then on line 8 we find the *bn* . *mrzḥ*. *Bn* has the primary meaning ‘son’, but similarly to *māru*, it can also mean “member of a group” (*DUL* s.v. *bn* (I)). As such, we can take this to once again be the “men of the *marzēaḥ*." Due to the state of the tablet, we cannot be sure that the banquet and the *marzēaḥ* are connected. Other than that, this tablet reinforces the connection between the “men of the *marzēaḥ*” and agriculture.

KTU 4.399 was found in a group of tablets traditionally known as “the oven” inside Court V of the Royal Palace. Van Soldt (1991, 110) still believed, as researchers did for decades, that the southwestern corner of Court V contained an oven meant for burning clay tablets—thus hardening and preserving them—and that right before the palace was destroyed, a last load of about 75 tablets was placed inside. To the excavators, it appeared that pieces of the wall of the Southern Archive had fallen and crushed the roof of the oven (van Soldt 1991, 110). However, it is now believed that the tablets originated from an upper floor of the Southern Archive that had fallen into the courtyard (Pitard 1999, 49–50). The oven-structure is unrelated and probably built by squatters (Singer 1999, 705).

3.7 KTU 4.642

	…	
1	[ ]x[ ]	[1] [ ] ? [ ]
2	[mr]*zḥ* . ʿ*n*[t]	[2] [the *mar*]*zēaḥ* of ʿAn[at]
3	[ ]*šir* . *šd* . *kr*[m]	[3] [ ] fruit of the field, the vineya[rd]
4	[ ]*l* . *mrzḥ* . ʿ*n*[t]	[4] [ ] to the *marzēaḥ* of ʿAn[at]
5	[ ]l . *mrzḥ* . ʿ*n*[t]	[5] [ ] to the *marzēaḥ* of ʿAn[at]
6	[l] . *mrzḥ* . ʿ[nt]	[6] [to] the *marzēaḥ* of ʿA[nat]
7	[mr]*zḥ* . ʿ*n*[t]	[7] [*mar*]*zēaḥ* of ʿA[nat]
	…	…

I have included above a full transliteration and translation of *KTU* 4.642 = RS 19.103, which is our next text. The transliteration is based on *KTU* 2,[39] the translation is that given by McLaughlin (2001, 19). This is necessary for the reader to grasp the fragmentary state of the text as well as the central question it poses: who or what is *ʿn*[t]? As the transliteration shows, all that is preserved of this word in any instance is the first two letters, *ʿn*. There does not seem to exist a published photograph of the tablet,[40] but Virolleaud's handcopy in *PRU* 5 does not show any indication of what the missing letter might be. The *t* to make *ʿnt* is therefore completely reconstructed. This is, however, the way this text is generally reconstructed in scholarship,[41] with the assumption being that the word is supposed to be the name of ʿAnat, a Ugaritic goddess of war and hunting (Wyatt 1999b, 242).

While this reconstruction is plausible and indeed quite widely accepted, it is by no means the only possibility, nor is its acceptance universal. Clemens (2001, 452–53) gives the same assessment and includes a list of authors who have accepted or challenged the matter. He suggests that the modifier after *mrzḥ* could also be a personal or geographical name. It is possible that the word is indeed supposed to be ʿAnat, and at least equally possible that it is something else. It could be the case that scholars have been eager to reconstruct the word as ʿAnat because they expect to see the *marzēaḥ* be associated with deities.

The tablet was found in room 80 of the Southwestern Archives of the Royal Palace. The archive consists overwhelmingly of economic texts, with Hurrian cultic texts forming the second-largest group (van Soldt 1991, 122). Van Soldt (1991, 123) believes the texts from room 80 were stored in an upper storey because there was very little space for storing tablets on the ground floor. He also suggests that most of the texts from the archive date to the last 50 years of Ugarit's existence, which works to tentatively indicate the age of *KTU 4.642*, otherwise undatable based on its contents alone.

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[39] The way reconstructions and breaks are marked also follows the conventions of *KTU*. Broken-off letters are in square brackets, complete letters are italicized, and partially-preserved letters are non-italicized (Dietrich, Loretz, and Sanmartín 2013, xi).

[40] According to its entry in *KTU* 3, the only photograph of the object is in the private collection of the Ugarit-Forschungen, owned by the publisher Ugarit-Verlag.

[41] McLaughlin credits Osso Eissfeldt with suggesting the reconstruction in the 60s, but I was not able to access Eissfeldt's works myself.

3.8 KTU 3.9

KTU 3.9 = RS 1957.702 = RS [Varia 14][42] originates from the illegal antiquities market and therefore has no known archaeological context. Loren R. Fisher (1971, 7) describes how he found it, along with other similarly unprovenanced tablets, being sold in Paris by a Swiss bank in 1969. He and some other scholars gathered funds to buy the tablets, and in 1970, the lot was moved to the collections of the Claremont College. *KTU* 3.9 remained there until 1994, when it was sold to the private Martin Schøyen Collection, where it remains (Mandell 2019, 39).

The object's entry on the Schøyen Collection's website claims the item was "excavated" in 1957 and belonged to Claude Schaeffer until it was sold to the Claremont College, but the veracity of these claims is extremely dubious.[43] There were no official excavations in 1957, a fact that is stated already in Fisher's (1971, 7) account. He states that the tablet was given the "excavation number" RS 1957.702 because 1957 is the year it is likely to have been looted. Fisher makes no mention of the tablets possibly belonging to Schaeffer. If the tablet really had been in the possession of Schaeffer, the lead archaeologist, it would be odd that its contents were only published in 1971 after it was acquired by Claremont College.[44] It is therefore likely that this provenance is a fabrication.

The text is a legal document detailing the establishment of a *marzēaḥ* in the house of a man named Samūmānu (or Samūmānū). Samūmānu is called the *rb*, 'chief' (*DUL* s.v. *rb* II), and he enters into a contract with the *mt . mrzḥ* 'men of the *marzēaḥ*'. The details of this contract are somewhat vague and require a close reading of the original text.

Samūmānu gives an *ibsn*—likely a part of the house, the precise meaning of which will be discussed later—for the *marzēaḥ* to use, and agrees to pay fifty silver if he were to "drive them out", meaning if he were to revoke the *marzēaḥ*'s right to use this space. After this is established, it is said that no "man of the *marzēaḥ*" will demand Samūmānu to pay *ksp . tql d ʿmnk* '(the) silver, (the) shekels which you have', literally "which (are) with you." *D* is the masculine singular determinative-relative pronoun, and *ʿmnk* is made up of *ʿm* /ʿimma/, a preposition of accompaniment (*DUL* s.v. *ʿm* I.2) with an enclitic *-n* /-na/ (Huehnergard 2012,

[42] "Varia" RS-numbers such as this are generally the result of an object being given more than one RS-number during the excavation (Jonathan Valk, pers. comm., February 19, 2025). However, in the case of this tablet, the number is attributable to the object's lack of a provenance.

[43] The entry is available at https://www.schoyencollection.com/palaeography-collection-introduction/early-writing-introduction/first-alphabets/lawsuit-ugaritic-ms-1955-6. Accessed June 14th, 2025.

[44] The primary publication is Miller's (1971) *The Mrzḥ Text*.

143) and the singular second person masculine pronominal suffix *-k* /-kă/. It is uncertain what this silver is that any "man of the *marzēaḥ*" is forbidden to demand. Maybe the 50 silver mentioned earlier actually represents a kind of deposit that the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" made before they were allowed to use the space, and this clause about the *ksp . tql d ʿmnk* means that no member may ask for his part of that deposit to be returned prematurely?

The matter is made more complicated by the last clause, *ṯqlm . ysʿ* 'he will pay the two shekels'. We know it to be specifically two shekels, because the word for shekel, *ṯql*, is feminine, and feminine nouns only get a suffixed *-m* to mark number in the dual (unlike masculine nouns, which get an *-m* in both dual and plural). The verb *ysʿ* comes from the root n-s-ʿ meaning "to pay" and is in the third masculine singular prefix conjugation, identifiable by the prefixed *y-*. The first radical, n, is weak and assimilates to any consonant immediately following it; as such, it is not marked in writing in G-stem prefix conjugations (Huehnergard 2012, 66). Friedman (1979, 203) suggests[45] translating this clause as "they paid the shekels," implying that this is a third masculine plural prefix conjugation.[46] While this would fit the context, it does not reflect what is actually written. The 3mp prefix conjugation of this verb would be *nsʿ*, and even if this were an unusual case of the suffix conjugation being used for completed past action, the 3mp form would be *tsʿ* or *tsʿn*[47].

As for what the *ibsn* is that Samūmānu has set up for the *marzēaḥ*, that is a matter of some contention. The word is a hapax legomenon, appearing nowhere else in the Ugaritic corpus, and interpretation relies therefore on identifying possible related words in other Semitic languages and on its context within *KTU* 3.9. The usual interpretation is 'warehouse', derived from the Akkadian word *abūsu* 'storehouse' (*DUL* s.v. *ibsn*; *CAD* s.v. *abūsu*). However, Fenton (1977, 72–73) suggests, based on the word's context within the text as well as Hebrew and Akkadian cognates, that the word might translate to 'dining-complex'. This would encompass all the different spaces required for the storage, preparation, and consumption of food. He argues that if the *marzēaḥ* is established in a house, then the dining would take place within the house, requiring the presence of dining facilities and not only a storeroom. It would therefore be odd for the document to only list the establishment of a storeroom, when more than that is required for a *marzēaḥ*.

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[45] His suggestion is followed at least by McLaughlin (2001, 24 n. 55)

[46] Prefix conjugation denotes completed action, while suffix conjugation denotes incomplete action, whether that be in the present or future, or even unfinished past action.

[47] *Tsʿ* for the jussive-preterite and volitive, *tsʿ* for the indicative.

3.9 KTU 1.114

KTU 1.114 = RS 24.258 is a mythological text from the South Acropolis. It is mostly in a good state of preservation, but the very bottom of the tablet is broken, meaning that the middle of the composition is lost. The original Ugaritic sometimes makes it unclear who the subject of certain actions is, but roughly the story goes as follows. El hosts a banquet in his palace, and the gods arrive to eat food and drink wine. El encourages them to drink wine to satiety and drunkenness, which they do. They apparently get so drunk that someone—possibly either the god Yariḫ or El himself—scavenges for food beneath the table like a dog, and the goddesses Athtartu and Anat prepare cuts of meat for this scavenger. The heavily intoxicated El has to be carried home by the gods Thukamuna and Shunama, and upon arriving there, he passes out in his own feces and urine. Athtartu and Anat go off to hunt, followed by a break in the tablet. When the text resumes, Athtartu and Anat are administering some kind of curative to El, recovering him from his passed-out state.

The *marzēaḥ* appears on line 15 in the sentence *ỉl . yṯb . b mrzḥ* 'El sat/sits in his *marzēaḥ*'. Narratively, this takes place just before El becomes so intoxicated that he has to be carried home. The line begs the question: is the *marzēaḥ* here a place, an event, or something else? McLaughlin (2001, 28–29) says *yṯb.b* was idiomatic and always referred to a place, and this is indeed how it is used elsewhere in the Ugaritic corpus (*DUL* s.v. /*y-ṯ-b*/). Ugaritic poetry makes frequent use of parallelism, and indeed the word *mrzḥ* has a probable parallel, *åš*k[ ], the first word on line 15. Unfortunately, the word is mostly destroyed. As can be seen in Figure 3, only the first sign, *å*, is fully preserved; the two after it are badly damaged, and the next two are completely destroyed. Even the restoration of the *š* and *k* is not concrete. Pardee (1981, 267) suggests *åškrh* 'his drinking-feast', which is plausible but uncertain.[48] If this is the parallel of *marzēaḥ*, then we might interpret the word as referring here to an event, though this would still have the problem of going against the known usage of *yṯb.b*.

[48] For discussion of other suggested restorations, see McLaughlin (2001, 27–29).



Figure 3. A close-up photograph of *KTU* 1.114, showing the beginning of line 15 as the second from the top. Department of Antiquities, Syria, Mission de Ras Shamra, via the InscriptiFact Digital Image Library: https://digitallibrary.usc.edu/asset-management/2A3BF1S2T9Z7N.

Van der Toorn (1996, 154–55) notes that the scene of sons supporting their very intoxicated father is a recurring theme in Ugaritic literature. We find a close parallel in the Epic of Aqhat, when the god Baal appeals to the god El that El would grant the protagonist Danʾel a son. Baal lists the desirable qualities that the son should have, including that the son should "grasp his arm when he's drunk" and "support him when sated with wine" (Parker 1997, 53).

3.10 KTU 1.21.II

The last text is another literary text, more fragmentary than the last. The II in the name of *KTU* 1.21.II = RS 2.19 means this is the second column of a multi-column composition: there

seems to have been four or six columns in total (Pitard 1992, 52), but the others are all destroyed. The left side of this one, and therefore the beginning of each line, is also lost. The tablet was found in the House of the High Priest.

The state of the object makes its contents difficult to interpret. It is even uncertain whether the word *marzēaḥ* even appears: instead of the usual spelling *mrzḥ*, the tablet says *mrzʿy*, with the *y* at the end probably being a first-person singular pronominal suffix for "my." Researchers take *mrzʿ* to be a rare variant spelling. However, while the word appears twice—once at the beginning of line 1 and once at the beginning of line 5—the initial *m* is damaged in both instances. The beginning of the text is seen below in Figure 4. On line 1, the vertical wedge seen of *m* is entirely preserved (refer to Figure 2 for the shapes of the letters), but the clay immediately to the left of it is chipped off so that the presence of the horizontal wedge is impossible to ascertain. On line 5, even the vertical wedge is badly damaged, but still very faintly visible.

Of course, an *m* is not the only letter that ends in a vertical wedge. Other possibilities are *g*, *l*, and *ṣ*.[49] If it were an *l*, it would likely be the preposition *l-* 'to, on, from' (Sivan 2001, 195–96). There are no real candidates for what the word might be if the letter were *g* or *ṣ*, and neither letter can function as a prefix. Therefore, if the letter were either of those two, it would most likely belong to the word preceding *rzʿy*. In this case, one would expect there to be a word divider, which is otherwise employed quite consistently by the scribe. Pardee (2011, 24) finds it unlikely that the word divider might have just been forgotten, since this word repeats twice and the divider is missing both times. As Pitard (1992, 52) points out, the wedges in the *l*-signs seen elsewhere on the tablet are generally thinner than the one at the beginning of line 1. Indeed, the width of the wedge at hand seems to be consistent with *m*-signs seen elsewhere on the tablet.[50] Pitard (1992, 52) also mentions a "clear juncture point on the upper left side of the wedge" at the point where the horizontal of an *m* would meet the vertical. In the photograph, this "juncture point" is not easily distinguishable from a break in the clay, but taken together with the other epigraphic considerations, it does seem very probable that it is a trace of the horizontal of an *m*, making this word indeed *mrzʿ*.

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[49] Pardee (2011, 24), when discussing the broken sign, does not mention *g* at all. I am unsure why this is: there seems to me to be no reason to believe that there must necessarily be more to the sign than the vertical wedge.

[50] You can see several *l*-signs in Fig. 4, including one at the end of what is visible of line 1, one in the second position on line 3, and two on line 4, one near the beginning and one at the end. No complete *m*-signs are visible in this picture, but you may view a larger mage of the top of the tablet in the InscriptiFact database: https://digitallibrary.usc.edu/asset-management/2A3BF1S269T43.



Figure 4. A close-up photograph of the left side of lines 1–5 in *KTU* 1.21.II. Department of Antiquities, Syria, Mission de Ras Shamra, via the InscriptiFact Digital Image Library: https://digitallibrary.usc.edu/asset-management/2A3BF1S26H210.

As for its contents, the text seems to consist of someone speaking an invitation to the *rpum* and the *ilnym* to come to his house (*bty* 'my house'), his palace (*hkly* 'my palace'), its shrine (*åṯrh*, 'its sanctuary'[51]), and his *marzēaḥ* (*mrzʿy* 'my *marzēaḥ*'). The invitation repeats, and the second time El is specified as the speaker. He might also be the speaker in the first part, but this is uncertain. The text makes heavy use of semantic thetic parallelism, most likely synonymous parallelism. In synonymous parallelism, there are two or more *cola*, singular

[51] The literature variously translates this word as 'its/his shrine' and 'its/his sanctuary' (McLaughlin 2001, 31–32; Parker 1997, 199–200; Yogev 2021, 18–19; Wyatt 2002, 318). The disagreement on 'his' versus 'its' is due to both being marked by the same possessive suffix *-h* in Ugaritic. As for the meaning of *åṯr*, none of the scholarship on this tablet seems to explain where the interpretation comes from, and the word is not found in Ugaritic dictionaries. The word does have apparent cognates in Akkadian, where the word can mean either 'sanctuary' or 'place' (*CAD* s.v. *aširtu*; *ašru* A).

colon, each of which is a complete clause. Every word in one colon has a parallel word in the other colon or cola.[52] Usually, the word order in the parallel cola is the same, but sometimes the order of parallel, synonymous words is reversed (Segert 1983, 298). We see this in the lines of *KTU* 1.21.II where the *rpům* and the *ỉlnym* are addressed:[53]

11 12	[b hk]l*y* . *ảṯrh* . *rpum* [l tdd . aṯ]r*h* . *l tdd* . i[nym]	[11] [into] my [pal]ace. To its shrine, O shades, [12] [hasten], to its sh[rine], hasten, O spi[rits].

Here, the first colon has adverbial - subject - verb word order and the second colon has adverbial - verb - subject word order. This parallelism tells us that the *rpům* and the *ỉlnym* likely have the same referent.

As for the meaning of the words, that is a matter of significant debate. One common interpretation is that the *rpům*, singular *rpů*, are deified ancestors, reflected in the *DUL*'s (s.v. *rpů*) definition "healer, divine ancestral hero". Parker (1997, 196) prefers to similarly interpret them as "shades of the dead", although he also lists other possibilities that have been brought up in scholarship: "(a) minor deities, (b) heroic warriors, (c) a tribal group, (d) the shades of the dead, or (e) some combination of (a)–(d)." The matter is further complicated by the existence of the Hebrew cognate רְפָאִים 'Rephaim'. The Ugaritic *rpům* were already identified with the Rephaim by Virolleaud (1941, 1) in *Les Rephaïm: Fragments de Poèmes de Ras Shamra*, the primary publication of *KTU* 1.21.II. The meaning of *ỉlnym* does not definitively clarify the issue: that word is a derived adjective meaning 'the divine ones' (de Moor 1971, 241; *DUL* s.v. *ỉlny*). The DUL claims it is "basically used of dead and deified heroes / kings", but this is evidently based on the contexts the word is usually found in and not strong evidence in either direction.

The opinion that the *rpům* are deified ancestors has to do with the appearance of the word in *KTU* 1.20 and *KTU* 1.22, and the narrative connection that has been drawn between *KTU* 1.20–22[54] and the Legend of Aqhat[55]. I will not elaborate on the story here: Yogev

[52] As explained by Segert (1983, 298). Segert does not use the term *semantic parallelism* to describe this phenomenon, but Watson (1999, 170–71) does. It should be noted that while one may be used to line divisions agreeing with poetic divisions, this is not generally the case in Ugaritic (Huehnergard 2012, 22). A colon may therefore spill over into several lines, and one line may contain parts of several cola. This is why it is important to remember that a colon in this context is a complete clause, not a line.

[53] Translation reformatted from that found in McLaughlin (2001, 32)

[54] See Parker (1997, 196–204) and Yogev (2021, 11–38).

[55] See Parker (1997, 49–80).

(2021, 5–44) discusses the texts and their connections in depth. Suffice it to say that while the connections have led many to interpret the *rpỷm* as the shades of dead, heroic ancestors, Yogev's (2021, 43–33) analysis of the material leads him to conclude that they may actually be living ancestors, including in *KTU* 1.21.II specifically.

The use of parallelism in the text also gives us hints as to the meaning of *mrzʿ*. The invitation is given to "my *mrzʿ*, my house, my house, my palace, its shrine, its shrine, my *mrzʿ*." McLaughlin (2001, 33) suggests that the house and the palace form a parallel pair, and that the shrine specifies them, as evidenced by its third-person possessive suffix. This seems likely. However, McLaughlin then takes the shrine and the *mrzʿ* to form another pair, which is rather more doubtful. The *mrzʿ* has the same first-person possessive suffix as the house and the palace, so it grammatically resembles them more than it does the shrine. Additionally, McLaughlin does not explain why the *mrzʿ* appears at both the beginning and the end of the chain.

4 Analysis

4.1 Synthesizing the Evidence

Before moving on to interpretation, let us summarize what the schemas of identification can extract from the evidence concerning the *marzēaḥ*.[56] The word is mostly found in the phrase "men of the *marzēaḥ*", which seems to denote the people associated with a *marzēaḥ*, possibly the "members" of one. The "men of the *marzēaḥ*" could function as a legal entity, recognized by both the royal court at Ugarit and foreign courts as well.

"Men of the *marzēaḥ*" could own different kinds of real estate, including at least vineyards and houses, as evidenced by texts in which royal courts grant ownership of these to different "men of the *marzēaḥ*"-groups. We do not have absolutely certain evidence for any "men of the *marzēaḥ*" owning other kinds of agricultural land, but RS 14.16, *KTU* 4.642, and especially *KTU* 4.399 mention the *marzēaḥ* in connection with fields and olive groves in a way that very strongly indicates they were owned, or at least administered, by a "men of the *marzēaḥ*." We can therefore be relatively certain that "men of the *marzēaḥ*" could and at least sometimes did own and administer different kinds of agricultural land, although the details of

[56] It should be noted that when I speak below of "the *marzēaḥ*" and "the 'men of the *marzēaḥ*'", I am speaking of the *marzēaḥ* and the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" specifically at Ugarit. I am making no statements about the phenomena outside of Ugarit unless otherwise specified.

how this land and its produce were used are uncertain. We do not know who worked the land and whether the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" processed and consumed the produce themselves, sold it in a processed state, sold it in its raw state, or something else.

As for houses, there are two kinds of houses or parts of houses shown to be in the use of a "men of the *marzēaḥ*." The primary sources include two royal writs of possession in which "men of the *marzēaḥ*" are granted ownership of a house in perpetuity. We do not know what these houses were like or what the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" used them for: they may have been residences, storage spaces, or something else. In *KTU* 3.9, a *marzēaḥ* is established in a person's house, and an *ibsn* is set up for it. The meaning of the word is uncertain, but the most likely meaning is 'dining-complex' or perhaps 'warehouse'. We therefore know that a *marzēaḥ* could be set up within a house, and that specific parts of the house could be in its use.

The phrase "men of the *marzēaḥ*" is found with three different qualifiers: there is the "men of the *marzēaḥ* of *šatrana*", the "men of the *marzēaḥ* of Ari", and the "men of the *marzēaḥ* of Siyannu." Additionally, *KTU* 4.642 mentions something being given to "the *marzēaḥ* of ʿAn[ ]." Ari and Siyannu are known to be place names, but *šatrana* and the broken ʿAn[ ] are less certain. Both have been theorized to be the names of deities, but in neither case is this interpretation certain. Therefore, we know for certain that a *marzēaḥ* could be associated with a place, specifically a town, and we have tentative evidence of associations with deities as well. The fact that "vineyards *ša* ^{d}EŠ$_4$-TÁR *ḫur-ri*" are divided between two *marzēaḥ* in RS 18.01 has traditionally been taken to indicate that these *marzēaḥ* were likewise associated with that deity, but the evidence is weak. However, it is important to highlight that just because we have several examples of *marzēaḥ* being associated with places and deities[57] does not mean that every *marzēaḥ* must have necessarily had such an association.

While the *marzēaḥ* is attested already in the third millennium, meaning that the phenomenon was already ancient by the time of Ugarit, new individual *marzēaḥ* were likely still being established. This is indicated by *KTU* 3.9, which described the establishing of a new *marzēaḥ*. It should also be explicitly noted that there were indeed several *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit and at least one in Siyannu.

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[57] Assuming that any of the proposed associations with deities (Šatrana in RS 15.70, ʿAnat in *KTU* 4.642, and Hurrian Ishtar in RS 18.01) are real in the first place.

New people could become members in an extant *marzēaḥ*, as evidenced by texts in which ownership of property is given to "men of the *marzēaḥ*" and their *mârî*. The word *māru* has several possible interpretations, including 'descendant', 'member of a group,' and 'subordinate', and is likely used in this context to refer to future members. The interpretation that the "future members" were specifically the actual, biological sons of the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" is also plausible, but since kinship terms are also used to refer to group membership, this was not necessarily the case.

The social and economic status of the *marzēaḥ* and their members seems to have been very high. Ugarit's royal court cared about them enough to give them real estate, and when the property of the "men of the *marzēaḥ* of *šatrana*" was given away, they were compensated with new property. That their property was given to a high official speaks to the kind of elite circles they were associated with. They were involved in high-value economic transactions, including one that involved a silver *lîm* likely worth 1000 shekels. The archaeological contexts of the primary sources also speak to the importance of these groups: five of the texts were found in the royal palace, showing royal interest in these groups and their economic activities. Legal contracts involving "men of the *marzēaḥ*" had many witnesses, at least a dozen in the case of RS 14.16, which means that the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" or at least their dealings were notable and important to their communities. Two of the witnesses in RS 14.16 are known to be fathers of priests, firmly in the ranks of the social elite, which is indicative of the kinds of social circles we are looking at. Even the fact that these things were written down is significant, since literacy was not very common (Wyatt 1999a, 579).

We do not have conclusive evidence that there was feasting involved with the *marzēaḥ* on earth. The mythological *marzēaḥ* certainly involved feasting to great excess: *KTU* 1.114 is entirely about a lavish feast and its consequences, and *KTU* 1.21.II contains an invitation to some kind of gathering, which might well have been a feast as well. It does not therefore take much inference to say that the earthly *marzēaḥ* also involved feasting. The real estate holdings of the known *marzēaḥ* fit neatly with this interpretation. If a *marzēaḥ* owned vineyards and fields and had access to a house or a part of a house, it could feasibly produce most of what a feast needs: food, drink, and a place to consume them. This line of logic does not begin with the evidence the way I wished to do with this thesis, but since the practice of

feasting is quite universally accepted in scholarship,[58] I am willing to stretch my methodology and accept that the *marzēaḥ* almost definitely did include feasting.

To conclude this synthesis, let us attempt an actual definition of *marzēaḥ*. I suggest interpreting it as an institution. An institution is a form of procedure that is "recognised and accepted by society" and governs "the relations between individuals and groups" (Mohan 2022, 58). An institution is like a blueprint for how group activity is to be carried out, and it defines how the members of a group deal with each other and with the rest of society (Mohan 2022, 58–59). The *marzēaḥ* as an institution controlled the activities of individual *marzēaḥ*-associations,[59] and these associations are what the word usually refers to in the primary sources. The members of a *marzēaḥ*-association were collectively referred to as the "men (*amīlu*, *awīlu*, *bn*, or *mt*) of the *marzēaḥ*". A *marzēaḥ* could have a *rb*, meaning a chief or a leader, but since this is only attested in one case, this was not necessarily a universal feature.

In the literary sources, the word *marzēaḥ* seems to have referred to a place, an event, or both. For example, when in *KTU* 1.114 El is said to be sitting (*yṯb*) *b mrzḥh*, 'in his *marzēaḥ*', this might mean that he is sitting in a place referred to as the *marzēaḥ* or in an event (specifically a feast) referred to as the *marzēaḥ*. The known idiomatic usage of *yṯb.b* makes it more likely that the *marzēaḥ* in question is a place. This interpretation is tentatively supported by *KTU* 1.21.II, where the *marzēaḥ* has the parallels 'house', 'palace', and 'sanctuary.' This meaning of the word is not found in the non-literary sources, except perhaps *KTU* 3.9. In light of the mythological texts, one wonders whether Samūmānu is establishing a *marzēaḥ* in his house in the sense of turning his house (or a part of it) into a *marzēaḥ*-place. However, since the rest of the text concerns matters of interaction between the "men of the *marzēaḥ*", it still seems more likely that the word refers there to an association. It might be that *marzēaḥ* only refers to a place in literary texts, or that it can also refer to a place in non-literary texts and we just do not have examples of this. In any case, the primary referent seems to be a kind of association known as the *marzēaḥ*, which functions according to the norms of the *marzēaḥ*-institution.

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[58] To cite a few examples of scholars who think the *marzēaḥ* involved feasting, there is McLaughlin (2001, 35), Pope (1981, 176), and Lewis (1989, 83). The *DUL* (s.v. *mrzḥ*) also accepts 'banquet' as one of the word's meanings.

[59] "Association" is defined as " a group of people organised for a particular purpose or a limited number of purposes" (Mohan 2022, 57). A *marzēaḥ* had members, so it was a group of people; and it had rules, a leader (at least sometimes), and a legal status, so it was organized. Defining the purpose of a *marzēaḥ* is more difficult, but one could point to the administration of real estate or to the organization of feasts as constituting a purpose.

4.2 The Marzēaḥ as Cultic, Religious, or Ritual?

4.2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

The *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit has often been interpreted as "religious", "cultic", or "ritual". For "cult", I am borrowing Donald R. Redford's (2002, 62–63) definition of the word in the ancient Egyptian context: cult is "what people did to interact with their gods." While cult might not have functioned identically in Ugarit, as a fellow ancient Near Eastern culture, it should be a close enough point of comparison for the definition to be workable. Our primary sources give extremely little indication of any interaction with gods taking place: the closest we get is the flimsy connection that several *marzēaḥ* have with what might be deities. While there is certainly room for speculation, any claim that the *marzēaḥ* was cultic is beyond the evidence.

Asking whether something in an ancient Near Eastern context was religious comes with the built-in assumption that these societies had a clearly delineated "religious" sphere, when this was likely not the case. For example, Wyatt's (1999a, 531–37) description of the Ugaritic cosmology does not concern a separate "religious" cosmology that existed alongside a "secular" cosmology, the way we today have largely separate religious and scientific cosmologies. The Ugaritic cosmology was simply how they thought the world to be; they did not identify it as religious. It would be anachronistic to make a clear distinction where none exists. Pointing to a specific phenomenon, in this case the *marzēaḥ*, and asking whether it was "religious" is therefore not very productive: whatever answer you give, you are drawing a boundary that actual Ugaritic people would probably not have made.

So we do not have evidence for calling the *marzēaḥ* cultic, and asking whether it was religious is not very useful. However, the claim that it was "ritual" has potential. Within the theoretical framework I will be using to examine the *marzēaḥ*, ritual is defined as a social practice that is distinct from other social practices. It is not distinguished by what is done, but rather by how it is done (Bell 1990, 302). This definition allows us not to get bogged down by anachronistic definitions of religion or by a need to connect the practice to specific deities or to wider Ugaritic religion. Instead, it will allow us to approach what we do have evidence of—practices, people, spaces, and myths—and see how these features of the *marzēaḥ* come together to produce meaning.

As said above, this theoretical framework defines *ritual* as a social practice that is distinct from other social practices, distinguished by how this practice is done (Bell 1990, 302). This means that ritual need not involve anything specific like "sacred" or "magical" elements or sacrifice: instead, it must deliberately act to distinguish itself from non-ritual activities. Bell (1992, 90) uses the example of the Christian Eucharistic meal. While it mimes the activity of a regular meal, the Eucharistic meal involves a larger gathering of people, is carried out repeatedly at specific times, and gives its participants too little food and drink to be physically nourishing. These are all forms of *diacritica*[60] which serve to privilege the Eucharistic meal over regular meals (Bell 1990, 303). The process of differentiating an activity from other activities by doing it in a distinct way is called *ritualization*.

From Foucault, Bell borrows an emphasis on how power is localized and embodied in rituals. She mentions in her article his example of a public execution, where the large-scale power of the state over the individual is "carved upon the body of the criminal" by the executioner (Bell 1990, 307). In this way, the larger economic and social structures of power are localized in the ritual of the public execution and embodied by its participants.

Applying the theory that ritualization is the deliberate differentiation of an activity, how is the public execution differentiated from other kinds of violence? The location of the execution is one factor: there is generally a stage set out for executions, placed in an accessible and visible spot within a town or village, allowing the crowd to easily observe as the punishment is carried out. The activity follows a certain script, so that predetermined things are said and actions are carried out in a predetermined order. This can get very granular and involved, specifying details like "the duration of the death agony on the stake or the wheel" (Foucault 1977, 34). As Foucault (1977, 34) notes, the violence was not indiscriminate, but carefully codified and calculated. The public execution, thusly ritualized, affects not only the executed but also the observers, who are sure to remember the sight and whom the spectacle is designed to affect.

From Bourdieu, Bell gets certain theories of social construction, such as the theory of the *habitus*. Bourdieu (1990, 53) defines habitus as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures." A *disposition* is a tendency to act, think, or feel in certain ways. Therefore, habitus is a system made up of socially-acquired norms and practices, the way one perceives the world, the

[60] This word for the means of distinguishing an activity from other activities is taken from Dietler and Hayden (2010, 9)

things one does and the way one does those things: schemas which are learned through socialization. The habitus endows a person with socially-acquired senses, like a sense of duty, a sense of the sacred, the sense of propriety, and the sense of ritual (Bell 1992, 80): it finds certain things proper and tasteful and others improper and distasteful. While the habitus of each individual is unique, in sociology, every individual whose individual habitus was produced by a given set of conditions is considered to have the same "class habitus" as others whose individual habitus were produced by the same conditions (Bourdieu 1990, 58–60). Individual habitus within a class are homologous, exhibiting diversity within a shared structure owing to a shared origin (Bourdieu 1990, 60).

The habitus mediates between individual agency and structural constraint. It gives the person the ability to choose to do any of the things that are part of their habitus, but not anything that their habitus does not include (Bourdieu 1990, 55). Let us use women's participation in the *marzēaḥ* as an example, imagining a world in which women may not be part of a *marzēaḥ*. The norm "women do not participate in a *marzēaḥ*" is then part of the habitus of the people who have been socialized into that society. This habitus limits women from participating. Women do not have to be violently prevented from participating, nor would there need to be a law forbidding them from doing so—the fact that "women participating in a *marzēaḥ*" is not a thing that is done is enough to keep them from doing it. This is how habitus limits agency.

However, habitus also broadens agency, which can be illustrated with an opposite example. If a society has the norm "upper-class women can participate in a *marzēaḥ*", then that would be part of the habitus produced by the conditions of that society. Upper-class women would grow up seeing women of their class participating in *marzēaḥ* (these women having been empowered by their habitus to do so) and therefore integrate that into their own habitus as well, in turn empowering them to participate. This is how conditions create habitus, which recreate the conditions that created them.

This idea of the habitus has implications for how we may use mythological depictions of the *marzēaḥ* in our study of the phenomenon on earth. According to Bourdieu (1977, 124), myths are made by the "socially informed body", meaning effectively the body with its habitus. Myths therefore reflect and communicate the values that come with the habitus, portraying as correct and proper or incorrect and improper what the habitus considers such. Myth can also exist in a symbiotic relationship with ritual: it legitimizes ritual by giving the activity a mythological context and justification (Burkert 1979, 57). While not every myth is

connected to a ritual and not every ritual is connected to a myth (Burkert 1979, 56–57), in the case of the *marzēaḥ*, it seems safe to presume that the *marzēaḥ*-myths were connected to any ritualized activity the *marzēaḥ* may have involved.

Central to these theories is a specific idea of the "body." As per Bell (1990, 300), this includes not just the physical body, but also the mind: the mind is considered to be embodied. Bodies are socialized, a process that shapes their dispositions and the way they are perceived. The resulting social body has features like "gender", which Bell (1990, 300) also uses as an example, and "race", which are not inherent qualities but rather socially constructed categories that affect how bodies are experienced. While the socialization of the body is not synonymous with the formation and functioning of the habitus, they are related and largely overlapping concepts. Like habitus, the social body is formed in the internalization of socially-acquired schemes and values; the social body has dispositions which generate practices which reproduce these dispositions; the social body is empowered by its socialization (Bell 1990, 300–301).

Bell (1990) discusses several theories concerned with the role of ritual in constructing the social body. Ritualization, described above, affects not only the activities in a ritual but also the bodies involved in it. The power relations that are localized and embodied in a ritual are embodied specifically by these bodies: in the example of the public execution, the executioner, the executed, and the audience are made to embody specific positions of power relative to each other. The act of kneeling in a ritual "generates a body identified with subordination" (Bell 1992, 99–100): ritual does not communicate existing qualities about the participants, it imbues the participants with those qualities.

4.2.2 Analyzing the Marzēaḥ via Ritual Theory

Feasting is the primary activity we know to have been associated with the *marzēaḥ*,[61] and it is what I will be analyzing through the lens of ritualization. Feasting has in and of itself been theorized to be a ritualized activity (Dietler 2010; Hayden 2010, 28–29). Dietler (2010, 65–67) defines "feast" as ritual activity involving the "communal consumption of food and drink", and "ritual" as activity that is "symbolically differentiated from everyday activities". This definition of ritual is slightly more narrow than the one we are using—ours does not call

[61] Outside of economic activities related to the ownership and administration of property. I do not see evidence of those activities being particularly differentiated from normal economic activities, so I will not analyze them here.

for the differentiation to be specifically symbolic—but fits within it: if a thing is ritual by his definition, it will necessarily also be ritual by ours.

The diacritica that distinguish a feast include but are not limited to offering and consuming exceptionally large quantities of food and drink; taking place at specific times and places that other meals are not generally set in; involving special foods not consumed at regular meals due to their price, rarity, strong and distinct taste, ability to intoxicate, or other characteristic; serving the food and drink from special vessels; and having a particular structure to how the meal is served and consumed (Dietler 2010, 89). Do we find indications of these diacritica in our primary sources?

The most obvious factor is the consumption of exceptionally large quantities of food and drink, especially drink. While it is hard to imagine that real *marzēaḥ*-feasts reached quite the same extremes as El's feast depicted in *KTU* 1.114, that myth does display notable excess. If this myth is reflective of what was considered appropriate at such a feast, as our theories indicate it is, then it is probable that the quantities consumed at a real *marzēaḥ* were also unusually large.

It is possible to eat and even drink excessively without becoming intoxicated if the items consumed have low enough alcohol content. However, *KTU* 1.114 posits intoxication as both the intended and the achieved end result. The degree of drunkenness achieved is quite extreme, too, with El passing out in his own waste. One hopes that the lived *marzēaḥ* did not replicate this feat, but it is probable that the drinking which took place at the feasts aimed at significant intoxication nonetheless. This is diacritical, since one does not generally get intoxicated at regular meals, and not even at all feasts.

Aside from their large volume, the drinks being consumed were not necessarily otherwise unusual. Viticulture played an important role in the economy of Ugarit (Heltzer 1999, 450), and wine was likely one of the principal drinks in the area.[62] Therefore, the *marzēaḥ*'s association with wine specifically is not noteworthy in this regard.[63] There is a potential avenue for further research in investigating what specific kinds of wine are referenced in *KTU* 3.9: are any of them known to be especially expensive or rare? Unfortunately, that question is outside of the scope of this thesis. The kinds of food displayed

[62] While I could not find a direct source stating this, Heltzer's (1999) article on the economy of Ugarit does not mention beer or other drinks at all, only wine. Furthermore, MacDonald (2008, 22–23) suggests that wine may have been the principal drink in ancient Israel, who shared a similar climate and geography to Ugarit (MacDonald 2008, 13).

[63] The existence of such an association can primarily be derived from the wine drunk at El's *marzēaḥ*, but this is strongly supported by the vineyards known to have been owned by real *marzēaḥ*-associations.

in the myth are noteworthy, however, since the only foods mentioned by name are different cuts of meat. Meat was probably not a very cheap and commonplace food,[64] so its centrality acts as a diacritic.

There was likely also spatial differentiation. From *KTU* 3.9 we know that a *marzēaḥ* could be based in a specific building, and if *ibsn* really means 'dining-complex', the feasts seem to have taken place in a dedicated part of that building. The fact that there were houses owned by "men of the *marzēaḥ*" might also be indicative of feasts taking place in specific locations, but we do not actually know what these houses were used for.

We do not know when these feasts were held, but they were almost certainly recurring. This is because you would not create an association that owns property just so you could have a single feast. The frequency at which they recurred is unknown, but they could hardly have been as common as regular meals: it would probably not be financially or physiologically sustainable to consume meat and wine to excess every day, or perhaps even what we would consider "weekly."

The final diacritic I wish to highlight is the very existence of the word *marzēaḥ*. The fact that Ugaritic and Akkadian had a dedicated name for it tells us that the *marzēaḥ* was understood as a distinct, non-generic social practice, separate from other social practices. It is not an etic categorization originating with the researcher; it is an emic categorization recognized by the culture being researched. This, combined with the plethora of other diacritica listed above, tells us that the *marzēaḥ* with its feasts was a social practice which deliberately and successfully distinguished itself from other social practices. In other words, the *marzēaḥ* was ritualized, and there is justification to call the feasts ritual.

This being so, what did the ritualization achieve? I have a few suggestions, but any proposed answer to this question relies on a heavy amount of inference. Firstly, I suggest that ritual was involved in the formation of the *marzēaḥ* as both an association and an institution. Part of the formation of these associations was contractual and bureaucratic, as evidenced by *KTU* 3.9. The text shows a *marzēaḥ* being established, a person being declared its *rb* 'chief', and a legal agreement being created that determines rules for the association's right to use the space given to them and the consequences if the agreement is broken. Such a contract creates

[64] Having found no source stating this explicitly either, I am inferring this from two matters. Firstly, McGeough (2007, 163–69) does not mention meat among the goods that were redistributed by the palace to royal personnel, which suggests that unlike cereals, wine, olives, and oil (which were redistributed), meat was not a staple. Secondly, in Israel, meat is known to have been uncommon outside of the elite (MacDonald 2008, 27–28). It is unlikely that the relatively nearby Ugarit differed significantly in this regard.

the *marzēaḥ* as a legal entity, but it does not create the *marzēaḥ* as a community and a social group. Legal contracts do not create kinship and trust or shared values, experiences, and identity. One would expect the members of an association that dines and gets drunk together to have those things, firstly because you would hardly feel like regularly getting drunk with a polite acquaintance, but more importantly because the act of drinking and dining brings people together. The same way that kneeling "creates a body identified with subordination" (Bell 1992, 99–100), shared feasting creates a body identified with group identity and solidarity.

My other suggestion for what these feasts achieved has to do with the elite nature of the *marzēaḥ*. As discussed in Section 4.1, the social and economic status of the *marzēaḥ* was very high. The feasts likely functioned as what Dietler (2010, 85–90) calls "diacritical feasts", which define "elite status membership" (86) and create exclusive in-groups that exist hierarchically above the out-group. To put it in simplified terms, a diacritical feast signals that its participants are better than non-participants. This interpretation also fits with what we previously listed as the diacritica that are used to ritualize the *marzēaḥ*: Dietler (2010, 86) lists diacritica typical of diacritical feasts, and includes the consumption of rare and expensive foods and the use of architectonical distinction. Both of these are among the diacritica the *marzēaḥ* uses.

When examining the *marzēaḥ*-feast as a kind of diacritical feast, it is also relevant to note the very concrete and practical financial benefit that membership in a *marzēaḥ* carried. As discussed in the synthesis, the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" collectively owned and administered real estate and had very financially significant business dealings. When you became a "man of the *marzēaḥ*", you gained access to this wealth. As a diacritical feast, the *marzēaḥ*-feast helped its participants embody this status and its associated privileges.

4.3 'Men' of the Marzēaḥ?

It is generally assumed that the *marzēaḥ* was an exclusively male institution. Either scholars explicitly state that it was for men, or they at least talk about the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" without interrogating the genderedness of these "men" at all. This is a deficiency in the scholarship because, as I hope to demonstrate, the maleness of the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" is not nearly as self-evident as it might seem. My aim in this section is not to decisively prove

that the “men of the *marzēaḥ*” were gender-inclusive, but to propose new interpretations of the evidence and critically examine the foundations of the prevailing view.

4.3.1 The Language

The “men of the *marzēaḥ*” are consistently referred to with generally masculine terms. The syllabic texts call them *amīlu* or *awīlu*,[65] while the alphabetic texts use *bn* and *mt*. A descendant or future member of the “men of the *marzēaḥ*” is a *māru*. Both *amīlu* and *mt* have the meaning ‘man,’ denoting a person of that gender (*CAD* s.v. *amīlu*; *DUL* s.v. *mt*), while *bn* and *māru* have the meaning ‘son,’ as in someone’s specifically male child (*DUL* s.v. *bn*; *CAD* s.v. *māru*).

However, each of these words also has generally accepted gender-neutral meanings. The *DUL* gives *mt* the additional meanings of ‘individual’ and “member of a group or category”, and the *CAD* describes *amīlu* in very similar terms: “designation of a person in relation to another person, to an organisation, to a city." The words also have other shared meanings, such as ‘human’ in opposition to ‘god’, but these are less relevant to our context. *Bn* can also mean “member of a group”, and it can be used in statements of quality. The *DUL* categorizes the phrase *bn mrzḥ* under these statements of quality, alongside phrases like *bn ḫrn* ‘messenger’ and *bn åmt* ‘servants’. The *CAD* gives *māru* the possible meaning “subordinate, employee, member of a group."

As we can see, every one of these words has a *generic masculine* meaning that makes sense in the context of our texts. In fact, our context makes it quite clear that the words are not being used to specify men as opposed to women, as in “the men (and not the women) of the *marzēaḥ*”, but men as in “people” or “members." So why use the translation “*men* of the *marzēaḥ*”? For one, it is standard: this is how they are usually referred to in scholarship.[66] However, I also find “men” to be a befitting translation because it, too, can be a generic masculine. “Man” can be used by itself, in “mankind”, and in compounds like “chairman” to refer to people regardless of gender (Benatar 2005, 1), but like *amīlu*, *mt*, *bn,* and *māru*, it is

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[65] The difference between the two is a matter of orthographic variation. According to van Soldt (1991, 279–80, 389–90), the semivowel /w/ is written in two ways in the Akkadian of Ugarit. The first is with the sign PI, which has the values *wa/e/i/u* and *a/e/i/uw*, among others (see Borger 2004, 382–83). The second is with either a null morpheme or *m-* when at the beginning of a word, or with *-m-* when in the middle of a word. This does not affect the meaning of the word.

[66] One notable exception happens to be the *CAD*, which talks about the “*m*.-people” in its entry for *marziʾu*.

also not truly gender-neutral.[67] As Benatar (2005, 3) writes, “true gender-neutralization of ‘man’ (in its purportedly generic contexts) could likely only be achieved at the cost of its gender-specific meaning in other contexts.” The same applies to the Akkadian and Ugaritic words: because they have certain gender-specific meanings, women are non-standard and overlooked even in their “purportedly generic contexts."

For the English “men”, this issue is compounded by the availability of truly gender-neutral alternatives like “member”, “person”, “people”, and “human." This creates a degree of plausible deniability: if the author or speaker meant people regardless of gender, why would they opt for a generic masculine instead of a more truly neutral term? However, the same might not be true for *amīlu*, *mt*, *bn,* and *māru*. Did Akkadian and Ugaritic have any truly gender-neutral alternatives that could have been used when talking about the members of the *marzēaḥ*, or was the generic masculine their only option? I decided to investigate the matter.

For Akkadian terms, I looked under “person”, “human”, “people”, “individual”, and “member” in the *Assyrian-English-Assyrian Dictionary* (Parpola 2008) and searched for the keywords in the online Akkadian Dictionary maintained by the Association Assyrophile de France[68]. Since there is no English-Ugaritic dictionary, finding terms in that language was more cumbersome. I decided to use the web browser’s search function to find instances of the keywords in the e-book version of the *DUL* and write down any entries that had a keyword in their definition. You can find a full list of the Akkadian and Ugaritic terms I considered in Appendix 2, along with their meanings as given in the *CAD* and the *DUL* respectively.

Although I strove to cast a wide net and include rather than exclude dubious terms, this is not a definitively exhaustive selection. My search might not have found rare words or ones with many other meanings more common than my keywords. However, very niche words would probably not be very interesting for our purposes, since a word like “member” would presumably be quite commonplace.

Having compiled a list of terms, I then eliminated unsuitable options in rounds. First, I culled those terms whose meanings were blatantly irrelevant for our purposes. For example, *lišānu* only refers to a ‘person’ in specific, language-related contexts, such as “person or people speaking a (foreign) language” (*CAD* s.v. *lišānu* 4.c). Then I removed any words only

[67] It should be noted that the generic masculine in English has been disappearing for decades already, and that this largely a result of the (well-justified) attention that is being given to biases and inclusivity in language.

[68] Available at https://www.assyrianlanguages.org/akkadian/index_en.php. Accessed March 12, 2025.

attested in clearly different historical periods: *ūqu* could be ruled out in this way, since it is only attested in Neo- and Late Babylonian. Finally, I examined the semantic ranges and attested uses of the remaining words to see if they might fit our context. For example, the word *pagru* refers primarily to the tangible 'body' or a dead 'corpse' or 'carcass' (*CAD* s.v. *pagru* A). All instances of the meaning 'self, person' given in the *CAD* are reflexive with an attached genitive pronominal suffix, like in *mimma ana pagriki la tanaʾidi* "do not worry about yourself at all."[69] Since our context, the "men of the *marzēaḫ*", is not reflexive, this word would not be suitable.

One Akkadian word and six Ugaritic words proved worth mentioning: ***nišū***, ***ảdm***, ***ỉnš***, ***bnš***, ***bt***, *npš*, and ***nšm***. The relatively rare *nšm* and the considerably more common *nišū* are cognates. They both have semantic ranges that overlap with those of *amīlu* and *mt* as far as referring to 'people', 'persons' or 'mankind', but both of them lack a clear usage as 'member' of a group. The few attestations of *nšm* do not include anything of the sort, while the closest *nišū* gets is "members of a family" (*CAD* s.v. *nišū* 4). *Ỉnš* and *npš* also lack any attestations in similar contexts, as does *ảdm*, which has mostly masculine meanings besides. The word *bt* derives etymologically from *bn* and functions as its feminine counterpart, for example in the phrase *bnm w bnt*, 'sons and daughters' (*KTU* 2.2, line 9; *DUL* s.v. *bt* I.1.a). *Bnš* is another derivative from *bn* and has approximately the same semantic range as *mt*, including having both masculine and generic meanings. None of these words could neatly replace *amīlu*, *mt*, and *bn* in the phrase "men of the *marzēaḫ*", so this does not seem to be a case of a less neutral term being chosen over a more neutral one.

As this has hopefully demonstrated, *amīlu*, *mt*, *bn,* and *māru* all have well-established generic masculine meanings in these kinds of contexts, and neither Ugaritic nor Akkadian has a well-established way of communicating the same idea in a truly gender-neutral way that the scribes could have opted for instead. This should sufficiently demonstrate that the phrase "men of the *marzēaḫ*" in either source language is not evidence that the participants were all necessarily men. Because of this, 'people' could be a fine alternative translation, and at least the CAD does use it (s.v. *marziʾu*). However, a generic masculine is still a generic *masculine* and therefore biased language, and 'men' has the benefit of conveying this bias. The translations emphasize different aspects of the original phrase, and both are justifiable.

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[69] Example from the text *VAS* (*Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler*) 16 22:12 as found in volume 12 of the *CAD*, p. 16.

4.3.2 Women in the Myths

In *KTU* 1.114, the goddesses Athtartu and Anat have active, integral roles in the story of El's *marzēaḥ*. They prepare food, hunt, and tend to their passed-out father without the propriety of their presence and activity ever being questioned. It is not completely clear whether they actually ate and drank: the only gods who are clearly shown to have done so are Yariḫ, who scavenges for food under the tables, and El, who drinks and becomes intoxicated. The best indication we get is during the description of Yariḫ's scavenging. Yariḫ is said to have scavenged beneath the tables (these being presumably the tables at which the gods were seated to feast), and the gods who recognize him prepare food for him while the other gods beat him with sticks. Immediately after this description, he is said to approach Athtartu and Anat, who give him food. This can be interpreted in two ways. Either Yariḫ, still crawling underneath the tables, approaches the goddesses where they are seated, and they feed him; or the goddesses are not seated at the tables, and Yariḫ crawls out from underneath the tables and goes to them. In the first scenario, Athtartu and Anat are full participants in the ritual activity, and in the second one, they might have more of a supporting role. The verb used for food being 'prepared' for Yariḫ is ʿ-d-b both when the goddesses do it and when the other gods do it, so the word choice there does not indicate that these activities were different.[70] All in all, it is certain that Athtartu and Anat were present, but it is not certain that they ate or drank or that they were seated with the other gods.

This has implications for the role of real women in the real *marzēaḥ*, although we cannot take a mythological representation of goddesses as directly representative of women's lives in society (Marsman 2003, 36). We know that myths are made by the "socially informed body" (Bourdieu 1977, 124) with its socially-acquired senses. This means that the myth of El's *marzēaḥ*, including the portrayal of Athtartu and Anat, is the product of the habitus of the people who made the myth. Their presence (and possibly their full participation) was therefore at the very least thinkable. And since the habitus is involved in the creation of social conventions in general (Bell 1992, 79), not just myths, the real lived *marzēaḥ* is also produced with those senses that found the presence (and, again, the possible participation) of Athtartu and Anat to be proper. From this, it can be inferred that women could have been present at real *marzēaḥ*-feasts as well. The nature of their participation depends on which

[70] As opposed to using two different verbs, one of which might imply simply cutting off a piece of meat while the other implies cooking meat, for example.

interpretation of the myth is used: either they were full participants like the other gods, or they might have played a supporting role. It is also plausible that they ate and drank, but did so while sitting at a different table from the others.

When we look outside of the *marzēaḥ*-texts to the broader Ugaritic mythological corpus, we do find instances of women's participation in feasts being limited. In the Baal Cycle[71], the god Baal hosts a victory feast featuring food, wine, and music. During the feast, he raises a goblet, described as follows (*KTU* 1.3 I):

12	*bk rb . ʿẓm . ridn*	[12] A large, imposing cup, a container
13	*mt . šmm . ks . qdš*	[13] Of the men of heaven, a holy cup
14	*l . tphnh . aṯt . krpn*	[14] Women may not look at, a goblet
15	*l tʿn . aṯrt . alp*	[15] Athtartu may not see…[72]

This text presents some difficulties for interpretation. Firstly, the word *aṯt* 'women' can also mean specifically 'married woman' or even 'wife', and the word is written the same in both singular and plural (*DUL* s.v. *åṯt*). The corresponding verb, *tphnh*, does not definitively tell the number either. It is a prefix conjugation of the root p-h-y with a 3ms pronominal suffix. Usually, the suffix is written *-h*, but when it is an accusative suffix (marking the object of the verb, in this case the cup), it sometimes takes the form *-nh*. Unfortunately, 3fs and 3fp of the prefix conjugation are differentiated from each other by the presence of a suffixed *-n* in the plural. We are therefore left asking if this is

t-ph-nh
3fs-see-3ms.ACC

or

t-ph-n-h
3fs-see-3fs-3ms.ACC.

This is the difference between a cup that Athtartu specifically may not see ("a holy cup the woman may not look at, a goblet Athtartu may not see") and a cup that no woman can see. In the latter case, Athtartu might be singled out because she is the wife of El, the head of the pantheon: the proscription is emphasized by pointing out that not even she may view the cup (Marsman 2003, 271).

Later in the description of Baal's victory feast, he is said to gaze upon his two daughters, Pidray and Tallay. This has led some to speculate that Pidray and Tallay were

[71] Transliterated and translated in full in Parker (1997, 81–180).

[72] Original translation. *Alp* at the end of line 15 is part of the next sentence and was left out of the translation.

unmarried and that *aṯt* refers here to specifically married women, and that Athtartu is forbidden from viewing the cup—and possibly from participating in the feast altogether—by virtue of her being married (Marsman 2003, 272–73).[73]

What might explain the absence of overt gender segregation in the myth of the *marzēaḥ*? It could be that while the institution of the *marzēaḥ* was not necessarily any more egalitarian than the society it was part of, the creation of the ritualized body overshadowed the genderedness of its participants. It is possible that by being reconstituted as a "man of the *marzēaḥ*" among other "men of the *marzēaḥ*" ("man" still functioning as a generic masculine) and internalising this shared identity through the ritualized activity of feasting, their femininity was made into a non-issue.

This idea finds interesting resonance in existing scholarship on the symbolic construction of goddess's gender in myth. In some contexts, scholarship has identified goddesses being masculinized through their presentation and behaviour, the kinds of activity they partake in, and the symbolism associated with them. For example, in the Epic of Aqhat[74], the goddess Anat "acts and dresses like a (violent) man" (Margalit 1999, 228 n. 31) and is closely associated with the bow, a masculine symbol. This is an example of how behaviour and symbolism can affect genderedness. While I do not propose that women participants in the *marzēaḥ* were necessarily *masculinized* in this way, their femininity may have ceased to be a defining characteristic.

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[73] Interestingly, it has been further speculated by Korpel (1990, 130–31) that Baal's victory feast "might be the heavenly counterpart of the *mrzḥ*." From this, Marsman (2003, 272–73) draws that since married women were forbidden at Baal's feast, they would have also been forbidden at the *marzēaḥ*. Marsman explains Athtartu and Anat's presence at a *marzēaḥ* in *KTU* 1.114 with them perhaps being unmarried at the time the myth was set in, which would explain their presence at an event that excludes married women.

This line of reasoning falls apart at the assumption that Baal's victory feast is a "heavenly counterpart" to the *marzēaḥ*. Korpel never presents any evidence or justification for the claim. He might be implying—but he never states this very clearly—that Korpel already assumes the *marzēaḥ* to have excluded married women, and therefore sees the supposed exclusion of married women at Baal's feast as a similarity to the *marzēaḥ*. This perceived similarity might then have led him to associating the two. However, with this line of logic we are left asking why believes that married women were excluded from the *marzēaḥ*: nothing in the texts in which the word is attested indicates that this is so. Furthermore, when he later discusses different congregations of the gods, Korpel (1990, 271) cites KTU 1.3:I.8–10 for his claim that the *marzēaḥ* admitted only male gods and sometimes "nubile girls." If Korpel's belief that the two feasts were connected is based on shared exclusion of married women, then that is blatantly circular reasoning.

[74] For a transliteration and translation of the story, see Parker (1997, 49–80)

5 Conclusions

This thesis set out to ameliorate the shortcomings of existing scholarship on the *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit by first building an evidence-based, culturally-specific overview of the phenomenon and then investigating some of the most commonly-made and least-questioned claims that literature has made about it. Those claims were that the *marzēaḥ* had a religious, cultic, or ritual character and that the *marzēaḥ* was exclusively male. The overview was constructed by first applying the methodology of close reading to all Ugaritic sources explicitly mentioning the *marzēaḥ*, and then bringing the evidence together to synthesize a coherent picture. The analysis of scholarly claims was done by applying relevant sociological theories to the synthesized overview, bringing in specific details from the primary sources when relevant.

Based on the evidence, the *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit seems to have been an institution of elite associations. The members of these associations were called "men of the *marzēaḥ*", with the word for *man* being variously *amīlu* or *awīlu* in Akkadian and *bn* or *mt* in Ugaritic. Another valid translation would be "people of the *marzēaḥ*". A descendant or future member of the "men of the *marzēaḥ*" was called *māru* in Akkadian, with no equivalent attested in the Ugaritic sources. A *marzēaḥ* could have a chief or a leader called a *rb*, but this might not have always been the case. The "men of the *marzēaḥ*" could act as a collective legal entity in legal and economic contexts. They could own various kinds of real estate, including at least houses and vineyards, and possibly also fields and olive groves, and they could also have the right to use the house of their *rb* (in part or in full) for storage or dining.

There were several of these associations in existence, and new ones were being founded within the timeframe of our sources. The sources from Ugarit attest to there being at least one *marzēaḥ* outside of Ugarit proper, in its ex-client state Siyannu, and more may have existed. They were officially recognized by royal courts in both Ugarit and Siyannu, and they could be associated with specific places and possibly with specific deities. However, we have no indication of the *marzēaḥ* involving interaction with deities. Based on the literary texts and supported by the non-literary texts, these associations organized feasts, which likely involved the consumption of large amounts of alcohol. These feasts were differentiated from ordinary meals by the use of several kinds of diacritica, meaning that they were ritualized.

We do not have definitive evidence for either women's inclusion or women's exclusion. As stated above, the phrases translated as "men of the *marzēaḥ*" can also well be

translated as “members of the *marzēaḥ*”. The original terminology has well-attested generic masculine meanings that fit this context, and there are no suitable, less biased alternatives. The only other evidence we have for the gender of the participants comes from El’s feast in *KTU* 1.114, which had goddesses present and participating in some capacity.

There are further inferences that can be suggested based on the analysis of ritualization in the *marzēaḥ*. The ritualization of the *marzēaḥ*-feasts might have served several functions, each of which had to do with the construction of the members’ identity as “men of the *marzēaḥ*”. The first was the creation of shared group identity and solidarity, which the members came to embody via ritualization. The second was diacritical and served to privilege the member over non-members, symbolically constructing their elite status. This is connected to the very concrete benefit that membership brought in the form of access to collectively-owned and -administered real estate. Finally, if women did indeed participate in the *marzēaḥ*, their femininity may have become a secondary characteristic to the group identity internalized via the feast. This might explain why they were included when other feasts in myths attest to women’s explicit and deliberate exclusion.

While this thesis did successfully give an evidence-based answer to the primary research question “what was the *marzēaḥ* at Ugarit, based on the sources from Ugarit?", it is evident that the Ugaritic evidence is very slim and often fragmentary, and leaves many gaps in our knowledge. For instance, while it is known that collectively-owned property could be passed down to the *mârî* of the “men of the *marzēaḥ*”, it is still uncertain whether these *mârî* were biological descendants or simply future members. The sources give no indication as to how one becomes a member in the first place. These are just a few of the questions that the sources cannot answer.

The analysis of common scholarly claims produced varied results. The claim that the *marzēaḥ* had a cultic nature was shown to be beyond the evidence, while the claim of a religious nature was shown to be an unproductive line of inquiry in the first place. The idea that the *marzēaḥ* involved ritual did prove to be justifiable, however. As for the *marzēaḥ* being only for men, the results of this thesis do not exclude that possibility. However, they do successfully show that the idea of male exclusivity is not as evident as scholarship tends to present it.

The greatly limited nature of the Ugaritic evidence has likely contributed to scholars’ unwillingness to study it in isolation from other cultures that featured the *marzēaḥ*. Indeed, now that we know what the local evidence actually tells us, it would be methodologically

justified to bring in extra-Ugaritic material to complement and compare. However, it might also be fruitful to take the primary sources seen here and bring them into closer dialogue with other sources from Ugarit. The *marzēaḥ* could be studied in the context of meals and feasts in Ugarit, or as elite associations within broader communities, to name a few potential lines of further research.

In addition to shedding light on the *marzēaḥ*, this thesis has hopefully demonstrated the value of evidence-based, culturally-specific analysis and synthesis. Even when the evidence from a given culture is limited, as it proved to be in this study, it is necessary to let it stand on its own before bringing it into dialogue with evidence from other cultures. Beginning with that kind of cross-cultural study risks generalization, unfounded assumption, and decontextualization.

List of Abbreviations

CAD: *The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago*. The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2010.

DUL: del Olmo Lete, Gregorio, and Joaquín Sanmartín. 2015. *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, 3rd ed. Edited and Translated by Wilfred G. E. Watson. Brill.

KTU: *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*. Edited by Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín. Ugarit-Verlag, 2013. 3rd ed. of *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*. Edited by Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1976.

PRU: Le Palais Royal d'Ugarit. Imprimerie nationale, 1955–70.

RS: Ras Shamra, museum siglum used by Louvre and Damascus for finds from Ugarit's Ras Shamra mound.

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Appendix 1 Reference Table for Primary Sources

Name	Lg.	Orig. publ.	Found in[75]	Genre[76]	Contents
RS 14.16	Akk.	Virolleaud 1951, 173–79	Ville Basse Ouest	Legal	Some kind of agreement with witnesses, involving "men of the *m*." Fragmentary.
RS 15.88	Akk.	*PRU* 3, 88	Royal Palace, Central Archive	Legal	Royal document (Niqmepa) granting ownership in perpetuity of a house to the "men of the *m*."
RS 15.70	Akk.	*PRU* 3, 130	Royal Palace, Central Archive	Legal	Royal document (Ammištamru) giving a house of the "men of the *m*. of *šatrana*" to a *sākinu* and giving them the house of Ibramuzi in turn.
RS 18.01	Akk.	*PRU* 4, 230	Royal Palace, Southern Archive	Legal	Siyannun royal document (Padiya) dividing a vineyard between two *m*.
KTU 4.399, RS 18.138	Ug.	*KTU* 2, 364–5	Royal Palace, Southern Archive	Econ.	Record of fields owned by individuals (*KTU2*, 365)? Might also record a transaction. Fragmentary.
KTU 4.642, RS 19.103	Ug.	*PRU* 5, no. 32	Royal Palace, Southwestern Archive	Econ.	Record of a transfer of land holdings (*KTU2*, 439)? Very fragmentary.
KTU 3.9, RS 1957.702, RS [Varia 14]	Ug.	Miller 1971, 37–49	unprove-nanced	Legal	Contract with witnesses, recording the establishment of a *m*. in the house of Šamumānu.
KTU 1.114, RS 24.258	Ug.	Virolleaud 1951, 545–51	South Acropolis	Myth	El invites the gods to a *m*.
KTU 1.21.II, RS 2.19	Ug.	Virolleaud 1941, 8–11	Acropolis, House of the High Priest	Myth	El? invites the *rpum* to his house, palace, and *m*.?

[75] According to the Ras Shamra Tablet Inventory.

[76] The genres of the Ugaritic texts follow *KTU*. The genres of the Akkadian texts are given by the author, based on the classification system of the *KTU* (see *KTU3*, ix–x).

Appendix 2 Terms for ‘People’, ‘Individuals’, and ‘Members’

Akkadian, with translations according to the CAD:

ba'ūlātu
subjects, population;
soldiers, workmen

lišānu
tongue;
statement, wording, report, gossip, slander;
commentary, synonym list;
language, technical language, special language or dialect, nationality, person or people speaking a (foreign) language;
person (captured) able to give information;
tongue of a flame, blade of a weapon or tool, plowshare, ingot

muškēnu
commoner, person not liable for service;
poor, destitute

nišū
mankind, human beings, people, workmen, soldiers;
inhabitants, population, subjects (of a king);
serfs, retainers belonging to an estate, a household, a palace, or a person;
family, members of a family

pagru
body;
trunk, torso;
corpse, carcass;
self, person;
(a star)

ummatu
main contingent, unit (of an army or workforce), mainstay, principal support, main part (of something), pack (of animals);
ummat eqli (a plant)

ūqu
people, army

zēru
seed (of cereals and of other plants);
acreage, arable land;
semen;
male descendant(s);
(special mngs., in idiomatic expressions)

zumru
: body (human body, animal body, body of an object, etc.)

Ugaritic, with translations according to the DUL:[77]

ảdm
: man;
man (coll.), mankind, people

ảḥd
: one, oneself;
adverbialised: as one, in unison, one alone, one together with, at the same time

ỉnš
: people: as element of a divine group; in general

ỉštnm
: members of a (workers') corporation

ʕbd
: servant, slave
servant (said of a special class of mercenaries or subordinate employees), person of a lower rank
faithful, devout person

ʕl
: offspring

bnš
: man, an individual, someone, person; people, personnel;
service personnel;
farmhand, labourer

bt
: daughter;
damsel;
stating a quality;
member of a group;
"daughter of" in onomastics

ǵmr
: members of a class or of a supplementary or subordinate social duty

lỉm
: people, clan

[77] The grammatical order of the list follows that used by the *DUL*.

mrů
: member of a group or class

mryn
: member of a social group

npš
: throat, fauces;
appetite, desire;
breath, force, vigour;
soul, spirit, life;
people (coll.), individual;
(piece of) offal

nšm
: people, men