



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

Report on defence of dissertation thesis

Academic year: 2023/2024

Student's name and surname: Mgr. et Mgr. František Válek
Student's ID: 91684411

Type of the study programme: doctoral
Study programme: Religious Studies
Study ID: 626316

Title of the thesis: Life, Society and Politics in Relation to Religion at Ugarit in the Late Bronze Age
Thesis department: Institute of Philosophy and Religious Studies (21-UFAR)
Language of the thesis: English
Language of defence: English
Supervisor: doc. Dalibor Antalík, Dr.
Reviewer(s): Dr. Adam E. Miglio, Ph.D.
Juan Pablo Vita

Date of defence: 26.04.2024 **Venue of defence:** Praha
Attempt: regular

Course of defence: The members of the committee, the thesis supervisor and the opponents have been introduced. The supervisor has briefly introduced the thesis and the candidate. The candidate has likewise outlined the topic and results of the thesis. The candidate's verbal summary reflected closely the text of the thesis summary submitted by the candidate into the SIS.

The first opponent, Dr. Miglio, followed by providing the summary of his opponent's review. Overall, he considered the thesis a well-executed study of Ugaritic religion. For him, the major obstacle in the study of the topic is the uniqueness of the locale of Ugarit and its complicated relationship to Mesopotamian cultural space and the influence of Biblical and Hebrew studies on the study of Ugarit. The following questions have been raised by Dr. Miglio: What is the relationship between the text written in Ugaritic and those written in Akkadian that have been found at the Ras Shamra site, and more, generally, the relationship between the Syrian and Mesopotamian strands in Ugaritic sources. Another topic is the apparent significance of certain deities that is limited only to a part of attested sources.

The second opponent, Dr. Vita, expressed a close affinity to the topic and findings of the thesis. The candidate's courage and ambition were highlighted in relation to the complex topic which demands a deep understanding of the source material. One of the contributions was the global perspective of the work which goes beyond a simple compilation and offers novel and critical approaches to the topic and older scholarship. The same critical attitude was also recognized in the thesis towards itself which serves as an indicator of a sincere and mature scholarly work. The use of was also highlighted as more than

satisfactory, as was the quality of writing and the overall structure of the work that permits easy orientation for its reader. The level of philological work was found sufficient, with possibility for improvement. The bibliography was likewise found adequate for the scope of the study. The study was recommended for publishing, after some rework. The first question was which area of study of Ugarit should in the opinion of the candidate be advanced. The second was related to the study of onomastics, specifically the significance of theophoric names and what inferences can be made from these to actual religious practice at Ugarit.

The reaction of the candidate is as follows. Faults of the work were admitted. On the topic of Akkadian texts found in Ugarit and those from outside of Ugarit, he commented that the statistical analysis shows a very complicated situation. Not all of the texts found were published, and the descriptions and general findings related to them are not consistent in current scholarship. As to the significance of the place of writing, the candidate argued for a high degree of significance. The use of cuneiform was highlighted as a medium facilitating similarity across the cultural space. Local scribes were affected by non-local cuneiform texts and consequently cultural phenomena, creating a dynamic religious environment connecting Ugarit with the wider Akkadian world. Intertextual influences can be observed between foreign texts and local practices. For example, divination texts were influenced by Mesopotamian tradition while not being literal copies. The question is whether this was caused by older local practices or adaptation to local needs and situation. Also – were divination compendia created in consequence of the arrival of Mesopotamian divinatory texts or was their articulation in Ugaritic caused by a different way? It is clear that Ugaritic compendia were related to Ugaritic practice and put into practice, while Mesopotamian texts had a more indirect relation to religion practice. Cultural articles may or may not have been adapted into local practice, essentially becoming local themselves, conditionally eroding the difference between local and foreign. Dr. Miglio found these answers to his questions satisfactory given the complicated nature of the topic at hand. The candidate briefly discussed the significance of onomastics, specifically of theophoric names for the study of Ugaritic religion. No specific findings or trends could be identified, indicating that there is no direct relationship between local practices and choice of names in a given location. Individual reasons were likely a significant factor in the choice of a theophoric name, and these elude modern inquiry.

As to Dr. Vita's question about most significant unanswered questions, the candidate has identified local cult, the so-called cult of the dead, but sees no possibility for advance in either of the fields of study. However, the excavation on the site could produce a lot of new sources, which would advance the study further. Notably, each of the archaeological clusters where texts were found gave a very different view of the society of Ugarit and allow a more nuanced understanding of the already discovered sources. Generally speaking, the candidate found that there is only a very vague and speculative notion of the inner workings of Ugaritic society, each scholar giving an implicit idea in their work, which is often not entirely founded on explicit sources. The political structure has been identified as a difficult, but key topic for future Ugaritic studies. As to a follow-up question whether and which parts of the thesis were planned to be expanded or reworked, the political issues of Ugaritic were one, as was the significance of narrative texts with regards to politics.

As part of general discussion, the topic of the concept of religion was raised. The lack of a positive conclusion of the part of the thesis devoted to this has been showed by the candidate as intentional, in

that it problematizes the concept without discarding it. The topic is addressed by showing the limits of the concept, thereby giving its usefulness in its opacity. The topic of religious continuity and the utility of comparative work has been also discussed. The question of publication of the works has been likewise raised, the candidate intending to publish some individual parts after rework and separately, the publication of a monograph not being likely.

After deliberation, the thesis was given the grade of PASS.

Result of defence:	pass (P)	
Chair of the board:	doc. Mgr. Radek Chlup, Ph.D.
Committee members:	Mgr. Martin Pehal, Ph.D.
	doc. ThDr. Jiří Gebelt, Th.D.
	prof. PhDr. Jana Mynářová, Ph.D.