"Speech from Tree and Rock: Recovery of a Bronze Age Metaphor"

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Of all semantic ambiguities in Homer, perhaps the most perplexing, and commanding the most attention of modern scholarship has been the enigmatic phrase involving "tree and/or rock."¹ In attempting to analyze this notoriously elusive phrase, scholars have generally adopted one of two methodologies: that of Indo-European comparison, or that of cultural contact between the Levant and the Mediterranean.² Despite attempts stretching all the way to the Homeric scholia, the meaning of the phrase has yet to be solved. A tantalizingly similar, and equally unsolved collocation appears in the 13th century Ugaritic Ba'al Cycle found at Ras Shamra. Although in recent years scholars have convincingly argued that the phrase in Hesiod and in the Ba'al Cycle are related, there still is no satisfactory answer regarding the meaning of this longstanding crux.³ This much is clear: the status of Levantine ports as vehicles for economic and cultural fluidity between the Levant, Anatolia and the Mediterranean during the 2nd

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¹ This paper would not exist without the generosity of others. For their support, I would like to thank Gregory Nagy, Jeremy Rau, Samantha Blankenship, Benjamin Fortson IV, Joshua Katz, Velizar Sadovski, Erwin Cook, and my mother, Elizabeth Williams-Forte, who raised her only son on a healthy diet of nurture and Bronze-Age cylinder seals. On the Ugaritic side of things, Mark S. Smith did me an immense favor by looking over my analysis and suggesting references even on points with which he disagreed. For the remaining mistakes and oversights, I have only myself to thank.

² I will use the term "rock" here to refer to the unworked material, but in this analysis ultimately the function of the object is largely irrelevant. Likewise, I use "tree" instead of "oak" to denote the general versus the specific. The phrase also appears in scholarship as "oak and rock", or "tree and stone." The use of the word "oak" is an accurate translation of the Greek, but in this case I believe that the generic "tree" is more appropriate due to the importance of the arboreal visual characteristics.

³ O'Bryhim 1996 and L-R 2010 are only concerned with the Hesiodic appearance of the phrase, and although they cite Semitic sources as parallels, there is relatively little comparative textual analysis. Ahl and Roisman 1996:226–227 attempt to reconcile the phrase as it appears in the Iliad and Odyssey.
millennium is complex, and hardly deniable. In my view, not just the Hesiodic instance of the phrase, but all of the archaic Greek attestations share a common ancestor with the Ugaritic phrase. This paper will not pursue an argument of direct borrowing, due to a lack of evidence for such a mechanism of transmission, and due to the convenient, but ultimately simplistic representation of the interwoven mythologies of the Levant, Anatolia and the Mediterranean that it would present. The following approach will integrate analysis of Greek and Ugaritic texts with visual analysis of Bronze-Age material culture, and in doing so seeks to offer a final explanation of this previously opaque collocation. It will consist of a two-step process: first, a reanalysis of the phrase in its original form as "speech from tree and/or rock," distinct from a more general formula of "tree and/or rock" that has been sufficiently addressed elsewhere; second, a definition of the crux as an ancient metaphorical phrase, with the supposition that the reflexes of the phrase found in archaic Greek constitute three distinct but overlapping stereotyped instances of the metaphor as it appears in Ugaritic. The metaphor originally describes lightning and thunder as a representation of divine speech and generative power, and likely reflects an element of archaic cultic practice that survived at Zeus’ shrine of Dodona.

4 Languages attested in the documents of Ugarit include: Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite, Luwian, Hurrian, Egyptian, Cypriot-Minoan and, of course, Ugaritic. The Uluburun and Gelidonya shipwrecks are some of the most conclusive material evidence for heavy trade between the Syro-Palestinean Coast and the Aegean. The sophistication of the trade occurring in the 14th century BCE is remarkable. For more detailed and sometimes speculative catalogs of trade, see Cline 1994. Also see Lambrou-Phillipson 1990. For an analysis of the physical evidence, see Hoffman 1997.

5 Janda 1997 has an exhaustive treatment of the "tree and stone" in Indo-European, see pp. 68–90 for Greek examples, and pp. 159–170 for Semitic examples. His work is almost entirely devoted to the linguistic reconstruction of the ur-phrase, and is generally unconcerned with overarching thematic significance. West 1966:167–169 has an extensive classification of instances not pertaining to the issue at hand, with a summary of previous scholarship. In my view, the phrase may well be a linguistic 'universal' of the two fundamental natural materials. The phrase "tree and rock" appears elsewhere in Greek, Lucill. A. P. 11.253, Juv 6.12 (cj.), Plut. Mor. I 608c, Philostr. Im. 2.3.1, Palladas A.P. 10.55, on a particularly interesting reflex of the phrase in the work of Makarios Chrysokephalos see West 1969:168 and Watkins 1995:162.
At least part of the difficulty in rendering a coherent meaning for this collocation has resulted from confusion over Plato's frequent use of the phrase. In two contexts, he paraphrases lines from the Odyssey in a manner that has suggested to many that Greeks at the time of Homer believed in anthropogenic trees and/or rocks. The lines from the Odyssey and the relevant passages in the Apology and in the Republic appear below:

ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς μοι εἶπὲ τεὸν γένος, ὀππόθεν ἐσσί.

οὐ γὰρ ἀπὸ δρυὸς ἔσσι παλαιφάτου οὐδ᾽ ἀπὸ πέτρης.

(Od. 19.162-3)

Penelope, speaking to a disguised Odysseus, asks him about his descent. “So tell me about your race, whence you are, for you are not from anciently spoken oak and/or rock,” she says. The Platonic examples hold fairly accurate to this original appearance, but with significant differences:

εἰ δὴ τις ύμῶν οὐτως ἔχει—οὐκ ἀξιώμεν γὰρ ἔγωγε, εἰ δ᾽ οὖν—ἐπιεικῆ ἂν μοι δοκῶ πρὸς τοῦτον λέγειν λέγων ὅτι “ἐμοί, ὦ ἄριστε, εἰσίν μὲν ποὺ τινες καὶ οἰκεῖοι: καὶ γὰρ τοῦτο αὐτὸ τὸ τοῦ Ὀμήρου, οὔτ᾽ ἐγὼ ἀπὸ δρυὸς οὐδ᾽ ἀπὸ πέτρης’ πέφυκα ἀλλ᾽ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων, ἰστε καὶ οἰκεῖοι μοί εἰσι καὶ ύεῖς γε, ὅ ἀνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, τρεῖς, εἰς μὲν μειράκιον ἡδη, δύο δὲ παιδία: ἀλλ᾽ ὀμοὶ οὖδένα αὐτῶν δεῦρο ἀναβιβασάμενος δεήσομαι ύμῶν ἀποψηφίσασθαι.

(Apoloy 34δ)

In Plato's Apology, Socrates claims that he has not sprung from tree and/or from rock, but from men. Plato therefore seems to have appropriated the Odyssey's lines in a very similar context, and has set in opposition “oak and/or rock” with “men” (ἔξανθρώπων).
Unfortunately, Plato has omitted a crucial word, "παλαιφάτου," from his usage of the phrase, but we will scrutinize that later.

οἴσθ’ οὖν, ἢν δ’ ἐγώ, ὅτι καὶ ἀνθρώπων εἶδη τοσαύτα ἀνάγκητρόπων εἶναι, ὃσαπερ καὶ πολιτείων; ἠ ὦτε ἐκ δρυὸς ποθεν ἢ ἐκ πέτρας τὰς πολιτείας γίγνεσθαι,

(Republic 544δ)

Plato, referring to the idea that constitutions have not sprung from trees or rocks, repeats the phrase here with ἐκ instead of ἀπὸ, perhaps intentionally denoting immediate instead of remote descent, but also perhaps rendering a looser paraphrase of the Odyssey with the addition of ποθεν and the absence of the negative οὐδενο[ε].

In the Phaedrus, the third use of the phrase, whose usage is markedly different from the Odyssey’s, refers to the cultic practices of the oracle at Dodona. Such an overtly ritualistic version of the phrase is not used anywhere else in Greek literature, and most closely resembles the Ugaritic instance of the crux. This iteration of the proverbial phrase appears to be quite ancient in its retention of an explicit notion of speech associated with trees and rocks.

οἱ δὲ γ’, ὦ φίλε, ἐν τῷ τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Δωδωναίου ἱερῷ δρυὸς λόγους ἔφησαν μαντικοὺς πρώτους γενέσθαι. τοῖς μὲν οὖν τότε, ἂτε οὐκ οὐδ’ai σοφοίς ὃσπερ ύμεῖς οἱ νέοι, ἀπέχρη δρυὸς καὶ πέτρας ἀκούειν ὑπ’ εὐηθείας, εἰ μόνον ἀληθὴ λέγοιεν: σοὶ δ’ ἰσως διαφέρει τίς ὁ λέγων καὶ ποδαπός, οὐ γὰρ ἐκεῖνο μόνον σκοπεῖς, ἐτε οὕτως εἴτε ἄλλως ἔχει;

(Phaedrus 275β-γ)
Socrates, speaking with tongue-in-cheek to Phaedrus, reports that the first mantic words were those of the oaks in the shrine of Zeus at Dodona, and that the people back then, not being as intelligent as Phaedrus' young contemporaries, were happy to listen to “oak and rock,” as long as they spoke the truth; but to Phaedrus, maybe, it matters who the speaker is and where he comes from, for he does not consider only whether the man's words are true or not.

Therefore, Plato uses the collocation of “oak and/or rock” three times, in two different contexts. On two occasions, he seems to employ lines of the *Odyssey* that describe what many reasonably interpret as an anthropogenic myth, and on a third occasion he references the cultic practice of Dodona (from source unknown), describing prophetic utterances. The 

*Phaedrus’* passage places the collocation in a speech-context: the tree and rock are speaking, whereas in the *Republic* and the *Apology*, they are silent. However, in the *Odyssey*’s passage, we have the adjective παλαιφάτου, modifying "oak," but I would also submit, extending to "rock." This attests a spoken context (that of speaking or being spoken), for the phrase that approximates that of the *Phaedrus*. The other appearance of παλαίφατος in the *Odyssey* occurs at 9.507, where Polyphemos recalls that the prophesy of the seer Telemos has come to pass: ὢ πόποι, ἥ μάλα δή με παλαίφατα θέσφατ’ ἰκάνει. Thus, even the *Odyssey* attests a link between παλαίφατα and prophetic words, or θέσφατα. Consequently, the mantic element of the phrase in the *Phaedrus* finds a Homeric ideological counterpart.

However, the collocation of “oak and/or rock” in the *Odyssey* is not completely consistent with any of Plato’s three uses of the phrase. It shares the generative semantics with its counterparts in the *Republic* and *Apology*, but has the hint of prophesy contained in the *Phaedrus’* attestation, although “oak and/or rock” is “spoken” in the *Odyssey* and “speaks” in Plato. Given these inconsistencies, it seems that Plato was communicating certain instances of

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6 On this point, see also Nagy 1990:198.
the phrase's iterations in textual or oral traditions, some attested, some not. In short, the
variety of the collocation's meanings in these contexts suggests Plato's continued use of an
ancient proverbial phrase. An examination of the other archaic Greek examples of this phrase
to see if they contain 1) a spoken context, 2) the generative element, or 3) a prophetical element
consistent with the Odyssey's attestation will assist in illuminating the underlying meaning.

Looking to the Iliad's attestation of the phrase, we find that it occurs in a transparently
spoken context:

Τρωσίν δ' αὖ μετόπισθε γερούσιον ὄρκον ἔλωμαι
μή τι κατακρύψειν, ἀλλ' ἄνδιχα πάντα δάσασθαι
κτήσιν ὃσην πτολέμεθρον ἐπήρατον ἐντὸς ἔργει·
ἀλλὰ τί ἦ μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θυμός;
μήμιν ἐγὼ μὲν ἰών, ὃ δέ μ' οὐκ ἐλεήσει
οὐδέτερον ὀνόματα, κτῆσιν ὃσην ἐπήρατον ἐντὸς
ἀφετηρίας ώς τε γυναῖκα, ἐπεὶ κ' ἀπὸ τεύχεα δύω.
οὐ μέν πως νῦν ἔστιν ἀπὸ δρυῶς οὐδ' ἀπὸ πέτρης
τῷ ὀριζέμεναι, ὃ τε παρθένος ἥθεος τε
παρθένος ἥθεος τ' ὀριζέτον ἀλλήλουν.

(Il. 22. 119-128)

Hektor considers an attempt to placate Akhilleus, but quickly reconsiders, saying: “In no way is
it possible now to woo him, either by oak and/or rock, with things which a youth and a maiden
would woo one another.” At first glance, there is nothing prophetical about the collocation in
this context, but there is a conversation of some sort taking place. Regarding "genetic"
associations here, we find the speech between a youth and a maiden, in a context of wooing, so
we have potential "genesis" of a sort, but nothing as explicit as in the Odyssey's attestation of the collocation. The subtext of procreation is implicit in the use of ὀαρίζεμεναι, but it is unclear if ἀπὸ δρυὸς οὐδὲ ἀπὸ πέτρης overlaps semantically with the following verb or construes more specifically with the preceding οὐ μέν πως νῦν ἔστιν. I think it more likely that "about oak and/or rock" construes with the latter, since the relative clause following ὀαρίζεμεναι already semantically specifies, and repeats, the verb (ὁαρίζετον). Ultimately, Hektor is considering negotiating with Akhilleus, but even if he were able to speak “from oak and/or rock” it would be of no use. It seems that the phrase as it appears in the Iliad is involved in persuasion, and appears within a sexual context. What could this overarching phrase, “speech from tree and/or rock” mean? Or what could it be?

Hesiod's use of the collocation has been the subject of much commentary, due to the phrase's particularly elliptical nature:

𫄹专家组 κοὐραί μεγάλου Διός ἀρτιέπειαί:
καὶ μοι σκῆπτρον ἔδον δάφνης ἐριθηλέος ὃζον
δρέψασαι, θηητόν: ἐνέπνευσαν δέμοι αὐδήν
θέσπιν, ἵνα κλειόμιτά τ’ ἐσσόμενα πρὸ τ’ ἔόντα.
καὶ μ’ ἐκέλονθ’ ύμνεῖν μακάρων γένος αἰὲν ἑόντων,
σφᾶς δ’ αὐτὰς πρῶτον τε καὶ ὡστατον αἰὲν ἑάδειν.

αλλὰ τί ἢ μοι ταῦτα περὶ δρῦν ἢ περὶ πέτρην:

(Th. 1. 29-35)

Once more, the phrase appears in an sonic context. The Muses are instructing Hesiod in the arts of poetry and prophesy (总产值专家组 κοὐραί ...), but Hesiod asks, “But why do I have these things about oak or rock?” In this context, the “things about oak or rock” refer to prophetic
access. A re-translation of the line as “But why do I have this prophetic access?” makes good sense given the next four lines:

τύνη, Μουσάων ἀρχώμεθα, ταὶ Διὶ πατρὶ

ὑμνεῦσαι τέρπουσι μέγασ νόον ἑντὸς Ὀλύμπου,
 εἰρεῦσαι τά τ᾽ ἐόντα τά τ᾽ ἐσσόμενα πρό τ᾽ ἐόντα,
 φωνὴ ὀμηρεῦσαι ...

(Th. 1.36-39)

Instead of digressing about himself, Hesiod refocuses his discussion on the Muses (Μουσάων), and their prophetic powers (εἰρεῦσαι τά τ᾽ ἐόντα τά τ᾽ ἐσσόμενα πρό τ᾽ ἐόντα) as opposed to his own derivative ability, (... ἵνα κλεῖσομε τά τ᾽ ἐσσόμενα πρό τ᾽ ἐόντα). From lines 36-74, Hesiod provides a genealogy of the Muses, and then resumes in line 75, ταῦτ᾽ ἄρα Μοῦσαι ἄειδον, Ὀλύμπια δῶματ᾽ ἔχουσαι. So Hesiod perhaps answers his own rhetorical question, to which he already knows the answer: he can sing of prophesy because the Muses have. So it is probable that “about oak or rock” here refers to prophetic ability, that in Hesiod's case is inspired by the Muses and their “divine voice” (... αὐδὴν / θέσπιν ...). The phrase ... τί ἦ ... has interrogative-causative, not interrogative-resultative force in archaic Greek. The common translation, therefore, of "What's the use/point?" does not quite capture the phrase's semantic profile. A closer English approximation might be "Why in the world?" Even this translation does not adequately capture the full force of the Greek, because ... ἦ ... indicates a rhetorical question to

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7 I agree with L-R 2010 contra O’Bryhim 1996, that the phrase in Hesiod does not refer to cultic objects of composed of wood and rock: "Hesiod is most probably not referring directly to the concrete oracular or cultic aspect of these elements, but to the abstract religious and sage notions that they represented. Likewise, this type of veiled allusion is exactly the one reflected in the Ugaritic passage of the Ba‘al Cycle, where, instead of a short proverbial expression we have "tree and rock" clearly linked with sacred wisdom and cosmic knowledge." L-R 2010:70, see also ibid. 82–83. After analyzing the Ugaritic evidence, I will propose a precise meaning for this proverbial expression.
which the speaker already knows the answer. Moreover, the first half of the fifth line, ἀλλὰ τί ἦ μοι ταῦτα ..., ending with a feminine caesura, appears in a unique context here. Otherwise it is found only in the Iliad, and only in the formulaic line ἀλλὰτι ἦ μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θυμός, at Iliad 11.407, 17.97, 21.562, 22.122, and 22.385. Of particular note here is its appearance at 22.122, just four lines away from the "oak and/or rock" appearance in the Iliad. Likewise, Hektor addresses himself in debating a negotiation with Achilles, just as Hesiod responds to his own question here (τὸνῃ, Μουσάων ἀρχώμεθα ...). So in Hesiod we have the first part of a formulaic line explicitly associated with speech (διελέξατο), and this line also occurs in close proximity to the "oak and/or rock" collocation in both the Iliad and the Theogony. On the basis of these facts, one must consider the phrase's appearance in the Iliad and the Theogony to be closely related. In sum, the Hesiodic attestation of the “oak and/or rock” collocation includes a clear sonic context with explicitly prophetic connotations, but without any hint of generative semantics.

Thus far, each of the three attestations in the archaic Greek sources is associated with speech acts, with the collocation in Odyssey connoting genesis, the Iliad's attestation representing persuasive speech in a sexual context, and those in the Odyssey and Theogony involving prophesy. To glean a clearer conception of what the phrase "speech from tree and/or rock" may have meant before its proverbial, murky status in archaic Greek, an examination of the oldest, and equally mysterious, instance of the collocation will be instrumental.

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8 I owe thanks to Gregory Nagy for helping on this point.
9 The use of different prepositions in the three instances of the collocation also warrants comment here. In the Odyssey the phrase occurs alongside ἀπὸ (+ genitive) with generative semantics, in the Iliad ἀπὸ (+ genitive) with sonic semantics, and in the Theogony we have περὶ (+ accusative), which means around/about in either a literal, locational sense or in a figurative, ideological sense. West 1966: 169 argues for a strictly locational sense, but this is not conclusive, see also Watkins 1995:161. See below for additional comments.
The proverbial phrase, "speech from tree and/or rock"\(^{10}\) appears three times in archaic Greek poetry, and a very similar phrase surfaces as many times in the Ugaritic Ba'al Cycle found at Ras Shamra in what is now Northern Syria. It is generally accepted that the text of Ras Shamra is a recorded instance of a much older oral-poetic tradition. As the oldest textual manifestation of this collocation, dated to the 13\(^{th}\) century BCE, the Ugaritic evidence is crucial to understanding an older and more conservative stage of the phrase, especially given the complex network of cultural and economic exchange between Anatolia, the Levant and the Mediterranean. A formulaic address that includes the phrase in question has three different speakers. In the first instance, El, the head of the Pantheon, addresses the craftsman god Kothar-wa-Hassis, in the second, Ba'al the Storm-God entrusts the speech to two divine messengers, and in the third, the two divine messengers deliver Ba'al's speech to the goddess Anat. Looking at the Storm-God Ba'al's address to Anat, CAT I.3 iii.18-32, we have:\(^{11}\)

> Hurry! Hasten! Rush!
> To me let your feet run,
> To me let your legs race
> For I have a word, and I will tell you,
> A message, and I will recount it to you,
> A word of tree\(^{12}\) and murmur\(^{13}\) of rock,

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\(^{10}\) Traditionally in Ugaritic scholarship 'abn is translated "stone," for consistency's sake I will continue using "rock."

\(^{11}\) All translations of Ugaritic text are based on Smith Pitard 2009 except where noted. Syllabification follows Smith Pitard 2009 and Huehnergard 2010.

\(^{12}\) ʽṣ likely denotes a cedar tree, but I will use a more neutral and controversy-free translation of "tree." I believe the visual form of the tree to be the crucial semantic element of the analogical metaphor that will be argued below.
Converse of Heaven with Earth,

Of Deeps to the Stars.

I understand the lightning\(^{14}\) Heaven does not know,

The word humans do not know,

And Earth's masses do not understand.

Come and I will reveal it,

In the midst of my mountain, Divine Sapan

In the holy place, on the mount of my possession,

In the pleasant place, on the hill of my victory.

I take the middle section (lines 21-28) to be essentially appositional (although there is a more nuanced bipartite organization that will be discussed below), and the systematic, interlocking repetition of key vocabulary supports such a reading:

\(^{13}\) I translate \(lḫš\) as "murmur," not "whisper" because the following reading suggests that the sound was indistinct, but not likely to be quiet.

\(^{14}\) The reading of this phrase will be the subject of the following argument, and I offer my translation in the text below.
What draws one's attention immediately is the phrase \textit{rgm ʽṣ w lhšt ʽabn}, "word of \textit{tree} and murmur of \textit{rock}," which reads very similarly to the archaic Greek textual crux.\textsuperscript{15} In interpreting this phrase within the Ugaritic text, line 26 features quite prominently. Specifically, the collocation \textit{ʽabn brq}, literally, “rock-lightning” has been the subject of much debate: some have interpreted it as a construct noun referring to particular form of lightning thought to derive from heavenly rocks, and the more common translation is "I understand lightning," with \textit{ʽabn} characterized as a g-stem verbal formation, which is echoed in \textit{wltbn} just two lines later.\textsuperscript{16} However, the internal Ugaritic evidence seems to support the minority opinion. In the vocalized text, there is relatively little evidence that demands \textit{ʽabn} be a noun or a verb.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{tabular}{|l|}
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\textit{dm\textit{rgm ʿt ly w ʿargmk}} & For I have a \textbf{word}, and I will \textit{tell it to you},
\textit{hwt w ʿatnyk} & A \textbf{message}, and I will recount it to you,
\textit{rgm ʿṣ w lhšt ʽabn} & \textbf{A \textit{word of tree} and murmur of rock},
\textit{tʾant šmm ʾm ʿarṣ} & Converse of Heaven with Earth,
\textit{thmtn kbbm} & Of Deeps to the Stars,
\textit{ʽabn brq dl tdtʾšmm} & \textbf{The \textit{rock-lightning} Heaven does not know},
\textit{rgm ltdʾnšt} & \textbf{The \textit{word} humans do not know},
\textit{wltbn hmtlt ʿarṣ} & And Earth's masses do not \textit{understand}.
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\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{15} Avishur 1984:593–594, concludes that ʿṣ and ʿabn, ("tree" and "rock") form a word-pair.
\textsuperscript{16} See Smith Pitard 2009:227–228 for relevant bibliography, and their evaluation of the structural and thematic implications of reading ʿabn as a noun or a verb. They ultimately read ʿabn as a verb.
\textsuperscript{17} There is only a minor difference in syllabic count between ʿabni and ʿabīnu, but within the larger context of the syllable/word count of the tricolon structure of lines 26–28, taking ʿabni as the first element of a compound noun is significant. We already also have ʿabni at line 23, and given the repeated, chiastic use of the nouns \textit{rgm} (rigmu),
Thematically, ‘abn brq, and line 26 as a whole, must be especially relevant given that they only appear in Ba’al's instance of the address, which is then repeated by his messengers. One cannot reconstruct the line for El's address in 1.1 III 10-16. However, all instances of the speech share the text contained in lines 27-28. This makes it unlikely that ‘abn represents a verb functioning in the construction of [main verb] + [particle] + [subordinate *yqtl verb]. If one posits that construction's presence in this passage, with ‘abînu as main verb, it follows that the negative particles (l-, hm) in lines 27-28 would also function in an extended form of this structure. One would then have to explain, somewhat violently, the same lines (and same negative particles) in El's speech as having a different syntax, since there is no verbal ‘abn which could function as a main-verb in an extended construction. However, if one takes ‘abn brq as a construct noun, the syntax of Ba’al's and El's speeches, which are otherwise identical, coincides, with Ba’al's speech simply having a further appositional noun-phrase added to the pre-existing list. This noun-phrase, "the rock-lightning Heaven does not know," therefore, must reflect something specific and revealing about Ba’al's word that only Ba’al himself can reveal. There is clearly an element of word-play occurring in this passage, with paranomasia between the words meaning "rock" and "to understand." One could perhaps argue for the etymological multiformity of ‘abn šm (šamûma) and ‘arṣ (‘arṣî) in this section, reading ‘abn as a noun is more internally consistent with the passage as a whole. Vocalizing as ‘abni, we have:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Phonetic Form</th>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>‘abni-barāqa dā-lā-tida’ū šamûma</td>
<td>b c d</td>
<td>4/13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>rigma lā-tida’ū našūma</td>
<td>b’ c d’</td>
<td>3/9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-28</td>
<td>wa-lā-tabînū/hamulâtu ‘arṣî</td>
<td>c’ d’</td>
<td>3/11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If ‘abn brq is a compound noun, then we have 4 words (though functioning as 3, since 2 compose a single compound noun) consisting of 13 syllables, but if we take ‘abn as the verb ‘abînu, we have 4 words consisting of 14 syllables, which would further imbalance the lines. Given the the other instance of punning in the passage using the noun rigma three times (lines 20, 22, 27) and the verb wa-‘argumu-ki once (line 21), it is more internally balanced for there to be one corresponding verbal form, namely wa-lā-tabînū, accompanied by two instances of the noun ‘abni.

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18 Smith 1984.
in line 26 as introducing simultaneous notions of "understanding" and "stone," but syntactically, 'abn is certainly a noun. The remaining piece of the puzzle would be an analogous construct noun-phrase to 'abn brq, and this is exactly what one finds when examining a text describing the fulfillment of Ba'al's wish to build his palace on mount Sapan.

The fragmentary text of CAT 1.101, describing Ba'al's enthronement, contains this illustrative parallel, and its evidence suggests that the noun-phrase 'abn brq has a close parallel:

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\text{\textit{Tree-lightning}, [...]}
His head is adorned (?),
With dew between his eyes
... at his base
... the horns[s] ... on him (?)
His head with a downpour from the heavens
... is watering,
His mouth like two clouds (?)…
Like wine is the love of his heart…
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Although difficult to read, this text does include a depiction of Ba'al's body in terms of natural elements. It begins with the realization of the finale of the former text, Ba'al finally sits enthroned on his mountain. The young Storm-God has attained the height of his power by inhabiting the highest geographical altitude. Notably, we find the compound-noun 's brq, "tree-lightning," which appears to correspond to 'abn brq, "rock-lightning" in the previous text. The

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\footnote{For another example of wordplay in Ugaritic see Greaves 1994.}
pairing of "word of tree" and "whisper of rock" is significant, and the tandem of "tree-lightning" and "rock-lightning" are analogously constructed. Apparent in the two Ugaritic texts is that "rock-lightning" occurs in a sonic context, and "tree-lightning" appears in a visual context. Moreover, in CAT I.3 iii, the "rock-lightning," appears in an extended parallel structure with ṭgm (word), hwt (message), ḫšt (murmur), and ṭ’ant (converse). By analogy with the other elements, "rock-lightning" is likely not just occurring in a sonic context, but actually representing a speech act of Ba’al. This speech act, I contend, is the sonic component of lightning, namely thunder, which is compared to the sound of rolling or crashing rocks. Consequently, "tree-lightning" is a doubly appropriate visual description of a branching, tree-like, lightning bolt as it strikes a tall, earthly object, such as its arboreal semi-eponymous counterpart. Thus, ʼṣ brq and ʼabn brq are metaphorical descriptions of lightning and thunder.

Pardee 1998:138, comments that this "tree-lightning" reminds one of the branching spear of Ba’al on the Ras Shamra Stele, also known as Baal au foudre, confirming the visual nature of ʼṣ brq. See also Fisher and Kutson 1969:159, and Pope and Tigay 1971:124. Heffelfinger 2007 argues that this passage consists of opposing descriptions comparing Ba’al to a mountain and those comparing him to a storm. She argues that there is an inherent opposition between these two forms of metaphors, with the mountain ultimately subordinating the storm. However, this notion neglects the fact that Ba’al only has full dominion over the storm once he has attained his palace on his sacred mountain. The two, storm and mountain, consist in a fundamentally causal relationship. Thus, her discussion of the metaphorical language, while sophisticated, is built on a false premise. Ba’al "wears" the storm because it is a recent acquisition, only gained upon the completion of his mountain-palace. Although her readings are necessarily based on her own reconstructions due to the fragmentary nature of the text, a sizable portion of them are convincing.

Thunder is frequently characterized as a divine voice in Semitic texts, especially in Akkadian omen texts, see below and n24 for Ugaritic evidence. For instances of the relationship between the sound of stones and thunder in Indo-European see Nagy 1990:181–201. However, there is not much comparative Semitic evidence, one possible example being in Akkadian ARM 14, 7:6 DN (...) ṭigimšu udannim abnam ra-ab-bi-tam it-ta-ad-di "Adad has made his thunder strong and has set down a huge rock.” See Kouwenberg 1997:84 for commentary. The equation of the sound of thunder with that of crashing or rolling rocks is perhaps a linguistic universal, e.g. English ‘rolling thunder.’ The comparison of thunder to rocks and lightning to trees is much more popular in Indo-European traditions, and is even found in Hittite ritual (see Forte forthcoming). This opens up the possibility that this metaphor, "speech from tree and/or rock" is a product of Semitic and Indo-European cultural interaction, the concept of lightning and thunder as speech-related omens from a Storm-God being nearly universal in Semitic and Sumerian religion, and the metaphorical relationship between trees and lightning, and rocks and thunder being prevalent in Indo-European traditions.
Elsewhere, Ba'āl's voice is commonly characterized as thunder, perhaps most relevantly in CAT I.4 V, which contains a well-attested expression *ytn ql, "to give one's voice." Lines 8-9 read: wtn.qlh.b'rpt / šrh.lar.š.brqm, "And may he give his voice in the clouds, May he flash to the earth lightning."23 With this in mind, one can understand the mysterious "word of tree" (rgm 'š) and "murmur of rock" (lḥšt 'abn) as representing a layered metaphor. The phrases contain visual and aural metaphors for lightning and thunder: a bolt that appears in the sky like a tree, (as seen in 'š brq) and a thunder which mimics the sound of rocks (followed in the same passage by 'abn brq).24 Moreover, lightning and thunder themselves are metaphorized as Ba'āl's divine speech, a "word (rgm) of tree and a murmur (lḥšt) of rock," consisting of these very same two components: the visual 'š brq, a lightning-bolt, and the sonic 'abn brq, namely the "thunder which Heaven does not know."25 Thus line 26 of CAT I.3 iii ('abn brq dl td' šmm), appearing exclusively in Ba'āl's speech, provides a partial gloss of "word of tree and murmur of rock" (rgm 'š w lḥšt 'abn), thereby revealing Ba'āl's ability to communicate oracularly through his lightning and thunder. Moreover, 'š brq, the key analogue to 'abn brq, occurs only in the description of Ba'āl's enthronement. As Ba'āl promised to Anat to reveal his secrets upon his enthronement, so the text itself reveals the arcane meaning of "speech from tree and rock" to the initiated audience in the description of Storm-God's enthronement.

There are additional thematic elements at work in Ba'āl's address to Anat. The sound of thunder frequently precedes heavy rain storms, which form an additional fertility motif of intercourse between heaven and earth. This notion of “converse” persists in Semitic

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23 For a detailed and current discussion of this passage, see Smith Pitard 2009:561–570.
24 As Smith Pitard 2009:224 note, rgm is used in an epistolary context as referring to the written words of letter, similar to English "to send word" (i.e. a messenger or letter). Thus a visual use of rgm seems to be corroborated by the common usage of the word throughout the Ugaritic corpus.
25 So my decision to translate 'abnas “rock” not “stone” is relatively minor, but seeks to reflect the notion that the sonic mimicry applies to the raw material of rock as well as to the worked material of stone.
traditions. Particularly relevant to this notion of “converse” are the earthly and celestial equivalents of tree and rock, and of lightning and thunder, which functioned as paired representatives of intercourse between the earthly and the divine.

Ba’al summons Anat to help him consolidate his power against his rivals. He must convince the powerful warrior Goddess to heed his call, so he uses the ultimate persuasion, a great reward. He offers her the ability to understand what no one else can, his divine speech of lightning and thunder, which will remain obscure to mankind and heaven alike. This is reminiscent of the Iliad’s attestation of the phrase, where Hektor seeks to convince Akhilleus but cannot. The Ugaritic text’s interlocking word-order of rgm, ’abn, šmm, and ’arṣ is perhaps also representative of the connective nature of the “word/murmur” (lightning/thunder) for heaven and earth in this religious text.

The description of Ba’al’s mouth as composed of two clouds (corresponding to his lips) lends further credence to the metaphoric reading of the passage in CAT I.3. The lightning and thunder issue forth from the clouds, as the Storm-God delivers his message to the world below. Thus, what the text of the Ugaritic preserves is an audio-visual metaphor for lightning and thunder, "speech from tree and rock," that is beautifully nuanced into "word of tree," and "murmur of rock," and specifically glossed by the surrounding text:

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26 See Batto 1987, Smith Pitard 2009:561–563. For this passage analyzed in terms of divine marriage, see Pongratz-Leisten, B. 2008, for which reference I thank Erwin Cook and Gregory Nagy.
27 See Brown 1999:327.
28 Wyatt 2005:115 argues that t’ant is indicative of copulation between heaven and earth.
For I have a word, and I will tell it to you,
A message, and I will recount it to you,
A word of tree and murmur of rock,
Converse of Heaven with Earth,
Of Deeps to the Stars,
The thunder Heaven does not know,
The word humans do not know,
And Earth's masses do not understand.

The latent structure of the passage reveals itself. The noun phrases, describing the bipartite
divine speech act of lightning (using the visual aspect of ṛgm three times, see n.21) and thunder
(using 1. hwt, which is semantically sonic, and 2. two construct-noun phrases with ṛbн, which
analogically describes the nature of the sound), function in an extended ABABBA structure,
with synchesis fused with chiasmus. This metaphorical phrase also occurs in Greek, although it
is significantly more worn by time and usage in those traditions. ²⁹ However, there is one more
important piece of evidence regarding the nature of this phrase, and it lies on a Bronze-Age
cylinder seal in a Northern Syrian style.

On several seals, the Storm-God appears with a branch-like object issuing from his mouth
that is particularly reminiscent of "word of tree."³⁰ One could reasonably attribute the
similarity between the "word of tree" in the Ugaritic text and the visual "word of tree" to
sheer coincidence. However, one specific seal suggests that it may not be mere chance at work.
In BM 132824, we seem to have an exact depiction of the resulting scene after Anat heeds
Ba'al's call, and returns to him along with his two divine messengers.

On the seal, as in the Ugaritic text, a Storm-God, with characteristic attributes: crown, kilt,
weapons, and subdued bull, stands atop mountains; he peers down at a winged goddess who is

³⁰ Williams-Forte 1993, in a case of exceptional insight, solely on the basis of the iconographic evidence and the
textual evidence from CAT I.3.iii 15-28, postulated that "word of tree" was referring to lightning. Seals in question
include: Louvre AO1634, Tell 'Ajjul No 43, British Museum 132824, and Kultepe Ib Pl. XIXB.
trailed closely by two armed companions; from the Storm-God's mouth, a tree shoots forth. The stylistic element of the goddess' two spears covered by her wing is characteristic of 18th century BC seals from Northern Syria. Consequently, on Syrian seal and in Ugaritic text, we have parallels at every level of detail, from the characters to their locations.

In the text, the Storm-God possesses power over a "word of tree," and on the seal, a tree appears in front of his mouth. Although it would be inaccurate to call this completely categorical, since a comparative analysis of image and text will always possess a substantial level of difficulty, the level of thematic correspondence between a Northern Syrian cylinder seal from ~1700 BC, and a northern Syrian text from ~1200 BC is so close as to suggest a significant relationship. The visual metaphor posited for the "word of tree" in the Ugaritic text may actually find its visual illustration in a corresponding cylinder seal that pre-dates the transmitted text by roughly 500 years. The implications of this are many, but it may follow that a "the word of tree" is a remarkably ancient visual metaphor for lightning as an expression of the Storm-God's power, and that this particular episode in the Ugaritic text may be included in a much more ancient mythological tradition with undiscovered antecedents.

32 The evidence from material culture makes a visual or physical analysis of "rock" in Ugaritic and Greek rather unlikely. The "rock" in the Ugaritic passage has relatively clear sonic characteristics, and only the "tree" is represented visually in the cylinder seals. This seems to support "word of tree" as a visual metaphor, and "murmur of rock" as a sonic metaphor, since only the former can be represented in visual depiction. Thus, the notion of "thunder-stones" should probably be characterized as a related but ultimately separate phenomenon.
Cylinder seal impression BM 132824

The Ugaritic evidence crucially contains all three associative elements found in the various Greek examples of the phrase: 1) a persuasive, spoken context 2) the generative/sexual element and 3) a prophetic association. That "speech from tree and rock" was an ancient metaphor for lightning and thunder allows one to view the Greek sources with new clarity.

In returning to relevant lines in *Iliad* 22, we find a peculiar level of situational similarity between the Ugaritic text and the text of Homer. The young Storm-God, Ba' al speaks a "word of tree and a murmur of rock" to the goddess Anat, so Hektor concludes that he cannot "woo" (ὀαριζέμεναι) Akhilleus from "tree or rock", with the things that a youth and a maiden (παρθένος ἥθεως τε) would.

Τρωσίν δ' αὐτ' μετόπισθε γερούσιον ὄρκον ἔλωμαι
μή τι κατακρύψειν, ἀλλ' ἀνδιχα πάντα δάσασθαι
κτῆσιν ὀσὴν πτολέεθρον ἐπηρατον ἐντὸς ἐέργει·
ἀλλὰ τί η μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θυμός;
μή μιν ἐγὼ μὲν ἱκωμαί ἱών, δ' ἔκ μ' οὔκ ἐλεήσει
οὔδέ τί μ' αἰδέσεται, κτενεὶ δὲ με γυμνὸν ἐόντα

I owe thanks to Dominique Collon of the British Museum for allowing me to display this seal drawing.
As in the Ugaritic, the phrase here simultaneously connotes persuasion and intimacy. As Ba'al attempts to convince Anat to hasten to him, so Hektor momentarily hopes to persuade Akhilleus to relinquish his anger by accepting Helen and treasures as a sort of placating reverse-dowry. And as there are sexual undertones in the Ugaritic, so they also appear in the Iliad, most obviously in lines 124-5:  … κτενεῖ δὲ μὲ γυμνὸν ἐόντα / αὐτῶς ὡς τε γυναῖκα, ἐπεὶ κ' ἀπὸ τεύχεα δῶ. Hektor fears that Akhilleus will slay him as he would a woman, once Hektor has stripped off his own armor. If one interprets this stereotyped instance of the phrase as possessing two frozen connotations associated with lightning and thunder in the Bronze Age and beyond: their role in fertility, as inseminating agents themselves and as harbingers of the nourishing rains, and their irrefutability as divine speech, the phrase in its Iliadic context is particularly appropriate. That the characterization of the thunder's sound is similar in the Ugaritic and the Greek is worth emphasizing: we have "moaning" or "murmuring" (lhšt), and "wooing" (ὀαριζέμεναι).

34 Perhaps ὅαριζέμεναι is an allusion to the previous lines' discussion of dividing up the possessions of Troy and giving it to the Akhaeans along with Helen to make amends and to end the war. Hektor appears to be comparing this reparation, the division of Troy's treasures to accompany Helen's return to Agamemnon, to a placating gift, or perhaps even to a wedding dowry. For a much more detailed account the erotic undertones of this passage, see Ready 2005.
By treating Hesiod's use of the phrase as a stereotyped element of an original metaphor of lightning and thunder, we gain insight into the role of prophesy and omen in the beginning of the *Theogony*:

"But why do I have these things around oak or rock?" Hesiod seeks to rephrase the underlying cause of his own prophetic abilities, not in terms of himself (μοι), and the objects and abilities given to him, but in terms of the Muses themselves (... Μουσάων ἀρχώμεθα ...). The prophetic power of song endowed by the Muses does not lie in Hesiod's received σκῆπτρον, or even in the αὐδὴν / θέσπιν, but in their primary function as divine vocalists. Hesiod vows that his prophetic voice only exists in as much as he now dutifully re-performs what the Muses have already sung: ταῦτα ἀρα Μουσαι άειδον, Ὅλυμπια δώματ' ἔχουσαι (*Th.* 65). The phrase, "these things about oak or rock," (... ταῦτα περὶ δρῦν ἢ περὶ πέτρην) is a stereotyped preservation of a
Bronze-Age metaphor, and Hesiod employs it here masterfully. Ba'al reveals the mysteries of universe through his "word of tree and murmur of rock." Why does Hesiod have access to an archaic form of prophesy inspired directly by divine voice? Because the Muses sing and he, understanding them, mimics.

Plato's attestation of the crux in the *Phaedrus* acquires a remarkable clarity when viewed in the context of the Ugaritic phrase:

{o̱i dέ γ', Ὠ φίλε, ἐν τῷ τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Δωδωναίου ἱερῷ δρυὸς λόγους ἔφησαν μαντικοὺς πρώτους γενέσθαι. τοῖς μὲν οὖν τότε, ἄτε οὐκ οὐσι σοφοῖς ὑσπερ ὑμεῖς οἱ νέοι, ἀπέχρη δρυὸς καὶ πέτρας ἀκούειν ὑπ᾽ εὐηθείας, εἰ μόνον ἀληθῆ λέγοιεν: σοὶ δ᾽ ἵσως διαφέρει τίς ὁ λέγων καὶ ποδαπός, οὐ γὰρ ἐκεῖνο μόνον σκοπεῖς, εἶτε οὖτως εἴτε ἄλλως ἔχει; (Phaedrus 275β–γ)

Plato describes the extremely archaic technique of divination native to the oak-shrine of Dodona, beloved by Zeus. As the site of frequent lightning strikes due to the oaks' natural attractive properties (see note 37) the location was interpreted as holy to the leader of the Pantheon, and the priests there divined lightning and thunder, "speech from tree and/or rock," as indicative of Zeus' will. This is likely the most transparent preservation in Greek of the phrase's original function in archaic ritual, but being too far removed temporally (τοῖς μὲν οὖν τότε ...), Plato has lost the metaphorical meaning of the phrase, interpreting it as referring to the speech of literal trees and rocks.

Returning finally to the *Odyssey*, we have an alternate explanation to the idea that the Greeks thought that men were born from trees and/or rocks:

ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς μοι εἶπὲ τεὸν γένος, ὑπὸθὲν ἔσσι.
Penelope literally says to a disguised Odysseus, "For surely you are not born from anciently-spoken oak and/or from rock." Perhaps reintroducing the original metaphor to her statement will prove instructive: "For surely you are not born from lightning and/or thunder." Here, the stereotyped generative aspect of lightning and thunder, as seen in the Ugaritic, is transformed into a teasing adynaton. Lightning fertilizes the ground through nitrogen deposits, and lightning and/or thunder are harbingers of the nourishing rain-waters.\(^{35}\) Moreover, the Miller/Urey experiments of the 1950's sought to recreate the origin of life on earth by simulating lightning strikes in an environment rich with water, ammonia, nitrogen and hydrogen, and succeeded in creating organic compounds. Thus the pairing of "anciently-spoken oak and/or rock" as a metaphor for lightning and thunder could feasibly represent a creative event. It requires mention that Greek δρῦς, as the lightning-wielding Zeus' favored oak tree, is particularly appropriate in this context, even more so since oaks attract lightning strikes at a higher-rate than any other tree.\(^{36}\) In short, scientific inquiry appears to support the archaic beliefs that lightning was particularly attracted to the oak, and that lightning strikes were generative as well as destructive.

Further, only if one interprets "speech from tree and/or rock" as a metaphor for lightning and thunder, can one convincingly explain why either ... ἦ ... or ... ὃδε' ... is present in all three archaic Greek examples of the crux. Although belonging to the same phenomenon, lightning and thunder seem bipartite due to the difference in the speeds of light and of sound.

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\(^{35}\) See Shepon, Gildor 2008 for a study of climate change on nitrogen-compounds deposited into the soil by lightning. See Nagy 1990:197 for Indo-European textual examples of the generative power of lightning strikes, esp. n119 for further sources and discussion.

\(^{36}\) See Nagy 1990:196.
Consequently, there is always an "and/or" when the phrase occurs. Lightning and thunder may occur simultaneously, there may be a delay between the two, or one may seem to occur without the other. In the Odyssey, the adjective παλαιφάτου is crucial, since it preserves the proverbial and prophetic nature of the original Bronze-Age phrase, and repositions Penelope's question in the larger metaphorical context of "speech from tree and/or rock."

Whether this phrase in the Odyssey reflects the cultural belief of the Greeks is essentially unknowable. Adynata have at least two major subtypes, universal and situational. It is impossible to know whether this phrase is the former or the latter. Likewise, we cannot know whether whatever poet(s) crafted these lines had access to the original metaphor. To view the phrase of “speech from tree and/or rock” as being subject to semantic loss, and transforming gradually into an idiom with non-compositional meaning is likely the correct approach. At any given stage during this process, each individual speaker would have a different level of understanding of the phrase’s original meaning, and while Plato almost certainly did not have access to the phrase’s origins, it is unclear what its absolute semantic status was at any stage of the idiomatic process. Here I will offer a few examples in English to make this point clearer; there are three phrases, “by hook or by crook,” “to make ends meet,” and “the proof is in the pudding.” If one were to ask a sample of native English speakers what the overall meaning and origins of these phrases were, there would be a variety of responses. Some would have no idea on either account; some would be able to give a general gist of the phrase’s meaning and context without being able to identify the exact function the “hook,” “meet” or “pudding,” in which case the phrase would be a non-compositional idiom, that which cannot be analyzed semantically in distinct parts; a few would be able to answer both questions accurately. This situation of idiomatic transformation seems to be the most accurate in attempting to analyze the semantic profile of “to speak from tree and/or rock” in Greek, and accounts for the variety
of prepositions in the phrase’s use in Homer and Hesiod. What is certain, however, is that this phrase survived for over 1500 years, relatively intact despite wear-and-tear from its lengthy sojourn, in a testament to the power of an inherited oral tradition that likely functioned within a highly specific ritual context.

In an effort to elucidate the crux of "tree and/or rock," I hope both to have redefined the phrase as including the notion of speech, and to have offered an explanation of its appearance in Greek epic and the Ba'al cycle. The Ugaritic evidence supports the reading of "word of tree and murmur of rock" as a visual and auditory metaphor for lightning and thunder. If one views the archaic Greek attestations, analyzed as "speech from tree and/or rock" as preserving stereotyped thematic elements of prophesy and generation present in the Ugaritic, there appears a clear inherited ideological system that persists from the Bronze-Age through Homer and Hesiod. In all three archaic Greek contexts the phrase can be specified as "speech from tree and/or rock," which distinguishes the crux from a more general and popular collocation, "tree and/or rock." In the Iliad, the phrase has connotations of persuasion in a context of courtship, in the Odyssey it is generative and prophetic, and in the Theogony, it occurs in a transparently prophetic context within a larger work concerned with the creation of the universe. Each Greek phrase is likely an idiomatic reflex of an original, which is well-preserved and artfully articulated in the Ugaritic, in which lightning and thunder represent divine speech as a prophetic act of persuasion, and are representative of the converse and mingling between heaven and earth. The visual evidence from Northern Syria suggests that the origins of this phrase, "speech from tree and/or rock," may be lurking in cultic practice of the early 3rd millennium BCE.

References


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