In an article on Leukothea and Atargatis, written a few years ago, I suggested that El and Dagon were identified at Ugarit. I still feel that the suggestion has merit. If Dagon is El, then Kapelrud's riddle is solved, who says, "it remains a riddle why Dagan, who had an important temple in Ugarit, is so completely neglected (in the Ras Shamra texts);" i.e., why "Dagan is not found acting in the narrative parts of the texts." Then we can also explain why Baal is constantly called son of Dagon, though his father seems to be absent from the myths; why though Baal is Dagon's son, Anat El's daughter is his sister; and why the two greatest temples of Ugarit were dedicated to Dagon and Baal, while no temple of El has appeared.


El and Dagon were alike identified with Kronos. The Etymologicon Magnum says that Dagon was Kronos in Phoenicia; while Philo of Byblos identifies El with Kronos in his account of Phoenician mythology. Philo also says that Demarus (Baal) was son of Uranos by a concubine, but was born in the house of Dagon, El-Kronos' brother, to whom his mother had become wife. It is quite likely that El was identified with Uranos as well as with Kronos, or that the roles of El and of El's father were confused or interchanged in various parts of the Canaanite area. Certainly there are patent differences between the Ugaritic and Phoenician pantheons, though the Ugaritic texts and Philo's account are mutually illuminating.


Kapelrud points to Ugaritic religious texts in which El and Dagon seem to be listed as different deities. In a list of deities, as Gordon translates it, there appear "... 'Il-Ṣapān; 'Il-[i]b; 'Il; Dagān." It is tempting
to suppose that three names of El are listed here, the third being 'Il-Dagån. But Dagån does not appear on the same line with 'Il; there are four names on four successive lines. Yet it is significant that Dagån is preceded by three names of El; for though 'Il-Šapån appears to be a name of Baal in one of the Baal poems, its first element indicates that it was properly a name of El; for Baal is often called Baal-Šapån. In a parallel text we find Baal-Šapån, Baal-Ugarit, on successive lines; i.e., two titles of Baal are similarly set side by side in a list of deities; and the preceding entry 'Il-Add (El-Adad) seems to be another name of Baal. Hence Dagån may well be the fourth term in a series of names of El.

Again in a list of prescribed offerings we find:

A head of small cattle: 'Il
A head of small cattle: Baal
A head of small cattle: Dagån
A head of small cattle: [ ]

This appears to be a sacrificial formula, and the order may be intentionally interlocked in an ABAB arrangement: 'Il repeated by Dagån, Baal by another of the names of Baal. In a similar passage farther on there occurs the sequence El, Baal, Asherat, Yam: i.e. El is parallel to Asherat, his consort, Baal to Yam, his great rival of the myth, but in actual cult perhaps as closely associated with him as was Zeus with Poseidon. Of course, El and Dagon have quite different origins as Semitic deities. My point is that they were identified at Ugarit. Yet it may have been sometimes necessary in certain rituals, as in the text above, to address Dagon rather than El.


I am not convinced in spite of Schmölkel's dissertation that Dagon was never known as a fish-god in antiquity. I can grant that originally he had nothing to do with the sea; but once he became an important god of maritime Canaanite peoples like the Phoenicians, it was inevitable that his name would be referred to dag (fish), and that this etymology would influence representations of him. In discussing the Babylonian fish-god Schmölkel deals only with Oannes, and has failed to consider Berossos' Odakon, part man and part fish, who rose from the Erythraean Sea, and whose name may be a garbled form of Dagon. Schmölkel refers to the Septuagint version of I Samuel 5. 4, which says that both arms and legs of Dagon's image at Ashdod were broken off when the image fell before the ark of the covenant, whereas the Hebrew text mentions
head and hands only. He believes that the Septuagint, being earlier than any extant Hebrew MS, shows an earlier state of the Hebrew text. His point is that an image with legs could not be the image of a fish-god. But even if he is right about the soundness of the Septuagint text, and the argument is flimsy, he has still not made his point. For representations of a fish-god (Oannes, i.e., Ea?) with human arms and legs are found on Mesopotamian cylinders and other monuments. The whole point of I Samuel 5. 4, it seems to me, is that when Dagon’s human members fell away, head, arms, and possibly legs, only his fish-body remained, and he was revealed for what he was, a fish.

H. Schmökel, Der Gott Dagan (Borna-Leipzig: Universitätsverlag von Robert Noske, 1928), esp. pp. 53-55. For representations of the Babylonian fish-god, see Katharine Shepard, The Fish-Tailed Monster in Greek and Etruscan Art (New York: p. p. [Bryn Mawr thesis], 1940), pl. I, figs. 5, 6, discussion on pp. 5-7. Miss Shepard distinguishes Oannes and Odakon as deities who wear a fish-skin cloak from mermen. But certainly they were imagined as beings who had fishbodies with human heads and limbs. The representations show a human figure that appears to have a cloak of fish-skin around it, the best that could be done in the medium, and possibly portraying worshippers who had dressed as the god. See Fontenrose, pp. 138-141 with n. 56, 68; Berossos, frag. 29 Schnabel.