

UNRAVELLING UGARITIC *MDL*

Wilfred G. E. Watson

In a recent paper on Ugaritic technical terms, R. M. Good queried the accepted meaning of *mdl*<sup>1</sup>. The present note builds on Good's proposals, offering a different etymology for *mdl*<sup>2</sup>.

In his discussion of the verb *mdl*, Good makes the important point that "ridden animals ordinarily were not *saddled* in the Late Bronze Age"<sup>3</sup> and he adds: "The only piece of equipment a Late Bronze Age rider would need was a rope to guide the ridden animals"<sup>4</sup>. According to Good, then, "Ugaritic *mdl* probably refers to the guide rope"<sup>5</sup>. So far so good<sup>6</sup>, particularly as it agrees with Good's own findings concerning the term *šmd*, used in parallelism with *mdl* (see below)<sup>7</sup>. However, instead of his proposed etymology (he cites Arabic *dalla*, "to guide (an animal)" and Aramaic *dallel*, "to lead")<sup>8</sup>, I prefer to turn to Mesopotamian material.

In summary form the lexical data are as follows. The verb *madālu*, "to salt, pickle meat"<sup>9</sup> also occurs (in the D stem) as *muddulu*, "to preserve (in oil or salt)"<sup>10</sup>. Derivatives are *madlu*, "salted"<sup>11</sup> and *midlu*, "pickled meat"<sup>12</sup>. The near-homonym *muddulû* means "elastic strip"<sup>13</sup> and has the fem. form *muddultum*, "soft (bed)"<sup>14</sup>. There are, accordingly, two possible etymologies for Ugaritic *mdl*:

- 1) *madālu*, *muddulu*, "to preserve, etc." (derivatives *madlu* and *midlu*)
- 2) *muddulû*, "elastic strip" (also as fem. *muddultum*).

Either would be suitable. If cognate with 1), Ugaritic *mdl* would denote a strip of tanned leather (i.e. animal hide or skin treated with oil or

salt)<sup>15</sup>. If, instead, the cognate should be 2), then the Ugaritic term would mean a strip of some material with a degree of give in it, again most probably leather<sup>16</sup>. In the mythological texts, therefore, the verb *mdl* (// verb *smd*) would be denominative from *mdl*, "strap" (or the like)<sup>17</sup>. The stock expression *mdl* <sup>c</sup>*r* *smd* *phl* (used in KTU 1.4 IV 4-5 // 1.19 II 3-4) in all likelihood can be translated "Attach a halter<sup>18</sup> to an ass, tie a lead-rope to a donkey". The same applies to the expanded formula in 1.19 II 8-9<sup>19</sup>. The word *mdl* occurs elsewhere, again in the context of asses (*hmr*)<sup>20</sup> and also as part of a PN<sup>21</sup>.

Unexpected confirmation for my proposed etymology of Ugaritic *mdl* comes from the Ebla texts. There, the word *ma-da-LUM* occurs in an "equine" context:

1 *aktum*-TÚG 4 *ma-da-LUM* 2 IGI.NITA en 2 IGI.NITA *I-bi-zi-kir* *ḥa-za-an*  
 šu ba<sub>4</sub>-ti

"One cloth<sup>22</sup> (and) four *madalum* for two I.-equids of the king (and) two I.-equids of Ibbi-Zikir, received by Ḥazan"<sup>23</sup>.

In this text, presumably a list of equipment, each animal is assigned one *madalum*, which in the light of the Ugaritic and Akkadian material discussed above, is most probably a bridle or guide-rope of some kind and certainly not such an expensive item as a saddle<sup>24</sup>.

Rather more difficult is Ugaritic *mdl* in two other contexts:

KTU 1.5 V 6-7

*wat. qh* <sup>c</sup>*rptk.* For your part, take your clouds,  
*rhk. mdlk mtrtk.* your wind, your *m.* and your rain<sup>25</sup>.

KTU 1.3 IV 25-27

*yšt* [*bšmm*]. *b* <sup>c</sup>*l. mdlh* May Baal place his *m.* in the sky(?),  
*yb* <sup>c</sup>*r* [*il hd q*] *rnh.* may the god Haddu cause his rays to be  
 kindled<sup>26</sup>.

Good cites both these passages and comments: "Certainly Baal is the cloud rider, and if the metaphor of the storm deity as rider of the clouds is

taken seriously, perhaps his guide rope [i.e. *mdl* (W. G. E. Watson)] can be thought of as 'lightning' "<sup>27</sup>. His words immediately brought to mind Akkadian *ṣerretu*, 'nose-rope, lead-rope, halter ... lead-rope (of the heavens)'"<sup>28</sup> but unfortunately, the meaning of this term is not clear cut. In his review of W. G. Lambert, BWL, R. Borger remarked: "*ṣerret šamāmi* ... bedeutet, wie ich schon vor Jahren vermutete, aber damals noch nicht beweisen konnte, 'die Zitzen des Himmels (d.h. der Himmelskuh)' ", where *ṣerretu* is a form of *ṣertu*, 'nipple'<sup>29</sup>. Attractive though it may appear, therefore, the equivalence of Akkadian *ṣerretu* and Ugaritic *mdl* must as yet remain an unproven possibility<sup>30</sup>.

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- 1) R. M. Good, *Some Ugaritic Terms Relating to Draught and Riding Animals*: UF, 16 (1984), 77-81.
  - 2) I was able to prepare this paper during a month's research fellowship in Münster kindly granted me by the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung, Bonn. I also had the opportunity to discuss some points with participants in the 32nd Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale which was held in Münster (1985).
  - 3) Good: UF, 16 (1984), 80 (his emphasis).
  - 4) Good: UF, 16 (1984), 80. He refers to M. A. Littauer and J. H. Crowel, *Wheeled Vehicles and Ridden Animals in the Ancient Near East*, Leiden 1979 (*Handbuch der Orientalistik*, 7<sup>te</sup> Abteilung. I Band, 2 Abschnitt B - Vorderasien, Lieferung 1). They show that in the period 2000 - 1600 B.C. mounts were led by a line attached to a nose ring (p.66) and that even later (1600 - 1000 B.C.) no saddles were used since riders rode either bareback or on a blanket (which provided a secure seat and protected the rider from sweat - p.96).
  - 5) Good: UF, 16 (1984), 80. Without going into detail a bibliography of studies on Ug. *mdl* can be given here: Dahood: UF, 1 (1969), 35 and n. 40; Day: VT, 29 (1979, 147, n.18; *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*, Cambridge 1985, 33, n.93; de Moor: ZAW, 78 (1966), 69-71; BO, 24 (1967), 209; QuSem, 2 (1973), 97, n.3; *The Seasonal Pattern in the*

- Ugaritic Myth of Ba<sup>c</sup>lu* (AOAT 16), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1971, 109; Dijkstra-de Moor: UF, 7 (1975), 202; Goshen-Gottstein: Bib, 41 (1960), 64-66; Greenfield: Bib1, 45 (1964), 527-534; Margalit: UF, 16 (1984), 133-134; Pardee: BO, 37 (1980), 278; Rin and Rin: BZ, 11 (1967), 184; Smith: UF, 16 (1984), 297 and n.13; P. van Zijl, *Baal. A Study of Texts in Connection with Baal in the Ugaritic Texts* (AOAT 10), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1972, 67-69; Wieder: JBL, 84 (1965), 164. Also, the glossaries in CML, CML', TOu, WUS, etc.
- 6) The possibility (ignored by Good) that animal trappings could have a degree of ornamentation is discussed below (note 19).
  - 7) Unaccountably, Good does not cite Akk. *ṣamādu* (or its derivatives) which can mean "to tie, attach" (CAD, *Ṣ*, 91b-92a, meaning 1e), "verbinden" (AHw, 1080) and supports his own findings.
  - 8) He could also have mentioned Ug. *dll*, "scout, messenger" - on which cf. de Moor, AOAT 16, 168; Del Olmo Lete, MLC, 536; Greenstein: UF, 11 (1979), 332 and n.24 (contrast Sanmartín; UF, 12 [1980], 346-348). Cf., too, Ug. *mdll* in KTU 1.40:13. 21; 1.84:6. 16. 21.
  - 9) CAD, *M/1*, 10 (cf. AHw, 1572: "in Salz einlegen").
  - 10) K. Butz, *On Salt again ... Lexikalische Randbemerkungen*: JESHO, 27 (1984), 272-316 discusses *muddulu* (pp.304ff) noting that "*muddulu* scheint Oberbegriff zu sein, etwa wie 'Konservieren' " either in salt or in oil. See, in general, D.Potts, *On Salt and Salt-gathering in Ancient Mesopotamia*: JESHO, 27 (1984), 225-271 (to which Butz's article is a response).
  - 11) CAD, *M/1*, 19.
  - 12) K. Deller, *midlu "Pökelfleisch": Assur*, 3/4 (1983), 33-39. Against CAD *M/2*, 48a, the author shows that *midlu* in six Neo-Assyrian texts means not the "process of salting" but actual "pickled meat".
  - 13) So Butz: JESHO, 27 (1984), 305, n.144: "*muddulû* ist kaum von *muddulu* abgeleitet; es bedeutet 'elastischer Streifen, Band' ".
  - 14) Butz: JESHO, 27 (1984), 305, n.144: "*muddultum* (*mundultum*) ... könnte ein 'weiches' Bett sein, d.h. dass die Gurten des Bettes sehr *elastisch* sind, wenn sie geflochten sind". For references see CAD, *M/2*, 202.
  - 15) Leather-workers (*aškapū*) are attested in texts from Ras Shamra - cf. M. Heltzer, *The Internal Organization of the Kingdom of Ugarit (Royal Service-System, Taxes, Royal Economy, Army and Administration)*, Wiesbaden 1982, 82-83. He remarks "It is difficult to propose what the leather workers (sic) supplied for there is still no recognizable information" (p.83 under 3.k); perhaps they produced *mdl*. See next note.

- 16) M. Sigrist, *Le travail des cuirs et des peaux à Umma sous la Dynastie d'Ur III*: JCS, 33 (1981), 141-190, in the section on "Cuirs pour les charrues et les boeufs de trait" (p.185) comments "Les propriétés de élasticité, de flexibilité et de souplesse du cuir trouvaient leur application directe dans certains équipements d'attelage des animaux".
- 17) According to which etymology is valid, the process would be either *mdl* (to preserve) → *mdl* (leather strap) → *mdl* (to tie a strap), or *mdl* (elastic strip) → *mdl* (to tie a strip). Good: UF, 16 (1984), 80 has argued along similar lines with respect to the etymology he posits.
- 18) Littauer-Crouwel, *Wheeled Vehicles*, 5 define halter as "simple head-stall used for leading animal or for tying it up by the head".
- 19) *bkm. tmdln. <sup>c</sup>r / bkm. tšmd. phl.* The couplet *št. gpn̄y dt ksp / dt. yrq. nq̄bny* of lines 4-5 (cf. also KTU 1.4 IV 5-7) is not repeated; for the use of decorative metal studs on leather straps see N. Na'man, *ašt̄tu* (Sg.) and *ašātu* (Pl.) - *Strap and Reins*: JCS, 29 (1977), 237-239. Note also *2 maninnū ša s̄sē hulālī hurāša ub̄huz*, "two m.-necklaces for horses made of h̄.-stone beads mounted in gold" (EA 22 I 12, cited in CAD, M/1, 212). Cf. also Margalit: UF, 16 (1984), 135, n.140.
- 20) In KTU 1.86 (= PRU V 158 bis) obv. 13 and perhaps also in obv. 12. The expression *rb. [m]dlm* of PRU V 162 B 2 is read *rb. mgdlm* in KTU 4.410 obv. 27.
- 21) The PN *mdl bn nrm* of KTU 4.75 VI 1; cf. Punic *mdl'* (or *mdn'*) cited but not discussed by F. L. Benz, *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions* (*Studia Pohl* 8), Rome 1972, 137. 340.
- 22) Although, like *ma-da-LUM*, the word *aktum* (with the determinative TÚG for cloth) is left untranslated by the editors (see next note), it is quite likely a Semitic word derived from KTM, "to cover". The context indicates a meaning such as "(horse-)blanket" (corresponding, perhaps, to Ug. *hpnt ššwm* in PRU V 49 3-4. 7); cf. *kitmu*, "(bed-)cover"; *kutummu*, "mat, cover, veil"; *taktīmu*, "blanket", etc. (The function of such a blanket is discussed above, note 4). Paolo Xella, who kindly commented on the first draft of this short note, brought to my attention the following passages: 1 *aktum-TÚG TAR* (ARET IV, 7 r. IV 11-12) and 1 *aktum-TÚG TAR.TAR* (*ibid.*, 10 r. XII 7-8) where the use of TAR, "to cut", is significant. On the equivalence *aktum* = *šapšu*, "(a garment)", cf. CAD, Š, 97-98, with discussion; AHW, 1028b and especially Pomponio: OA, 17 (1978), 251-252 ad II 1.
- 23) Text and translation: ARET IV, 6 r. XI 19 - XII 1.
- 24) Note that the Eblaite equivalent of Akk. *muddulu* appears to be *muddalu*, written *mu-da-lum*; cf. Butz: JESHO, 27 (1984), 274 for references and discussion.

- 25) Correcting Good's stichometry: UF, 16 (1984), 80; cf., e.g., MLC, 220.
- 26) For discussion of this and other possible restorations see, conveniently, MLC, 187.
- 27) Good: UF, 16 (1984), 81.
- 28) CAD, *Ṣ*, 134-137, especially the discussion section on *ṣerretu* A; AHw, 1092: "Nasenseil, Leitseil; kosmisch 'Halteseil' ".
- 29) Borger: JCS, 18 (1961), 55.
- 30) Even more problematic is the possible relationship between Ug. *ṣrrt* and Akk. *ṣerretu*, on which cf. M. Dietrich - O. Loretz, *Srrt ṣpn* - 'Feste des *Ṣapānu*: UF, 12 (1980), 394 where the connection is denied and Sanmartín: UF, 10 (1978), 454, n.9. Is there, instead, a connection between *ṣerretu*, "rope which keeps rain tied up in heaven" (so CAD, *Ṣ*, 137) and the use of *ysr* in KTU 1.19 I 42-43 ?