

Baal Rebuked - *KTU* 1.2 iv 28-31

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Abstract

A new meaning, based on Akkadian, is proposed for the Ugaritic verb *bṭ*, which occurs three times in a passage in the Epic of Baal, although the text in question is incomplete.

Keywords

Akkadian, Epic of Baal, Ugaritic.

In the Ugaritic Epic of Baal, after the eponymous hero is described as having defeated Prince Yam, alias Ruler Nahar, he is addressed by the goddess Athtart as follows:

²⁸*b* . šm tg 'rm . 'ttrt .
bṭ . l āliyn . b['l]
²⁹*bṭ* . l rkb . 'rpt .
k šbyn . zb[l . ym .
k] ³⁰*šbyn* . tpt . nhr.
 wyṣā . b['l ...
³¹*ybt* . nn . āliyn . b 'l .

By name Athtart reproached (him) :

“..., O Mighty Baal
 ..., O Cloud-Rider,
 for Prince Sea is our captive,
 for Judge River is our captive”.

And B[aal] did go...

Mighty Baal really did¹ ...

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In this passage, the word *bṭ* remains obscure, as shown by the fact that there are at least four different translations of it:

(1) “to be ashamed”

The cognates cited are Heb. *bwš*, “to be ashamed” (*HALOT*: 116-117) and Akk. *bāšu*, “sich schämen” (*AHW*: 112); “to come to shame” (*CAD* B: 5)².

– Scholars supporting this view also cite Aram. *bht*, “to be confounded, ashamed” (*DTT*: 143) and Syr. *bht*, “to be ashamed” (*SL*: 123). However, Ug. *bṭ* is not identical with Ug. *bht*, “shame” (*DUL*: 219), which has a radical *-h-*, as in JAram. *bht*, “shame,

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¹ The verbal form *ybt.nn* is energetic, on which see *UG*: 503 §73.267; he translates: “(Ba‘lu) schämte sich gar sehr”. In a personal communication, N. Wyatt mentioned that there must be a reason for the use of the energetic form here, although this would be the case whatever the meaning of the verb.

² DRIVER 1956: 83: 164a; GINSBERG 1969: 131.

disgrace” (*DTT*: 143); JBArAm. *bht*, “to be ashamed” (*DJBA*: 189b) and Syr. *behtāā*’ (*SL*: 123). This is reflected in Akk. *bāšu*, “sich schämen” (*AHW*: 112), “to be ashamed, come to shame” (*CDA*: 41a) and Akk. *ba ‘āšu* B, “to come to shame” (*CAD* B: 5-6)³.

(2) “to scatter” or “to destroy”

This explanation is based on Arab. *Batta*, “he spread it, he dispersed it, scattered it” (*AEL*: 151) and OSA *bht*, “to spread out, lay out” (*DOSA*: 62)⁴.

– Logically, this would seem to fit and it also corresponds to the passage in *KTU* 1.6 ii 30-37, where Mot is treated in a similar way. However, the verb is intransitive in the text.

(3) “hail!”

In this interpretation, *bṭ* is considered to be a noun meaning “hail, welcome!”, corresponding to *bḥṭ* in *KTU* 1.5 ii 11 and 19⁵.

– As De Moor (1971: 139) commented, this is unacceptable on both phonological and contextual grounds and it also ignores the verb form *ybt.nm.* in line 31.

(4) “to dry up”

The verb here would be **ybt*, corresponding to Heb. *ybs*, “to dry up, become dry, be dry, wither” (*HALOT*: 384), Arab. *yabisa*, “to be or become dry, to dry” (*DMWA*: 1105), Arab. *Ya’bis*, “dry, dried up” (*AEL*: 2975) and OSA *ybs*, “dry up” (*DOSA*: 229), as proposed by Wyatt⁶. He supports his proposal with a reference to Isa. 19:5.

– Even so, the phonology is problematic⁷ and the verb *ybt* does not occur elsewhere in Ugaritic. This interpretation also ignores the parallel verb *yšā* in line 30.

The general consensus, then, is that in this passage, Ug. *bṭ* may mean “to be ashamed” (meaning 1) or “to scatter” (meaning 2)⁸, either quite acceptable but neither completely convincing.

(5) “to depart”

Instead, as yet another possibility, I tentatively propose a fifth meaning, namely, “to depart”. The meaning of *bṭ* here may be indicated by the parallelism between *wyšā b[ʕl]*, “and B[aal] did go...” and *ybtṭn āliyn b’l*, “Mighty Baal really did ...” in the last two

³ See SANMARTÍN 1978.

⁴ OBERMANN 1947: 198 n. 16; followed by WUS: 62 §609: “vernichten, zerschmettern”; GRAY 1965: 29; *TOug* 1: 139 and n. b 588 “dispenser”; HVIDBERG-HANSEN 1990 I: 64: “søndersplit” see also II: 38 n. 21; GIBSON 1978: 44 and n. 11: or possibly “be ashamed”. This meaning has been accepted by SMITH 1994: 357.

⁵ DAHOOD 1965: 9 (§5.39); cf. *TOug* 1: 244: “salut à toi!”, based on OSA *bht*, but cf. *DUL*: 219 (“shame”).

⁶ WYATT 2002: 68 n. 150, with a survey.

⁷ For details see WYATT 2002: 68 n. 150. A more general Afro-Asiatic background for this verb is provided in TAKÁCS 2001: 318-319.

⁸ GZELLA 2007: 539, comments (with bibliography) that the meaning “to scatter” is “quite plausible”.

lines (30-31), the clinching verb being *yšā*.⁹ Therefore, rather than any of the above explanations, I suggest the meaning “to go away, depart” for Ug. *bṭ*, cognate with Akk. *bēšu(m)*, “to go away, withdraw” (*CDA*: 43b); “to depart, to move away, to part company” (*CAD* B: 214); “sich entfernen” (*AHw*: 123-124)¹⁰. It occurs, for example, in *Maqlû* V 167:

isâ isâ rēqa rēqa bêša bêša ḫilqa ḫilqa
Be off, be off, begone, begone, depart, depart, flee, flee!¹¹

The passage in question (*KTU* 1.2 iv 28-31) can now be translated as follows:

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>b šm tg 'rm 'ttrt</i> | By name Athtart rebuked (him) : |
| <i>bṭ l āliyn b 'l</i> | “Depart, O Mighty Baal |
| <i>bṭ l rkb 'rpt</i> | depart, Cloud-Rider, |
| <i>k šbyn zbl ym</i> | for Prince Sea is our captive, |
| <i>k šbyn tpt nhr</i> | for Judge River is our captive”. |
| <i>wyšā b['l ...</i> | And (so) B[aal] did go ... |
| <i>ybtnn āliyn b 'l</i> | Mighty Baal really did depart. |

Note also that Hebrew *gr* can mean “to threaten” (*HALOT*: 200) and Aramaic *gr* can mean “to remove” (*DJPA*: 134a) and even “to drive away by rebuke”¹². The implication is that Baal should go away and leave *ym/nhr* alone because now he belongs to Athtart and company (“our captive”), not to Baal. Ultimately, though, since the text is incomplete, any proposal regarding its meaning can only be conjectural.

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⁹ As correctly pointed out by a referee for this paper, the word *bṭ* at the end of line 30 is only a conjectural reconstruction (as *b['l]*). It would be equally possible to restore *wyšā b[ph* or *wyšā b[špth*, meaning “from her (Athtart’s) mouth/lips there issued [a rebuke(?)]”, or the like, which would chime well with the first line and fit the overall context. However, such a restoration would not match the standard formula for speech with the verb *yšā*, which is *b ph rgm l yšā b špth hwth*, “from his mouth the word had not (yet) issued, from his lips his word” (*KTU* 1.2 iv 6 etc.).

¹⁰ See also Akk. *bēšu*, “fern” (*AHw*: 123b); “far apart” (*CAD* B: 214a); “far apart, distant” (*CDA*: 43b).

¹¹ Translation as in ABUSCH 1974: 256.

¹² As given in the on-line Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon, consulted on 14.08.2014.

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