

THE UGARITIC *BDLM*: A REAPPRAISAL

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The meaning of the Ugaritic term *bdl* remains uncertain¹, but a recently identified cognate in Aramaic may help to resolve the issue, as is shown below². The history of interpretation of Ugaritic *bdl* has been set out by J. Sanmartín³, F. Renfroe⁴, J.-P. Vita⁵ and J. D. Schloen⁶, so that only the main points need be mentioned here⁷. A succinct summary of current opinion is provided by J. Vidal⁸.

The term in question occurs in the following texts:

KTU 4.69 iii 6 (*bdl . mrynm*); KTU 4.69 vi 17 (*bdl . mdrglm*); KTU 4.85:6 (*bdl . qrty*); KTU 4.86:21 (*bdlm . dt []*), 29 (*bdlm . dt . ytb . b []*); KTU 4.96:1 (*bdl . gt . bn . tbšn*); KTU 4.116:20 (*bdlm []*); KTU 4.134:1 (*spr . bdlm*); KTU 4.214 i 4 (*bdl . r . dt . inn mhr lhm¹*); KTU 4.214 iii 1 (*bd¹ . ar*); KTU 4.232:42 (*bdlm*); KTU 4.312:4 (*bhtm . bdlm*), 7 (*bhtm . bdlm*) and KTU 4.724:5 (*bn . bdlm*). It also appears in the form ^{lu.meš}DAM.GAR^{meš} : *bi-da-lu-ma* (PRU 3, 200 [RS 16.257+258+126] A ii 12).

Five meanings have been proposed for Ug. *bdl* (and the corresponding syllabic form *bi-da-lu-ma*), which are set out here, each followed by a discussion. Finally, there are some concluding remarks.

- 1 As noted by J. Sanmartín, "Glossen zum ugaritischen Lexikon (V)", *SEL* 5, 1988, pp. 171-180: "Die genaue Bedeutung von ug. *bdl* ist trotz mancherlei Anstrengungen noch nicht als gesichert zu betrachten" (p. 171). W. Thiel, "Zur gesellschaftlichen Stellung des *mudu* in Ugarit", *UF* 12, 1980, pp. 349-356 concluded (p. 355): "So umstritten noch die genaue Bedeutung des Wortes *bdl* ist, so gewiss darf man annehmen, dass es sich hier um den *mrynm* bzw. *mdrglm* zugeordnete und subordinierte Dienstleute handelt". According to J. Tropper (KWU p. 23), it means "'Handelsagenten, Vertreter' (weniger wahrsch. 'Ersatzleute, Reservisten')".
- 2 My thanks go to Jordi Vidal (Barcelona), who read a preliminary draft and supplied me with references.
- 3 J. Sanmartín, "Glossen zum ugaritischen Lexikon (V)", pp. 171-173.
- 4 F. Renfroe, "Lexikalische Kleinigkeiten", *UF* 20, 1988, pp. 221-232 (pp. 221-226). He concludes (p. 226): "Zusammenfassend, lässt sich sagen, dass *bdl/bidaluma* schlechthin 'Stellvertreter' bedeutet. Es muss jedoch je nach Milieu (Militär, Kommerz, usw.) von den es begleitenden Wörtern her genauer bestimmt werden".
- 5 J.-P. Vita, *El ejército de Ugarit*, Madrid 1995, pp. 113-128.
- 6 J.D. Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol. Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East*, Winona Lake 2001, pp. 227-229. For further bibliography see Thiel, "Zur gesellschaftlichen Stellung des *mudu* in Ugarit", p. 355 n. 42.
- 7 There is a brief discussion in Watson, *LSU*, p. 127 §2.3.02 (21); cf. also *DLU*, pp. 105-106 and *DUL*, p. 217.
- 8 J. Vidal, *Las aldeas de Ugarit según los archivos del Bronce Reciente (siglos XIV-XII a.n.e.)*, Sabadell, Barcelona 2005, pp. 109-110.

1. “lower class (person), subject”

According to A. Alt⁹, followed by M. Heltzer, Ug. *bdl(m)* means “subjects”, literally *bd.l*, “into the hands of”, and corresponds to Akk. *muškenu*, i.e. the lower classes¹⁰.

Critique

Against the unlikely etymology suggested¹¹ is the lack of a word-divider in any of the spellings of Ug. *bdl*. In any case, it has been superseded by later suggestions, as set out below.

2. “merchant”

The meaning “merchant” is given by J. Aistleitner (as “Handelsagent (?)”, WUS §501) and by C.H. Gordon (UT §19.448). Both A.F. Rainey¹² and M.C. Astour¹³ also adopted this meaning. As additional support, Astour referred to Arab. *baddāl-*, “merchant of foodstuffs”¹⁴. Most recently, the meaning “merchant” or “commercial agent” for Ug. *bdl* has been accepted by K.M. McGeough¹⁵.

Critique

As Vidal explains¹⁶, difficulties arise because the meaning “merchant” does not fit other references to *bdl(m)*, nor does it suit military contexts such as KTU 4.69, etc., as J.P. Vita has noted¹⁷. Therefore, most scholars now reject this meaning, the basis for which was the assumption that in the entry ^{li.mes}DAM.GAR^{mes} : *bi-da-lu-ma* (PRU 3, 200 A ii 12), the colon *:/* denotes equivalence. In fact, as now generally recognised, it indicates a gloss¹⁸, or more accurately, the correction of a scribal error¹⁹.

⁹ A. Alt, “Bemerkungen zu den Verwaltungs- und Rechtsurkunden von Ugarit und Alalach”, *WO* 2, 1957, pp. 338-342 (p. 342). For a critique of Alt’s views, see Renfroe, “Lexikalische Kleinigkeiten”, p. 221 n. 2.

¹⁰ “It is impossible to agree with the translation of the Ugaritic word *bdl(m)* – “subjects,” lit. *bd.l* – “into the hands of” as “traders-*tamkars*”. Instead, they “were equal to *muškēnu*, and not to merchants, i.e. they were equal to a lower class of population and the *muškēnu* of these professionals were their assistants or subjects” – M. Heltzer, *Goods, Prices and the Organization of Trade in Ugarit (Marketing and Transportation in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Second Half of the II Millenium [sic!] B. C. E.)*, Wiesbaden 1978, p. 122, n. 10.

¹¹ “Die Vermutung dass *bidaluma* von *bd* (in die Hand) + *l* (von) abzuleiten sei (von Rainey und Astour befürwortet), scheint mir so unwahrscheinlich, dass sie keine Widerlegung benötigt” - Renfroe, “Lexikalischen Kleinigkeiten”, p. 222 n. 7.

¹² A.F. Rainey, “Business Agents of Ugarit”, *IEJ* 13, 1963, pp. 313-321.

¹³ M.C. Astour, “The Merchant Class of Ugarit”, in D.O. Edzard, ed., *Gesellschaftsklassen im Alten Zweistromland (XVIII RAI)*, München 1972, pp. 11-26 (pp. 11-12).

¹⁴ Cited from A. de Biberstein Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire arabe-français* I, Paris 1860 [reprint Beirut n. d.], p. 97.

¹⁵ K.M. McGeough, *Exchange Relationships at Ugarit*, Leuven 2007, pp. 105-107 and 377.

¹⁶ “El problema surge cuando, más allá de RS 16.257+, se aplica la traducción ‘mercader’ a algunas de las menciones de *bidalūma...*”, Vidal, *Las aldeas de Ugarit*, p. 110.

¹⁷ Vita, *El ejército de Ugarit*, p. 117.

¹⁸ See C. Kühne, “Mit Glossenkeilen markierte fremde Wörter in akkadischen Ugarittexten”, *UF* 6, 1974, pp. 157-167 (p. 158 and n. 9).

3. “vassal, someone liable to taxation”

The meanings “Lehensträger, Abgabepflichtiger” were proposed by M. Dietrich and O. Loretz²⁰, based on Hitt. *pitta-*, “duty, obligation”²¹.

Critique

This suggestion seems to have been ignored almost completely, but a few years ago it was mentioned again by I. Márquez Rowe²² and then by Schloen, who noted that in fact, Hitt. *pitta-* (or *pīetta*) means “allotment”, and not “duty”²³. As an alternative, he commented: “If one is seeking a hybrid Hittite-Hurrian etymology, it might be better to cite Hittite *pedi-*, “instead of, in place of (another person)” (*CHD P*, p. 342f.), which accords with the context-based interpretation of Ug. *bidalu* as “substitute” or “lieutenant”²⁴.

4. “helper, assistant”

A fourth possible meaning is “helper, assistant”, based on Hurrian *b/pidd*, “to help”, with the suffix *-(i)*, which denotes a profession²⁵, as has been proposed by I. Márquez Rowe. “In the light of the Arabic meaning and mainly, on account of the context, namely their subordination to other categories like the *mryn*, *mdrgl* or *tamkāru*, the word has

- 19 “Der Keil (:) wäre also hier ein echter *Glossen-* und kein *Gleichungskeil*: “Kaufleute: (d. h. ihre *bidalūma*”. Für die Lesung spricht sicherlich die Struktur des Textes PRU 3, S.199ff, wo einigen der aufgeführten Korporationen ... jeweils besonders spezifizierte Untergruppen ... zugeordnet werden, so dass die angebliche Gleichung LÚ.MEŠ DAM.GÀR.MEŠ : *bi-da-lu-ma* analogisch wohl doch als Korrektur einer Fehlschreibung zu werten ist” – J. Sanmartín, “Glossen zum ugaritischen Lexikon (V)”, pp. 171-172. Similarly, M. Heltzer, *Goods, Prices and the Organization of Trade in Ugarit*, p. 122, n. 10. J.D. Schloen, *The House of the Father*, p. 228, concludes: “the term *bidalu* is not equivalent to *tamkāru* but merely qualifies it, and the “gloss mark” ... does not designate a semantic equivalence but is simply a foreign word indicator”.
- 20 M. Dietrich – O. Loretz, “Die soziale Struktur von Alalāḥ und Ugarit (IV). Die É = *bītu*-Listen aus Alalāḥ als Quelle der gesellschaftlichen Schichtung von Alalāḥ im 15. Jh. v. Chr.”, *ZANF* 60, 1970, pp. 88-123 (here pp. 117-118): “Für die Etymologisierung von *pittallenni* bietet sich das heth. *pitta-* “Pflicht, pflichtmassige Leistung” an. *pittallenni* wäre demnach folgendermassen zu analysieren: *pitta-*+-(*l*)*li* (heth. Suffix zur Bildung von substantivierten Adjektiven auch im Sinne von Nomina actoris)+-*enni* (hurr. Suffix zur Bildung von Nomina [actoris]). Es liegt hier also eine der heth.-hurr. Mischbildungen vor, wie sie für die Texte aus Alalāḥ häufiger zu belegen sind ... Inhaltlich stünde *pittallenni* “Lehenstrager, Abgabepflichtiger” somit an der Seite von *unussuhli*”.
- 21 The meaning given in J. Friedrich, *Hehitisches Wörterbuch*, Heidelberg 1952 (-1954), 1, p. 170; 1. *Ergänzungsheft*, Heidelberg 1957, p. 16, as quoted by Dietrich – Loretz (see previous note).
- 22 I. Márquez Rowe in his review of J.-P. Vita, *El ejército de Ugarit*, *AJO* 45, 1997-1998, pp. 369-376 (p. 372).
- 23 Schloen, *The House of the Father*, p. 227, n. 20. For the meaning of Hitt. *pitta-*, *pijetta-* (“allotment”) see also A. Kloekhorst, *Etymological Dictionary of the Hittite Inherited Lexicon*, Leiden 2008, p. 677.
- 24 Schloen, *The House of the Father*, p. 227 n. 20. For Hitt. *pedi-*, “instead of, in place of” see also Kloekhorst, *Etymological Dictionary of the Hittite Inherited Lexicon*, pp. 342-343.
- 25 For this suffix see G. Wilhelm, “Hurritische Berufsbezeichnungen auf *-li*”, *SMEA* 29, 1992, pp. 239-244.

generally been translated “substitute” or “assistant, auxiliary”. In this regard and back to our suggested etymology [i.e. from **p/bidd-* + *-l(i)*], I would like to point out that a Hurrian verb root *pidd-* is attested in the Mittani letter ... for which C. Girbal has deduced a meaning of ‘to help’ ”²⁶.

Critique

This proposal is certainly attractive²⁷. For example, Schloen commented: “... a purely Hurrian derivation from **bidd-*, “to help,” still seems more probable”²⁸. However in KTU 4.69 vi 17, Ug. *bdl* occurs together with Ug. *mdrgl*, a word which probably means “(military) assistant” as has been suggested by Vita²⁹, based on Hurrian *mazeri*, “assistance”, “help”³⁰. It is unlikely, therefore, that the word *bdl*, which qualifies *mdrgl*, would also have the same meaning.

5. “deputy, substitute”

J. Aistleitner had already included the meaning “Stellvertreter” in his dictionary (WUS §501), in support of which he had cited Arabic *badala*, “to replace, etc.”³¹. Further confirmation for this meaning has come from Eblaite *ba-da-lum*, i.e. *baddālum*, “representative, vizier”³², which has been accepted by Sanmartín, who translates “Sustituto, (personal de) reserva”, tecnicismo de difusión sirio-levantina”³³.

Critique

Schloen noted that “Apart from Ugaritic there is no clear evidence for a Semitic root *b-d-l* in the second millennium B.C. or later, until it appears in Arabic as *badala*, “to exchange”. On the other hand, the occurrence of the term *ba-da-lum* ... in third-millennium texts from Ebla may point to an archaic Semitic etymology”³⁴. In fact, the

26 I. Márquez Rowe in his review of J.-P. Vita, *El ejército de Ugarit*, *AFO* 45, 1997-1998, pp. 369-376 (p. 372), where he refers to a suggestion previously made by A. Draffkorn Kilmer, *Hurrians and Hurrian at Alalah: An Ethnolinguistics Analysis*, PhD, University of Pennsylvania 1959, p. 234. For Hurr. *pitt-*, “helfen”, see C. Girbal, “Zum hurritischen Vokabular”, *SMEA* 29, 1992, pp. 159-169 (p. 164 §3.1) (cited by Márquez Rowe).

27 This coincides with Thiel’s view (“subordinierte Dienstleute”), cited above (n. 1).

28 Schloen, *The House of the Father*, p. 227 n. 20.

29 J.-P. Vita, “Two Hurrian Loanwords in Ugaritic Texts”, *AoF* 34, 2007, pp. 181-184 (pp. 181-182).

30 Hinted at by D. Arnaud, in his review of J.-P. Vita, *El ejército de Ugarit*, *Syria* 76, 1999, pp. 298-302 (p. 301) and “Textes administratifs religieux et profanes”, in M. Yon – D. Arnaud, eds, *Études ougaritiques I. Travaux 1985-1995*, Paris 2001, pp. 323-332 (p. 326). Identified as the root *maz*, “to help” with the root extension *-ri-* by M. Giorgieri, “Zu den hurritischen Personennamen in den Amarna-Briefen”, *SMEA* 41, 1999, pp. 63-83 (pp. 71-76).

31 For a detailed discussion of Arab. *bdl* see Renfroe, “Lexikalischen Kleinigkeiten”, pp. 224-225.

32 For discussion and references see Schloen, *The House of the Father*, p. 227, although, as he notes (*ibid.*, p. 228), this meaning may be restricted to the upper Euphrates region.

33 J. Sanmartín, “Isoglosas morfológicas eblaítico-ugaríticas: la trampa lexicográfica”, *AuOr* 9, 1991, pp. 165-217 (pp. 183-184 under §26 [B-D-L]).

34 Schloen, *The House of the Father*, p. 227. However, as Vidal, *Las aldeas de Ugarit*, p. 109, n. 69, notes, “La traducción eblaítica ... es enteramente dependiente de la propuesta ugarítica”.

verb is not so rare as has been claimed and there is additional evidence for it from Semitic³⁵ since this very verb is now known to occur in Aramaic. It is used three times in two Aramaic texts, which were translated several years ago by F.M. Fales³⁶. They are as follows:

(1) *z k bdl b ssbšr. yhb ksp*

“The latter, in substitution for PN, will give back the silver” (O.3714: 3-5)

(2) *hn . ʔl. k bdl qdm . hdd wḥrn 3+3+3 yšlm bdl l ḥrn[y]*

“If I enter as substitute (in judgement) before Hadad, then the substituted person will settle the payment of 9 donkeys to PN” (O.3672:1-4)

As Fales notes, this is “a reappearance in Aramaic of an ancient Semitic word for “substitute”, such as is attested at Ebla and Ugarit...”³⁷. This shows that Ugaritic *bdl(m)* has a good Semitic etymology and there is no need to refer either to Hittite or to Hurrian, as mentioned above.

In conclusion it can be stated that the combined evidence from at least three cognate Semitic languages, namely, Eblaite, Aramaic and Arabic, seems to indicate that Ug. *bdl(m)* (and its syllabic equivalent *bi-da-lu-ma* and *bi-da-lu-na*, PRU 3, 204-205 [RS 15.172]:14) is an inherited word and means “deputy”, “substitute” or the like. The other possible meanings that have been proposed can be safely excluded.

35 Heb. *bdl* means “to separate”, etc., as noted early on by C. Virolleaud, “Un état de solde provenant d’Ugarit (Ras-Shamra)”, *Mémorial Lagrange*, Paris 1940, pp. 39-49 (p. 41). See now HALOT, p. 110.

36 F.M. Fales, “The Use and Function of Aramaic Tablets”, in G. Bunnens, ed., *Essays on Syria in the Iron Age*, Louvain / Paris / Sterling 2000, pp. 89-124.

37 Fales, “The Use and Function of Aramaic Tablets”, p. 112, n. 132.