

THE MEANING OF UGARITIC *PGU (PGA/PGI)

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The Ugaritic word *pga* or *pgi* (probably forms of unattested **pgu*) occurs in three or four texts: KTU 4.117:1, 4.192:3, 4.721:1 and perhaps KTU 7.189:3. Two of these occurrences are in a broken context: *tl. dt. pgx* (KTU 4.192:3) and *pgx* (KTU 7.189:3). In the other two texts, the term seems to qualify garments: *in. hlpnm. pgam*, «two *pgu*-cloaks» (KTU 4.117:1)¹ and *mit arb'm lbs' pgi*, «one hundred and forty *pgu*-garments» (KTU 4.721:1)². This factor has determined the suggestions put forward by scholars. The following possible explanations can be listed for Ug. **pgu*, some proposed here for the first time. Each suggestion is followed by critical remarks.

1. «(garment made of) monkey-fur», based on Akk. *pagû(m)*, «monkey(-hair)» (cf. AHw, 809b); «ape» (CDA, 260), first proposed by Ribichini and Xella³.

Critique: a good solution in terms of phonological equivalents, which may even be correct.

2. «Fig(-coloured garment)», based on Heb. *pg*, «fig(-coloured)», also proposed, as an alternative, by Ribichini and Xella⁴.

Critique: The meaning of Heb. **pag*, which only occurs in Song 2:13, is uncertain. Possibly it denotes «unripened fruit» (HALOT, 909b), corresponding to Syriac *paggah*, «unripe fig» and Arabic *fagg*, *figg* «unripe, green», whereas the usual word for «fig» in Heb. is *p'nh*. Heb. **pag* may perhaps denote the fig-tree itself⁵. Alternatively, the plant in question may correspond to Akk. *pigû*, «a plant» (AHw, 862a; CDA, 274), the exact identification of which is unknown. However, neither of these explanations accounts for the final aleph in the Ugaritic word.

¹ With a dual ending; cf. J. Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik*, AOAT 273, Münster 2000, p. 289 (§ 53.213). Note that Ug. *hlpn*, «cloak», seems to be a loanword from Akkadian (cf. DUL, 393).

² For the genitive ending here cf. Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik*, p. 303.

³ S. Ribichini - P. Xella, *La terminologia dei tessili nei testi di Ugarit*, Rome 1985, p. 38 n. 28: possibly «'pelo' di animale». Cf. CAD P, 17-19 («monkey»).

⁴ They note: «in alternativa si potrebbe far riferimento all'ebra. **pg* ... che in Cant. 2:13 indica dei fichi acerbi e che potrebbe essere l'indicazione di un colore», Ribichini - Xella, *Terminologia dei tessili*, p. 38 n. 28.

⁵ M.V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, Madison / Wisconsin / London 1985, p. 113.

3. «Dyed (garment)», explained by Indo-European */peig-/*, «to dye», as proposed in DLU II, 345 (cf. also DUL, 665)⁶.

Critique: while such a loanword is possible, once again the final aleph would be unexplained, although one could allow for metathesis. The presence of final aleph in loanwords has been discussed by Tropper⁷.

4. «Open or loose (garment)», in view of Egyptian *pg3*, «to open»⁸, as first proposed a few years ago⁹. See also Arab. *fgw*, «to open».

Critique: this solution is possible and has been mentioned by Takács¹⁰, but remains uncertain.

5. «Fine linen (garment)», if it can be compared with Eg. *pg3(.t)*, «fine linen». This is a new proposal for the Ugaritic term¹¹.

Critique: according to Vos¹², Eg. *pg3(.t)* is a later form of Eg. *p3k.t* (*sic!*), which Takács discusses under **p3q*, «fein, dünn». He comments: «Etymology debatable, the presence of -3- in the root not being certain»¹³. Once again, the solution is open to debate.

6. «Veil», corresponding to Akk. *pūgu(m)* «net» (CDA, 277). This also is a new proposal. The term occurs in the following line from the Epic of Gilgamesh: «For the king of Uruk-Main-Street *pe-ti pu-ug ni-ši a-na ha-a-a-ri*, “the ‘people’s net’ will be open for the one who has first pick» (Gilg. OB II col. iv 155/157)¹⁴. As George explains, since Babylonian women were veiled at weddings, to be unveiled (*petām*) only by the bridegroom, «the expression *pūg niši*, ‘people’s net’ or ‘family’s net’, is a term for

⁶ For Indo-European *peig-* and *peik-*, «färben», cf. J. Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bern / Munich 1959, pp. 794-795 (cited in both DLU and DUL).

⁷ Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik*, § 21.341.13, although neither *pgam* nor *pgi* is mentioned there.

⁸ R. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, Oxford 1962, p. 96.

⁹ W.G.E. Watson, “Non-Semitic Words in the Ugaritic Lexicon (2)”, *UF* 28, 1996, pp. 701-719 (p. 707).

¹⁰ G. Takács, *Etymological Dictionary of Egyptian*, Volume Two: *b-, p-, f-*, HdO 48 I, Leiden 2001, p. 527.

¹¹ See also EA Akk *pa-qa*, «fine quality, of fine thread», based on Eg. *p3qt*, *p(3)qt*, proposed by T.O. Lambdin, “Egyptian Words in Tell El Amarna Letter No. 14”, *OrNS* 22, 1953, pp. 362-369 (p. 367), endorsed by Z. Cochavi-Rainey, “Egyptian Influence in the Amarna Texts”, *UF* 29, 1997, pp. 97-114 (p. 101) and tentatively accepted in CAD P, 141a.

¹² R.L. Vos, *The Apis Embalming Ritual. P. Vindob. 3873*, OLA 50, Leuven 1993, pp. 212-213.

¹³ Takács, *Etymological Dictionary of Egyptian*, Volume Two, pp. 403-404.

¹⁴ Text and translation: A.R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, Oxford 2003, Volume I, pp. 178-179. Differently in CAD P, 476b («the netting of the bed»).

the veil itself and ... this line refers to the initiation of intimacy by the act of parting the bride's veil»¹⁵.

Critique: this solution looks reasonably possible but would leave the final aleph in the Ugaritic word unexplained (but see above).

7. «(garment covering) the buttocks», corresponding to Akk. *pūqum*, «the cleft of the bottom» (cf. CDA, 278)¹⁶. and *pūqu* (and *puqqu*), «buttock», once with reference to a garment (CAD P, 514a). This, too, is a new proposal. Ug. *p_gam/p_gi* would then be a garment covering the area in question¹⁷.

Critique: Here Ug. /g/ would have to correspond to Akk. /q/¹⁸ and again the final aleph would remain unexplained. Also, George has rejected the meaning «cleft» for Akk. *pūqum* (see previous solution)¹⁹. The proposal seems unlikely, therefore.

8. «A textile», corresponding to Akk. *pūku*, «(a textile)» (CAD P, 503a); Veenhof notes simply: «The meaning of the word seems unknown»²⁰. This suggestion for Ugaritic is new.

Critique: While feasible, once again the final aleph in Ug. *p_gam/p_gi* would be without an equivalent and Ug. /g/ would have to correspond to Akk. /k/²¹.

The most likely proposals, therefore, are (1), (4) and (5) and the possibility that Ug. *p_gam/p_gi* is a loanword from either Akkadian or Egyptian cannot be excluded. Unfortunately, the overall conclusion is that for lack of clear and unequivocal comparative evidence and due to the extremely few occurrences of the term, as yet none of these solutions can be endorsed with any certainty. We can only agree with Tropper, that «die Etym[ologie] von *p_gu ist unbekannt»²².

¹⁵ George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, Volume I, p. 188.

¹⁶ See perhaps also Indo-European *peg-* «Achsel, Hüfte, Lende» in Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, pp. 792, 794.

¹⁷ For a similar explanation for Ug. *tp_rt*, «undergarment» (based on **tp_r*, «pudenda»), see W.G.E. Watson, «An Akkadian Anatomical Term and Ugaritic *tp_rt*», *NABU* 2003/64.

¹⁸ As in Ug. *grbz*, Akk. *qurpisu* (etc.), (DUL, 306-307).

¹⁹ George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, Volume I, p. 188.

²⁰ K.R. Veenhof, *Aspects of Old Assyrian Trade and Its Terminology*, Leiden 1972, p. 179.

²¹ See Ug. *gmn*, Akk. *kamānu* (DUL, 300); Ug. *mgšh*, Akk. *mukis* (DUL, 532); Ug. *s_glt*, Akk. *sikiltu* (DUL, 754); Ug. *s_gr*, Akk. *sekēru* (DUL, 754), etc.

²² Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik*, p. 289.