

THE SHINING SHADOW
LEXICAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE UGARITIC WORD *ZL**

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1. «... hab ich, mein Herr, einige Male (...) wirklich mit unaussprechlicher Bewunderung den schönen, schönen Schatten betrachten können (...). Sollten Sie sich wohl nicht abgeneigt finden, mir diesen Ihren Schatten zu überlassen?»¹.

As is well-known, in Chamisso's «Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte» shadow theme is the metaphor of Schlemihl's *alter ego*, the reproduction of his soul and of his life². At the beginning of the novel Chamisso uses the episode of Schlemihl selling his shadow as a starting point for presenting a wide and subtle speculation on the human existence.

It is, certainly, noticeable that the use of such a theme is connected with a very ancient tradition reaching back to a set of beliefs regarding the nature of the 'shadow', which were conceived within the Greco-Roman culture. The core of this tradition was the metaphorical perception of the shadow as a *simulacrum*, *imago* reproducing the exterior shape of something but lacking in material consistence and in brightness³.

Given this remark, it is also evident to notice the complete subjectivity of such a perception of 'shadow' and of its metaphorical developments; ancient speculations about the shadow have emigrated through the centuries as far as the present and 'our western shadow' draws completely on this heritage. Consequently, it is possible that other world civilizations may have developed different speculations and peculiar metaphorical uses of the same 'perceptive phenomenon' called «shadow».

This is the case of the language and the literary culture mirrored in the Ugaritic tablets.

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1 A. Von Chamisso, *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte*, in A. Von Chamisso, *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. I., München 1975, 22.

2 The use of this motif in Chamisso's novel has a very wide range of references that exceed the simple metaphor of *alter ego*, G. Von Wilpert, *Der verlorene Schatten. Varianten eines literarischen Motivs*, Stuttgart 1978; J.-P. Danès, *Pierre Schlemihl et la signification de l'ombre, Études germaniques*, 35/4, 1980, 444-48. Chamisso's novel above mentioned has the sole aim to draw attention to the wide diffusion of the use of the 'shadow' as a literary theme.

3 R.B. Onians, *Origins of European Thought*, Cambridge 1954, 94-95.

2. Anybody having competence in Semitic languages could check the translation of the root ZLL such as given by a dictionary of Arabic, Hebrew, Akkadian or any other Semitic language; they will always find the same translation: «shadow»⁴.

On the basis of this etymology the reading of a passage contained in KTU 1.14.III: 55 (dealing with an episode of the KRT's poem in which the protagonist is performing a ritual sacrifice) does not seem to leave any doubt as to the real meaning of Ugaritic *zl*:

ʿrb . bzl . ḥmt

All the interpretations concord readily in the translation of this passage as follows:

*he (KRT) entered in the shadow of the tent (?)*⁵.

In my opinion, in this particular case, the *western perception* of the shadow seems to coincide with the one expounded by the Ugaritic text. One can say in English: «in the shade 'of a tent' or 'of a tree' or 'of a building'» and so forth. I believe that the Ugaritic text I have mentioned, relates the same idea as saying in English: «in the shade of the tent», that is, «in a place where there is no sunshine, light».

At first glance one can deduce that Ugaritic confirms the data of the linguistic comparison (Semitic ZLL = «shadow») whereas, in fact, the question is more complicated.

3. Apart from the text KTU 4.611:12 (a list of persons) where the name *bn zl*⁶ is attested, the word *zl* occurs in two other significant passages⁷. On the basis of the

⁴ P. Fronzaroli, *Studi sul lessico comune semitico III - I fenomeni naturali*, ANLR VIII 20, 1965, 138.

⁵ The etymology (arabic *ḥaymah* = «tent», «pavilion») of the term *ḥmt* suggests the translation «tent»; however, this interpretation leaves some doubts in the light of the context as has been pointed out by TOu, 513 (also TOu, 195); For M. Dietrich - O. Loretz, *Die sieben Kunstwerke des Schmiedegottes in KTU 1.4 I 23-43*, UF 10, 1978, 58-60, this term means «Zelt» (also A. Van Selms, *A Guest-Room for Ilu and its Furniture*, UF 7, 1975, 470-71).

⁶ This proper name has been translated by S. Ribichini - P. Xella (*Su alcuni antroponomi da Ugarit*, RSF 15, 1987, 12-13): «figlio dell'ombra»; the writers suggest that such a personal name would be «intesa come designazione di un morto». Since I do not find in the Semitic languages any metaphorical use of the root *zll* in regard with the underworld (our metaphorical idea of *umbrae*), this only onomastic evidence, in my opinion, seems to be too vague for such a reconstruction. An interesting suggestion regarding the presence of this term is to be found in an Akkadian onomasticon interpreted such as «under / into the protection of ...» in B.A. Levine - J.-M. de Tarragon, *Dead Kings and Rephaim: The Patrons of the Ugaritic Dynasty*, JAOS 104, 1984, 651. For the supposed connection with *zlm* of KTU 1.161 («È difficile infatti non connettere *bn zl* con *zlm* di KTU 1.161 ...»; on p. 12 of the paper mentioned above), see the discussion on the p. 6. Also concerned with this issue is M. Dietrich - O. Loretz, *Zur Debatte über «Funerary Rituals and Beatific Afterlife in Ugaritic Texts and in the Bible»*, UF 23, 1991, 86.

⁷ There is another occurrence of the term *zlm* (KTU 1.161:1), whose interpretation has been amply discussed and interpreted in two different ways (shadow of the dead - statue). As both interpretations seem reasonable, I find myself obliged to exclude this occurrence as a point of evidence in my essay; for a more detailed discussion of this issue see note 28.

context many translations of these passages agree in the interpretation of *zl* as «shine», «glitter», an interpretation which, in my opinion, does grasp the deepest poetical nuance of these passages. Let us now proceed to a closer examination of both texts.

The first one, related in KTU 1.4.II:12-29, recounts the episode, from the Baʿl's cycle, in which ʿAnat and Baʿl are reaching the mother of the gods, Athirat, in order to offer her the wonderful gold and silver jewels moulded by the divine blacksmith; the main task of their 'mission' was to persuade the goddess to grant them the permission to build the Palace.

The lines 26-28⁸ describe the very moment in which Athirat recognizes the precious metals and smiles at them:

(26) [zl] ksp .
[a]trt (27) ktʿn [.]
zl . ksp .
wn[]t⁹ (28) hrš .
šmḥ rbt . a[trt]

(26) [the glitter] of the silver
[A]thirat (27) as soon as she saw
the shine of the silver
and [the splendour ?]¹⁰ (28) of the gold
then smiled Lady A[thirat].

It is quite evident that the context suggests this peculiar meaning of *zl*. The whole passage hints at the special effect of the precious metals that shine with reflected light and the goddess seems to become pleased and happy (whereas in the previous lines she is described as frightened at the sight of the coming gods) just because of this 'glitter'¹¹.

8 These lines presented here are the result of my personal reading of the tablet on the basis of the *editio princeps* published by Ch. Virolleaud, *Un nouveau chant du poème d'Aleïn-Baal, Syria* 13, 1932, pl. XXV.

9 This portion of tablet is damaged. In Virolleaud's edition the sign before the lacuna looks very probably like the sign for *n*, an assumption confirmed by CTA and by KTU. In my opinion after *n* is clear the room for a lacuna not exceeding two or three signs and then the line is closed by another sign probably to read as *t*. If my reading was correct, I would be inclined to accept Dahood's conjectural restoration (RSP II, 14): *n[ght]. It is also interesting to recall that the new edition of KTU reads this portion of text simply *n*r; a reading which fits perfectly the context but without pointing out any possible presence of room for a lacuna (to notice J. Oberman's restoration wn[r] in *Ugaritic Mythology*, New Haven 1948, 64, n. 13).

10 This interpretation depends on Dahood's restoration *n[ght] (from the root *NGH* = «to shine, to brighten») which would fit the context and the width of the lacuna. In my opinion the term *nght*, not attested elsewhere in Ugaritic, might find an interesting parallel in the expression: *ngḥ w srr* contained in KTU 1.123:12.

11 In this manner: ARTU, 48: «the glitter of the silver (...) the sheen of the gold;» MLC, 196: «el reflejo de la plata y el brillo del oro».

The second passage I would like to mention is contained in KTU 1. 92:27-28. This text is a short myth dealing with the goddess Astarte acting as a huntress. After the episode relating to Astarte's hunt, the myth tells of Baʿl's excitement before the beauty of the goddess:

(27) [wn]ʿmh . nšat ʒl kkbk₁bm

(28) [k]bd km kkb₁bt kt₁n

(27) [and] her [beau]ty shed a glitter like the (male) stars

(28) [a spl]endour like the (female) stars of kt₁n¹².

In this case the beauty of Astarte is compared to the light reflected by the stars, her beauty shines as much as the heavenly stars in the night.

Again, the context does not leave any doubt as to the peculiar nuance of the term ʒl such as «splendour, glitter, sheen».

4. I do not think that Chamisso would have been successful with his famous novel, if Schlemihl had sold a 'shining shadow'.

If we reflect on the Ugaritic passages mentioned above, the question then arises: in what way might the term for «shadow» be used, within some literary texts, as a synonym of its exact opposite: «splendour» ?

It is my impression that an attempt to find a convenient answer should have been that, worked out, on a philological basis, by Th. Gaster¹³ and then accepted by TOu¹⁴.

It is, indeed, very striking and noteworthy to discuss, given its importance in the Ugaritic studies, the translation proposed by TOu of the passage regarding the episode of Athirat and the precious metals, mentioned in the preceding pages:

(...) les ouvrages d'argent,
les ouvrages d'argent et l' é<clat> de l'or¹⁵.

This is the only explanation given by the authors: «Nous lisons pʿl (...) au lieu de ʒl»¹⁶. The reading pʿl instead of ʒl is possible owing to the fact that the sign ʒ looks like the signs p and ʿ brought closer¹⁷. Since the word pʿl is the well-known Semitic

¹² For the restorations and the interpretation of this passage I have followed the new edition of the myth recently published by M. Dijkstra, *The Myth of Astarte, the Huntress (KTU 1.92)*, UF 26, 1994, 113-26; (also J.C. de Moor, *Athartu, the Huntress*, UF 10, 1986, 215-36, especially, 228-29).

¹³ *Thespis*, 447: «But as soon as Asherat catches sight of the silver / the silver handiwork».

¹⁴ TOu, 199.

¹⁵ This interpretation has found supporters such as H.L. Ginsberg, *Interpreting Ugaritic Texts*, JAOS 70, 1950, 158-59.

¹⁶ TOu, 199, note m.

¹⁷ On this problematic topic, it is possible to find an interesting suggestion by D. Freilich - D. Pardee, (*z*) and (*t*) in Ugaritic: A Re-examination of the sign-forms, *Syria* 61, 1984, 25-36; W.T. Pitard, *The Shape of the ʿAyin in the Ugaritic Script*, JNES 51, 1992, 261-79. On the big issue of the Ugaritic script and its evaluation for a philological reading of Ugaritic tablets I consider

root meaning «to make, to do» (whereby the translation: «ouvrage»), one may interpret this passage in the manner of TOu and consequently the term *zl* disappears, being not pertinent to such a context (if one understands *zl* as shadow, the opposite of the idea suggested by the glitter of the metals). Although the arguments of TOu are consistent, it is also quite easy to raise two main objections: on the one hand, the Semitic root *pʿl* is attested in Ugaritic only in the allophone *bʿl*¹⁸, on the other, the poetical structure of the text, based on a very compact *parallelismus*, disappears into the anomalous and strange opposition between *bʿl ksp e n[gh]t hrš* («les ouvrages d'argent et l'éclat d'or»)¹⁹, for TOu restores the lacuna at the end of line 27 through Dahood's suggestion *n[gh]t*, «splendour, brightness».

The clear failure of every philological attempt to settle the question of the use of an 'inadequate' term (the shadow within the brightness?) reveals, in my opinion, the inadequacy of the question in itself.

When recalling what we have said in the beginning of this paper, shadow is, in our 'western' perception and metaphorical speculation, the exact opposite of splendour; our western shadow is obscure, it is a form without brightness. But, could the *shadows* of other civilizations have been different, at least, not necessarily 'obscure' ? That is exactly what seems to emerge from the Ugaritic literature: the shadow as metaphor of splendour.

If, among the many possible metaphorical speculations regarding the shadow, one of them might really have been the idea of shining, we are led to imagine some anthropological background underlying such a peculiar perception of the 'shadow phenomenon'.

Therefore it is certainly useful to ask ourselves whether we are informed about the peculiar beliefs that were widespread in the ancient Syrian culture and more generally in the ancient Near Eastern civilizations.

On the basis of different kinds of sources, the major observation to be pointed out is that shadow was perceived as a positive phenomenon, that is, shadow was a positive metaphor dealing with welfare. E. Cassin's²⁰ words regarding this issue may sum up such a peculiar Near Eastern perception of shadow: «Comme la lumière et comme l'odeur qu'irradie la personne, l'ombre est une manifestation de sa force vitale. Projection de l'être sur l'espace, son importance et son efficacité seront plus ou moins grandes selon qu'elles émanent d'un dieu, d'un héros, d'un roi ou d'un homme quelconque. (...) l'ombre participe de toutes les caractéristiques du corps qui la projette»²¹.

substantial W.T. Pitard's observations in *A New Edition of the "Rāpi'ūma" Texts: KTU 1.20-22*, BASOR 285, 1992, 33-77 and in the *Reading of KTU 1.19:III 41: The Burial of Aqhat*, BASOR 293, 1994, 31-38.

18 UT, 375.

19 I would like to mention also the translation of this passage given by CML, 57: «the covering of silver and the coating of gold». It is clear that such an interpretation of the word *zl*, in this context, does not make any sense. With regard to the episode of Astarte's beauty mentioned in the previous pages, I find in TOu II, 35 an inconsistency like the interpretation of CML: «elle a enlevé l'ombre, comme les étoiles».

20 E. Cassin, *La splendeur divine*, Paris 1968.

21 E. Cassin, *op. cit.*, 126-27.

Although E. Cassin's investigations relate to the Mesopotamian (and partially Syrian and Palestinian)²² mentality, evidence coming from the much later attested culture of Arabia seem also to confirm this peculiar imaginery. It is interesting, for instance, to remember that in the Quran the stereotypic motif of Paradise consists of three recurrent features: «waters of river, young and beautiful girls and refreshing shadows»²³ and that among the good things created by Allah for the mankind one of them is «shadow»²⁴.

Given this «positive» image of the shadow, consequently the root ZLL in the Semitic languages comes to mean very often «shelter, protection». Being held or hidden under this ZLL is something which evokes the image of being protected by some powerful energy (mostly divine).

Among the many examples that would be possible to mention, I find this biblical passage of particular interest (Ps. 121, 5-6):

The Lord is your guardian (*šom^oreka*),
 The Lord is your protector (*šill^oka*)²⁵,
 At your right hand.
 By day, the sun will not strike you,
 nor the moon by night.

In the language of the Ugaritic tablets the association of the shadow image with the one of «protection», so frequent in the Old Testament, is not clearly attested, even though the word *mzll* seems to hint at something like this²⁶. Certainly, it is always important to remember that the linguistic data emerging from Ugarit are very limited in

²² For a broader description of the use of the term *šel* in the Old Testament, see TWAT, Band IV, 1034-42. The image of the shadow in the Old Testament is very close to that emerging from the observations of E. Cassin's book and from the Arabic evidence (see below). Some interesting suggestions in I.H. Eybers, *The Root Š-L in Hebrew Words*, JNSL 2, 1972, 23-36.

²³ It is quite evident from the persistent frequency of the shadow (Qur. 56, 27-44; 4, 57; 36, 56; 77, 41; 13, 35; 76, 13; 39, 20) besides the other elements that «shadow» was a part of a stereotypic picture.

²⁴ Qur. 16, 83.

²⁵ This passage is mentioned by B.A. Levine - J.-M. de Tarragon, *op. cit.*, 651; I agree with the writers' arguments regarding the rendering of *šill^oka* at line 6 as «your protector». In my paper I cite their translation of the biblical passage. It is interesting also to draw attention to the fact that the Greek translation of LXX for the expression *šill^oka*, not being able to maintain the metaphorical sense of shadow as protection, «unusual» concept in Greek, is obliged to the rendering: *skepē sou*, where *skepē* is a verb issued from the noun *skepas* meaning «cover», «shelter» (whereby the verb *skepazō* = «protect») which is a manner of reproducing the «Semitic» metaphor of the shadow.

²⁶ It is to be said that Ugaritic *mzll* should evoke more exactly the idea of the dwelling (clear is the derivation from the concept of protection). However, this term is used only within a particular formula repeated four times in the Ugaritic texts (KTU 1.3.V: 40; 1.4.I:12, 17; 1.4.IV:52, 56; 1.117:6, this last one, a tablet whose left side is missing, presents many possible variants) in which *mzll* is used as synonym of *mṭb* and of *ḥzr*, words hinting at the habitation, the residence. Furthermore, the whole formula and the contexts deal with questions regarding a palace as in the case of Baʿl's Palace myth. It is interesting to notice the coincidence with Arabic in which the term *miṣallah* means *umbrella*, but also *veranda*, *porch* (a protective covering!).

their documentation and often puzzling in their interpretation, therefore it would be historically and methodologically wrong to take into consideration those data as if it were on a par with the Arabic or Hebraic ones (or another Semitic language attested by a more large and secular tradition)²⁷. However, the word *zlm*, which occurs in the ritual text KTU 1.161, has been the object of discussion concerning the possibility that it might be considered a technical term regarding the dead kings of Ugarit acting on the function of «protectors» of the living kings²⁸.

5. Apart from the doubtful attestation in Ugaritic of the meaning «protection» for the root *zlm*, what is important to notice is that an ideology of the shadow such as we have singled out, from the earliest stages of the Near Eastern civilization (Mesopotamia) to the more recent ones (Arabia) should represent, in my opinion, the very anthropological difference compared to our «obscure» and fairly «negative» image of the shadow.

Without being conditioned by our peculiar notion of «*umbra*», I think that we might be close to grasping a more adequate explanation of such a puzzling term as Ugaritic *zlm*.

Might such a perception of shadow have had any synonymic use for recalling the shining beauty of the divine dimension within the artificiality of the poetry?²⁹

This is, in my opinion, one of the possible assumptions enabling us to settle the lexical question and to penetrate the innermost features of the poetical language of

²⁷ The linguistic relationship between Ugaritic and other Semitic languages is a complex issue. I have found certain reflections interesting with regard to the frequent tendency to compare Ugaritic with Hebrew by G. Garbini, *Gli studi ugaritici oggi* and *Ugaritismi nell'ebraico biblico* in id., *Il semitico nordoccidentale*, Roma 1988, 131-36, 136-40; for the comparison with Arabic and with Southern Semitic see F. Renfroe, *Arabic-Ugaritic Lexical Studies*, Münster 1992; J. Hayes, *The Lexical Relationship Between Epigraphic South Arabic and Ugaritic*, in *Semitic Studies in Honour of Wolf Leslau on the Occasion of his Eighty-Fifth Birthday November 14th, 1991*, Wiesbaden 1991, 609-26.

²⁸ The first line of this text (*spr. dbh. zlm*) has been discussed without a sure solution. On the one hand, it has been suggested: «livret de sacrifice funéraire (littéralement «d'une ombre») by P. Bordreuil - D. Pardee, *Le rituel funéraire ougaritique RS. 34.126*, *Syria* 59, 1982, 122, on the other: «the written record of the sacred celebration (in honor) of the Patrons», by B.A. Levine - J. M. de Tarragon, *op. cit.*, 651 (the writers point out also on page 652: «the *zlm* of the Ugaritic dynasty are its protectors, its patrons»), finally: «liturgia del *dbh* della statua (?)», by P. Xella, *I testi rituali di Ugarit*, Roma 1981, 282 (accepted also by M. Dietrich - O. Loretz, *Neue Studien zu den Ritualtexten aus Ugarit (II)*, Nr. 6 - *Epigraphische und inhaltliche Probleme in KTU 1.161*, UF 15, 1983, 23: «Anweisung für das Statue - Opfer»). Since the relationship between shadow and the souls of the dead does not seem to be evidenced in the Near Eastern civilizations, or at least not so frequently as in the Graeco-Roman culture, I would incline to agree with Xella's interpretation and his arguments (on p. 284 of his book mentioned above). However, the exact meaning of *zlm* in the text KTU 1.161 remains doubtful and requires further investigation.

²⁹ For E. Cassin, *op. cit.*, 131, in Mesopotamia this analogy looks fully evident: «L'ombre et l'éclat lumineux, la stature, le sexe ou le génie protecteur sont pour les Mésopotamiens des réalités de même nature. Ombre, parfum, éclat: autant d'émanations par lesquelles l'être vivant manifeste sa présence (...) Vivre dans l'ombre ou dans l'éclat du roi, en respirer le parfum, signifie, en ce langage, participer de la vitalité royale, être situé à l'intérieur de cette zone d'énergie dont le roi est la source puissante».

Ugarit and maybe of a complex cultural fragment of the Near Eastern civilization. If this assumption is true, one may also suppose the possibility that a term meaning something like, in English, «shining, brilliant shadow» involves certain perceptive phenomena of the light reflected by special kinds of surfaces or filtered by peculiar coverings. I imagine the light effects produced by the basalt, alabaster or other materials treated with oil (and of course metals) that were so much in use in the Near East³⁰; and I imagine also the shadow-light effects of the sunshine through the covering of a tent or through the trees of an oasis, things and situations that are so typical in the geographical environment of the Near East.

6. In conclusion, it is just in this difficulty to find an adequate «translation» into our languages and our cultures of the term *zl* that one may perceive the extreme degree of refinement and sophistication of the literary texts from Ugarit. Such a degree, in my opinion, must have been parallel to that reflected by the complexity of the more famous «literary texts» like the Quran or the Odyssey or the Orlando Furioso and so forth.

Even though our lexical reflections have partially left doubtful the exact meaning of the Ugaritic word in question (and this is also due to the limited Ugaritic documentation in itself), I believe that these reflections might become a good occasion for reevaluating more in general³¹ Ugaritic literature not only as the most significant witness regarding a whole cultural system of the late bronze Syrian civilization (including a peculiar language), but also as a «highly developed poetical world» within the Near East³².

30 In this connection I find interesting some observations by J.C. de Moor (*Standing Stones and Ancestral Worship*, UF 27, 1995, 1-20, the quotation on p. 12): « (...) it may be observed that the Ugaritic word for shade of an ancestral spirit (*zl* KTU 1.161, 1) also describes the glitter of both precious metals and stars. Could it be that in the ancestral cult the spirits were also made "visible" by reflecting sunlight on their stelae using star-shaped mirrors? »; My personal reflections exposed in the present paper could be a partial confirmation of such an assumption.

31 G. Mazzini, *The Torture of Mot. For a reading of KTU 1.6 V 30-35*, SEL 14, 1997, 23-28; in this particular case I wanted to draw attention to the structural dynamic of the text which recalls the technique of the «intertextuality».

32 As regards this important issue, it seems to me that from the part of the scholars it has not been devoted such interest as it should, both on a speculative and a technical level; more in general, W.G.E. Watson, *The Character of Ugaritic Poetry*, JNSL 11, 1982, 157-69.