

NOTES ON UGARITIC *ṣbr* AND *ṣpr*

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The groups of Ugaritic words discussed here – derivatives of the various roots *ṣbr* and *ṣpr* – present difficulties, some of which can be resolved¹. The entries are given under the two sets of homographic roots: *ṣbr* and *ṣpr*.

ṣbr I

The most important previous study on *ṣbr* by Heltzer was a significant contribution to the problem². The term *ṣbr* occurs in connection with place-names in two texts³. One text (KTU 4.375 [RS 18.84])⁴ is a list of what appear to be types of field, where the entries (each written on two lines) are separated by ruled lines:

ṣbr. m. uṣkn Two *ṣbr*-fields in *Uṣkn*

ṣbr. aḥd b. ar One *ṣbr*-field in *Ar*

ṣbr. aḥd b. mlk One *ṣbr*-field in *Mlk*

ṣbr. aḥd b. m^crby One *ṣbr*-field in *M^crby*

ṣbr. aḥd b. ulm One *ṣbr*-field in *Ulm*

ṣbr. aḥd b. ubr^cy One *ṣbr*-field in *Ubr^cy*

¹ A re-appraisal is necessary because some of the meanings listed in older dictionaries for the corresponding Akkadian roots are no longer accepted.

² M. Heltzer, "Zur Bedeutung des Ausdrucks «die *ṣibbiru*-Felder» in Ugarit", *OLP* 8, 1977, pp. 47-55. He consulted H. Hirsch, "Šubrum und scheinbar verwandtes", *Afo* 21, 1966, pp. 52-55 but was unaware of P. Garelli, "Tablettes cappadociennes de collections diverses (*fin*)", *RA* 60, 1966, pp. 91-152 as it was published the same year. Curiously, J. Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol*, Winona Lake 2001, does not discuss either *ṣbr* or *ṣibbiru*. While completing this note, I received a copy of the *Festschrift Sanmartín*, which included Belmonte-Marín's solution to Akk. *ṣibbiru* (see below).

³ KTU 4.375:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11; 4.400:2

⁴ For the place-names see W.G.E. Watson, "The Lexical Aspect of Ugaritic Toponyms", *AuOr* 19, 2001, pp. 109-23 and W.H. van Soldt, *The Topography of the City-State of Ugarit* (AOAT 34), Münster 2005.

The other text (KTU 4.400 [RS 18.141]:2) simply has *gt šbr*, “The Oil-press⁵ of Š.”. As is generally recognised, the corresponding term in Ugaritian Akkadian is *šibbiru*. This occurs in PRU 6, 55 (RS 18.22)⁶ in the expression *ša ina eqlât šibbiri*, “which are among the *šibbiru*-fields”. It also appears in PRU 3, 79-81 (RS 16.239) as *eqil ši-ib-bi-ri* (line 6) and in PRU 3, 83 (RS 16.157) as *eqlât šibbiri* (line 7)⁷. Clearly, Akk. *šibbiru*, which only occurs in these texts, is a loan from West Semitic (Ugaritic or Aramaic)⁸. Note also the Alalakh place-name ^{uru}*zi-bi-ra* (AT 342:22), on which Van Soldt commented: «I prefer to read *šibbiri* and to connect it with Ugaritic *šbr*»⁹, although he proposed no meaning.

These are the possible meanings of Ug. *šbr* (Akk. *šibbiru*):

1. “communal plot”, i.e. a type of field or special farming system (DUL, pp. 777-778)¹⁰.

Rainey comments: «Nougayrol [PRU 6, 146] is probably correct in associating it with Ugaritic *šbr*, “group”», adding: «It is worthy of note that the fields in “community” land are all designated by the personal names of their owners! In other words, there is no real basis for M. Heltzer’s theory that community property was ever held in common»¹¹. According to Heltzer, «we may suppose that this type of land was similar to “public lands” ... but in this case the lands were under royal disposition»¹². Huehnergard has “*ši(-ib)-bi-ri = Išibbīril* ‘collective land(?)’ (ŠBR)”¹³. Similarly, Sivan has the entry: “**ŠIBBIRU** (? <*šabbīru) – collective fields (cf. *šabbūr* in Heb.)”¹⁴.

Critique: This is the universally accepted view. It would imply that there is no distinction between *šbr* I and *šbr* II (see below). However, it leaves the vowel pattern unexplained and seems to be based on a preconception about meaning.

2. “ploughed (field)”, based on Yemeni Arab. *ḍabūra*, “ploughing before sowing in order to remove weeds” (*√ḍbr*)¹⁵.

⁵ On *gt* see DUL, pp. 310-13 and D. Michaux-Colombot, “Le *gat* de Gédéon, pressoir ou fief?”, *UF* 29, 1997, pp. 559-98. Note that Eg. *gt* may mean “oil” (DLE II, p. 195).

⁶ Lines 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 28, 31 and 33.

⁷ In these texts, *eqlât* is written A.ŠÀ(.ĤI.A/MEŠ). For a full listing cf. J.A. Belmonte-Marín, “El «lenguaje del suelo» en parcelario rústico de Ugarit según sus textos cuneiformes”, in G. del Olmo Lete - L. Felio - A. Millet Albà (eds), *Šapal tibnim mû illakû. Studies Presented to Joaquín Sanmartín on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (AuOrS 22), Sabadell (Barcelona) 2006, pp. 35-44 (p. 43 n. 56).

⁸ See now Akk. *šippiru* or *šippiru*, “a kind of field” (CAD, p. 339 < Ug.).

⁹ Van Soldt, *Topography*, p. 150.

¹⁰ The meaning is based on Eth. *šabara* and Arab. *šabbārat* (see DUL, p. 777).

¹¹ A.F. Rainey, “Gleanings from Ugarit”, *JOS* 3, 1973, pp. 34-60 (p. 40).

¹² M. Heltzer, *The Rural Community in Ancient Ugarit*, Wiesbaden 1976, pp. 69-70.

¹³ J. Huehnergard, *Ugaritic Vocabulary in Syllabic Transcription* (HSM 32), Atlanta 1987, p. 169.

¹⁴ D. Sivan, *Grammatical Analysis and Glossary of the Northwest Semitic Vocables in Akkadian Texts of the 15th - 13th C. B.C. from Canaan and Syria* (AOAT 214), Kevelaer/ Neukirchen-Vluyn 1984, p. 269.

¹⁵ D. Varisco, “Terminology for Plough Cultivation in Yemeni Arabic”, *JSS* 49, 2004, pp. 71-129 (p. 104).

Critique: While this is possible, it seems strange that a special term should be used for an expression as common as a ploughed field.

3. “levelled or trodden ground”, based on Yemeni Arab. \sqrt{zbr} and \sqrt{sbr} , “to level the ground”¹⁶; cf. also Akk. *šapru*, “pressed in, pressed down”, derived from Akk. *šapāru*, “to press down” (CAD, p. 333).

Critique: Once again, although possible, it is curious that a special term should be used for a field of this type.

4. “low-lying ground”, based on Akk. *šipirtu*, “depression, trough” (CAD, 338)¹⁷ and like *šapru* in the previous solution, also derived from Akk. *šapāru*, “to press down” (CAD, p. 333b). It is a «term referring either to a part of the irrigation system or to a topographic feature» (CAD S, p. 202a).

Critique: While it feasible that Ug. /b/ corresponds to Akk. /p/, it is unlikely that *šibbiru* is equivalent to *šipirtu*.

5. “a particular type of land”, based on Akk. (OB) *supurtu* or *šupurtu*, “a type of terrain” - «Possibly to be connected either with *supūru* or with the geogr[aphic] names composed with *šupur-*» (CAD S, p. 396b); *supurtum* (or *šupurtum*), “(a topog[raphic] feature)” (CDA, p. 328)¹⁸.

Critique: This would require Ug. /b/ to correspond to Akk. /p/, which is feasible, but again it is unlikely that *šibbiru* is equivalent to *šupurtu*.

6. “fallow”, corresponding to Arab. *šfr* “to be vacant” (DMWA, p. 518a); *šifr*, “empty, void, or vacant” (Lane AEL, p. 1697).

Critique: It is uncertain whether the Arabic term does in fact refer to fallow fields¹⁹.

7. “rosemary”, as proposed by Belmonte-Marín²⁰. This meaning and his proposed transliteration as *Zi-ib-bi-ri* are based on Pseudo Apuleius 80, 31: *a Graecis dicitur libanotis, alii ycteritis, Itali rosmarinum, Punici zibbir*²¹.

¹⁶ Varisco, “Terminology”, pp. 94, 96.

¹⁷ Previously mentioned by Heltzer, *Rural Community*, p. 70 n. 24, where he notes: «in our opinion it has to be read *šibirtu* in Babylonian and Ugaritic texts». It is also mentioned by Heltzer, “Zur Bedeutung”, p. 50 n. 17, though no meaning is given there.

¹⁸ Not listed in AHW.

¹⁹ Other possibilities are as follows: “rough ground”, based on Arab. *šabbaʿratun*, “rugged ground, rising above the adjacent part or parts, and hard in which is no herbage, and which produces none” (Lane AEL, p. 1644); “ground with smooth stones”, based on Arab. *šubarat*, “stones, smooth stones” (Lane AEL, p. 1645). Note also OSA *dfr*, “to case a well with stone”, based on Arab. *dafara*, “to build a house of stones without mortar” (cf. Biella DOSA, p. 436). This could indicate a field enclosed with a “dry stone wall”, although the possibility remains remote.

²⁰ Belmonte-Marín, “El «lenguaje del suelo»”, p. 43. Whether there is any connection with Akk. *šibaru*, *šiburu*, “(a bitter plant, phps.) «aloe»” (CDA, p. 337b; cf. CAD S, pp. 154b-155a) or with Aram. *zambūrā*, *zabbūrā*, a loanword in Akkadian as *zambūru*, “thyme” (cf. AHW p. 1508; CDA, p. 444a and CAD Z, p. 39a), remains uncertain. See also Akk. *šiburratu*, *siburratu*, *šinurratu*, possibly “rue” (cf. CDA, p. 370a), Akk. *sibbiru*, *sippirru*, *šibirru*, *šinpirru*, “a tree: its aromatic product” (cf. CAD S, pp. 230-31), listed after *ḥašū*, “thyme”.

Critique: While this may apply to a single place-name, it is unlikely to denote a particular type of field as in KTU 4.735.

The most likely meanings are perhaps “ploughed field” (2), “flattened ground” (3) or “fallow land” (6), but the matter remains open.

šbrt (*√šbr* II)

1. “clan, community”²²

Hirsch understood Akk. *šubrum* “als Kollektivum”²³. He was followed by Heltzer, who applied this to Ugaritic: «Vielleicht gibt es hier ein vergleichbares Wort [akk.] *šubrum*, welches laut AHW (S. 1108) “Arbeitergruppe, Gesinde, Sklaven” bedeutet. Das Wort muss als Kollektivnamen verstanden werden, und bedeutet keine individuelle Arbeiter- oder Sklavenperson, sondern eine Gruppe von Personen»²⁴. Similarly, Gordon (UT §19.2142) translates *šbr* as “a team (of workers)” and for *šbrt*, “band, group”, refers to Arab. *šubār*, “bundle, package”²⁵.

Critique: This meaning seems to be based on Heb. *šibbur*, “pile (of heads)” (2 Kgs 10:8; cf. HALOT, p. 999b).

2. “domestics”, “household staff”, “household”

The meaning proposed here is based on Akk. *šubrum*, *šupārum*, “Sklave” (AHw, p. 1107; “slave”, CDA, p. 339) and *šubrum*, “Gesinde, Sklaven” (AHw, p. 1108); “(domestic) servants, labourers” (CDA, p. 340); *šubru*, “slaves” (see CAD S, p. 341, discussion section)²⁶. Garelli suggests considering «les *šupru* (*sic!*) comme de jeunes esclaves, servant de personnel domestique»²⁷. It may be a loanword²⁸. Note also Ug. *šbr(t)*, “Arbeitergruppe o. ä.” (mentioned in AHW, p. 1108)²⁹. If correct, then KTU 1.3 v 36-37 (= KTU 1.4 iv 48-50) can be translated as follows:

<i>yšh atrt wbnh</i>	He (Baal) calls Athiratu and her sons,
<i>ilt w šbrt aryh</i>	the goddess and the household of her kinsfolk ³⁰ .

²¹ RGTC 12.1, p. 400. My thanks to Juan Belmonte-Marín for discussing this term with me.

²² KTU 1.3 v 37; 1.4 ii 25; 1.4 iv 49; 1.6 i 40-41.

²³ Hirsch, “*Šubrum* und scheinbar verwandtes”, p. 52.

²⁴ Heltzer, “Zur Bedeutung”, p. 50.

²⁵ J. Blau, *On Pseudo-Corrections in Some Semitic Languages*, Jerusalem 1969, p. 61 and DNWSI, p. 958.

²⁶ A correction to the entry *šupru* in CAD S, 253b.

²⁷ Garelli, “Tablettes cappadociennes”, p. 136.

²⁸ For a different solution based on Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic, cf. DUL, p. 778 (“clan, community”).

²⁹ See also J.-M. Durand, “Études sur les noms propres d’époque amorrite. I : les listes publiées par G. Dossin”, *MARI* 8, 1997, pp. 597-673 (p. 651 n. 720) on the Mari PN *šubrum*, “Serviteur” (Liste D col. v 5’): «Le terme est p. è. apparenté au nom géographique Subir, Šubartum”. However, cf. CAD S, p. 341a.

³⁰ Similarly in KTU 1.4 ii 24-26 and 1.6 i 39-40.

šbr III(?)

meaning unknown. It only occurs in the broken line: *km. šq. šbrf |* (KTU 1.82:25)³¹.

špr I

“shaggy (hair)”, in the expression *klb špr*, “shaggy dog” (KTU 1.14 iii 19, 1.14 v 12).

This suggestion is based on Akk. *šuppuru*, “straggly, in strands”, used of sheep’s fleece (CDA, p. 341b; cf. AHW, 1113a) in the expression *šuppam šuppuram šipāti*, “a white š.-sheep with curly fleece”³².

špr II

This term occurs in the expression *mšprt dlthm* (KTU 1.23:25) – for a survey of opinions see now Smith³³. He opts for the translation: “(Shapshu) braids their branches”³⁴.

It is not clear what meanings should be assigned to the PNN *špr* (KTU 4.170:7; 4.296:8; 4.332:18) and *šprn* (KTU 4.232:20; 4.261:4), although the spellings *šu-pa-ri* (PRU 6, 99:23) and *šu-pa-ra-ni* (Ugar. 5, 86:22) seem to indicate “servant, slave” (see above)³⁵, i.e. “servant/worshipper (of the god)”. Alternatively, *špr(n)* could mean either “bird” or “goat”³⁶, although the vowels do not seem to support either meaning.

31 Translated «... you shall be struck / like someone distressed» by G. del Olmo Lete. *Canaanite Religion According to the Liturgical Texts of Ugarit* (translated by W.G.E. Watson), Bethesda 1999, p. 377, and cf. DUL, pp. 789-90.

32 For other possible meanings see W.G.E. Watson, “Some Rare Lexical Items in Ugaritic”, *SEL* 16, 1999, pp. 39-43 (pp. 42-43).

33 M.S. Smith, *The Rituals and Myths of the Feast of the Goodly Gods of KTU/CAT 1.23. Royal Constructions of Opposition, Intersection, Integration, and Domination* (SBLRSB 51), Atlanta 2006, pp. 66-67.

34 Following DUL, p. 587, based on the (Arab., ESA, Ethiop.) root *dfr*, but with the meaning “to plait”. For additional surveys, see W.G.E. Watson, “The Goddesses of Ugarit: A Survey”, *SEL* 10, 1993, pp. 47-59 (p. 53 n. 56); N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, London 2002, p. 329 n. 27.

35 The meaning “claw, nail (of finger or toe), etc.”, as in Akk. *šupru(m)* (cf. CAD, p. 341b), does not seem to occur in Ugaritic.

36 See Heb. *šāpir*, “billy goat” (HALOT, p. 1048b).