

KTU 1.93 (=PRU 5:124): THE PRAYER OF A SICK COW

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I. Introduction.

1.1 This poorly preserved text was discovered in the *Palais Royal* (room no. 81) during the 19th campaign (1955)¹ and was first published (in transcription only) by Ch. Virolleaud in PRU 5 (p. 173), accompanied by a partial translation (lines 1-3a) and some brief notes. Utilizing new photographs, M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín republished the text (also in transcription) as 1.93 in their 1976 edition of the Ugaritic alphabetic texts (KTU, p. 103), with some new and improved readings.

1.2 It was however only in 1979, some fifteen years after PRU 5, that there appeared the first preliminary studies of the text. Working from a moulage, A. Caquot subjected the text editions of both Virolleaud and KTU to critical review in an article revealingly entitled "Un épisode peu connu du mythe de Baal et de la Génisse"². Caquot proposed some new readings as well as an overall interpretation foreshadowed in the title and succinctly summarized as follows: "Ce petit tableau expose de façon imagée mais plus pudique que ... KTU 1.11 un moment mythique paraissant se rattacher à l'épisode du poème de Baal où ... le grand dieu a sailli une génisse avant de descendre au séjour des morts"³.

1.3 In the very same publication, and as part of a series of lexicographi-

cal notes, J.C. de Moor offered a new translation and some brief comments on our text⁴. With KTU 1.93 as his point of departure, de Moor ventured to restore the first six lines of the text in their entirety. He also suggested an emendation in line 3. On the basis of the reconstructed text, he then concluded that, contrary to the opinion of Virolleaud, the composition is not of the "mythological genre" but belongs to the genre of "prayers" discovered in small quantity at Ugarit, especially in the later campaigns.

1.4 Two years later, Z. Zevit authored a short article in which he proposed solutions to two lexical cruces in our text: *t^clgt* and *pš*. The discussion contains a translation as well of the first five lines of the text⁵.

1.5 A comparison of the foregoing contributions indicates that the authors are in fundamental disagreement as to the literal meaning as well as the general purpose and significance of our text. In part this divergence derives from the fragmentary and poorly preserved state of the text. It will be our purpose in this study to propose a reconstructed text-form and to make some suggestions as to its meaning, both literal and general. We have not had access to the original text; nor to photograph nor to moulage. Nevertheless, aided by the efforts of our predecessors as well as by some insight into the poetic structure and literary techniques of the composition, it is hoped that we may be able to advance the discussion towards a scholarly consensus.

II. Text-Layout and Translation.

¹ <i>ar^h. td. rgm. bgr</i>	4	'A cow cried out from the mountain:
² <i>bpy. t^clgt.</i>	2	} 4 'In my mouth (there's) a thickness, On (my)/[my] tongue, a ridge;
<i>blšn[y?] ³gr</i>	2	
^c <i>sb. bpšy. r[bs.]</i>	3	Pain is <i>lo[dged]</i> in my gullet;

4	<i>hwt. b^cl. išt*[m^c]</i>	3	(O) Baal, [he]ar my utterance.
—————			—————
5	<i>šm^c(.) ly.</i>	2	He has hearkened to me;
	<i>ypš. [pš</i>	2	
	<i>w]ḥkr [(1/b)b]šry.</i>	3	He will open [my gullet, And remove] the affliction
	<i>[y(š)rḥq]</i>	3	[from] my fl[esh];
7	<i>šr (!) (.)^c[nq.]</i>	2	The <i>tightness</i> of my th[roat], The <i>enlargement</i> of [my pharynx].'
	<i>gd * [grn]</i>	2	
—————			—————
8	<i>tat[.....</i>		A ewe [.....
9	<i>yn[.....</i>		
10	<i>i[.....</i>		

III. Notes

1.0 *Line 1*

1.1 *td. rgm.*: Lit., "hurl word", already compared by Virolleaud with the Akkadian idiom *nadû rigmu* (AHw, 706, §10b; CAD N/1, 94ab). Similarly understood by Caquot and Zevit (contrast de Moor). Ugaritic *šydy* recurs elsewhere in the poetic texts in the meaning "drive out/away" with reference to disease and an enemy army respectively⁶. It is not to be confused with the homonymous *šydy* "perish" (= Ar. *šw/ydy*)⁷ and *šydy* "scratch" (= Ar. *wadā*)⁸.

1.2 *bgr*: The analysis and translation follows once again Virolleaud. Although several homonyms share the spelling *gr* in Ugaritic, the meaning "mountain" is at once the most ubiquitous and the most appropriate here. Contrast Caquot who, proceeding from the assumption of *bgr*/*t^clqt* suggests a Ug. *hapax leg.* *šbgr*

cognate with Hebr. $\sqrt{p}^c r$ "open wide" (with reference to the mouth). This reflects however an erroneous stichometric division: $t^c lgt$ stands in parallelism with $\acute{g}r$ and $^c \acute{s}b$ of line 3, the symmetrical counterpart of the triple parallelism $(b)p(y) // (b)l\acute{s}n(y?) // (b)p\acute{s}(y)$. — Contrast also de Moor's "in negligence", similarly positing a Ug. *hap. leg.* $\acute{g}r$, considered cognate with Arabic $\acute{g}irra^t$.

2.0 Line 2

2.1 $t^c lgt$: All agree in relating this word to Heb. $\sqrt{c}lg$, occurring in connection with (inarticulate) speech and generally rendered "stammer"⁹. However, this meaning can hardly be primary in view of Arabic $\sqrt{c}l\acute{g}$ which denotes something large, coarse, thick, or bulky; thus $^c i\acute{l}\acute{g}^{un}$ "a cake of bread thick in the edges"¹⁰. Virolleaud astutely compared the Heb. $\sqrt{c}lg l\acute{s}n$ (Is. 32:4) with $\sqrt{k}bd l\acute{s}n = \sqrt{k}bd p(h)$ in Ex. 4:10, referring to Moses' speech impediment. The basic idea would seem to be of someone whose tongue hangs too loosely in his mouth causing him to lisp when speaking. In our text, however, we are not dealing with a congenital speech defect in a human being but rather with a temporary and symptomatic swelling in the tongue and throat area of a talking cow! This determination, I submit, is the key to a proper understanding of our text as a whole.

2.2 $b\acute{l}\acute{s}n[y?]$: The uncertainty derives from Caquot's observation that there is no room on the tablet for restoring the final y alleged both by Virolleaud and the editors of KTU. However, the forms of the parallel members bpy and $b\acute{p}\acute{s}y$, as well as the general consideration of grammar (UGU § 44) suggest that the absence of final y if not due to scribal error may reflect an abbreviation due to lack of space on the line.

3.0 Line 3

3.1 *ḡr*: Lit., "mountain" (or whatever the primary meaning of this common Ugaritic word). The metaphor describes the uneven surface produced by the swelling. The word is similarly understood by Caquot, but in a literal sense which, in my estimation, plays havoc with the resultant translation (proffered by the author with considerable hesitation). De Moor repeats the rendering "negligence" for this *ḡr*; but the final translation ("negligence from the tongue") hardly inspires confidence.

3.2 ^c*ṣb*: The reading of this word is controversial. Virolleaud demurred from identifying the two initial signs but considered the final *b* rather certain. The reading *tyb* originates with KTU and was adopted by de Moor who rendered it "restore", presumably from $\sqrt{t(w)b}$ "return". However, examining the moullage, Caquot observed that the initial sign could be read as ^c*ayin* as well as *t*, and that the second sign might with equal justice be considered a *ṣade*. For Virolleaud's final *b* Caquot suggested *d*. The resultant ^c*ṣd* is then rendered "territory", a secondary and rather strained derivative of an alleged Ug. $\sqrt{c}ṣd$ meaning "cut, delimit". — I agree with Caquot that KTU's *tyb* 'n'est guère explicable' (unless it be a technical term for some sort of ailment; but I am not convinced by his proposed ^c*ṣd*. Instead, I suggest 'splicing' Caquot's ^c*ayin* and *ṣade* to the *b* supported by both Virolleaud and KTU, thus arriving at a well-known Semitic word for "pain, misery" etc., a term most adequately suited to the context as interpreted hitherto¹¹.

3.3 *bpšy*: We owe the explication of this term, at least in its literal sense, to Z. Zevit (*art.cit.*, 196f.) who has argued convincingly for a Ug. $\sqrt{pš(š)}$ cognate with Arabic *fašša* "open, exit, come forth", and with Yaudic *pšš* (KAI 215:8), the meaning "ouvrir" already having been surmized for the latter by DISO, 238¹². However, Zevit's rendering of *pšy* by "my opening: my open mouth" does not quite hit the proverbial nail on the head. The word, as Zevit recognizes, stands in formal parallelism with *lšn* and *p*. It is logical to assume that a word meaning "opening" yet distinct from the mouth, would denote the

throat or gullet. This value happens to suit the context most admirably.

3.4 $r[b\dot{s}]$: Virolleaud read $t[$. But both Caquot and KTU agree on the alternatives k/r . De Moor opts for k and restores $k[nt]$ which he renders by "true words"; but not before he has emended the preceding $bp\dot{s}y$ to $b<n>p\dot{s}y$. The emendation, of course, is gratuitous. — $\sqrt{rb\dot{s}}$ is well known in Ugaritic. In *Krt* it occurs as $trb\dot{s}(t)$, denoting an animal stall. But in KTU 1.13:9 it is predicated of Anat and means simply "repose". This is also its meaning in Akkadian and Hebrew (restricted in the latter to animal referents). The choice of $rb\dot{s}$ here may nevertheless be prompted by the bovine nature of the speaker; note also the alliterative factor: ${}^c\dot{s}B. Bp\dot{s}y. rb\dot{s}$.

4.0 *Line 4*

4.1 $i\dot{s}t[m^c]$: Virolleaud restricted his transcription to the two initial signs. KTU reads $i\dot{s}qx$, which de Moor ventured to restore as $i\dot{s}q[d]$, rendered (without explanation) "I want to heed". Examining the moulage, Caquot remarks (*art. cit.* 103) that all one sees following the certain i and \dot{s} is a single horizontal wedge which KTU has evidently interpreted as the first half of the q -sign. Caquot himself, considering the wedge "un peu surélevé", opts for the first half of the m -sign. He then suggest restoring a final cayin , thereby yielding a l.c.s. impf. of $\sqrt{\dot{s}m^c}$ "hear". — I agree with Caquot that the word to be restored is from $\sqrt{\dot{s}m^c}$ "hear". However, the restoration $i\dot{s}m^c$ results in a ten-sign line count, the lowest of lines 1-5. Line 1 contains 11 signs; line 2, 12 or 13 signs (the latter if one restores final y); line 3 has 12 signs, line 5 most probably 11. Line 6, if our restoration is correct, contains 12 or 13 signs. Furthermore, the reconstruction of a l c.s. impf. seems contextually out of place. It is the cow who is addressing Baal, not vice versa. The *hwt* can only refer to the prayer; the verb $\sqrt{\dot{s}m^c}$ to the addressee, Baal. The restored $i\dot{s}tm^c$ (taking the controversial horizontal as a simple t) may be analyzed as the Gt impv. attested in precisely this form in 1.16

VI 29, 42. The resultant sign-count for line 4 is 11.

5.0 Line 5

5.1 $\text{šm}^{\text{c}}(.) \text{ly}$: Following Caquot, we take šm^{c} to be a *qtl*-perfect; contrast de Moor and Zevit who assume an imperative. The change from the normal *yqtl* to the less frequent *qtl*-perfect/infinitive in Ug. poetry is often prosodically determined, viz., as indicative of a strophic transition. Cf. *Maarav*, 2 (1979-1980), 106 n.116. This is certainly the case here: contrast the immediately following *yqtl*-form ypš .

5.2 $\text{ypš} [\text{pš}]$: the first word is a verb derived from the same root as $(b)\text{pš}(y)$ encountered in line 3 and means simply "he will open" (contrast Zevit, *loc. cit.*). The restoration of the cognate accusative pš is both contextually and alliteratively apt: Cp. ... $\text{išt}[\text{m}^{\text{c}}]:: \text{šm}^{\text{c}} \dots \text{ypš}[\text{pš}] / \dots \text{b}] \text{šry} \dots$. Note too the partially alliterative sequences $\text{yPš} \text{Pš} / \dots \text{B}] \text{šry} \dots$!³.

6.0 Line 6

6.1 hkr : The certainty of the reading contrasts sharply with the interpretation. In their review of PRU 5 nearly two decades ago, M. Dietrich and O. Loretz hesitantly suggested that this word might be related to Akk. hākāru "kill, destroy"¹⁴. Caquot's reaction to this proposal (*loc. cit.*, 103f) is that "le contexte n'offre aucun moyen de vérifier cette explication, plausible dans l'absolu". However, aside from the fact that Akk. h is not the normal correspondent of Ug. h , the context as here interpreted most definitely precludes this interpretation. Caquot himself has nothing to suggest, unlike de Moor who, citing Arabic hkr and an alleged Hebrew cognate $\sqrt{\text{hkr}}$, renders "distress". This rendering is essentially *ad sensum*: the Arabic word, meaning "to wrong, treat badly; be obstinate; monopolize" is semantically remote, while the very existence of the Hebrew word is moot. — Our own interpretation admittedly

takes its inspiration from the context, but can claim the support of Ethiopic (Tigr.) \sqrt{hkr} "bite (of animals!); inflict a wound"¹⁵. Otherwise unknown in Ugaritic, the word may have been selected for its alliterative properties assuming our restoration of the verbal predicate to be correct: $\sqrt{hkr}... [y(\text{š})r-Hq]$; note also the partially alliterating sequence $\sqrt{hkr}... [y(\text{š})RHq]$.

6.2 (1/b)b]šry: The word $bšr$ "flesh, meat" is well-known in Ugaritic¹⁶. Its contextual suitability, *per* our interpretation, is of course self-evident. Contrast de Moor's li]šry[t], allegedly "happiness", citing the problematic occurrence in KTU 1.22 I 19. No other restoration proposals have been proffered.

6.2.1 It is difficult to decide between bb]šry and lb]šry in view of the well-known ambiguity and interchangeability of these two Ugaritic prepositions. If the restoration of \sqrt{rhq} at the end of the line is correct, then Ug. usage favours lb]šry (cf. 1.14 III 28-29; 1.3 IV 40). However, the data is too meagre for establishing idiomatic usage. The alliteration favours bb]šry.

6.3 [y(š)rhq]: The context would appear to require at this point a verb meaning "remove": if so, then \sqrt{rhq} is surely the best candidate. The uncertainty of the morphology is due to two conflicting considerations: on the one hand, the causative Š-form, elsewhere attested with this verb, is clearly indicated both by virtue of context and alliteration (... b]šRY. YŠRHq). However, the restoration of five signs at this point in the line results in a sign-count total of 13, the highest hitherto. Be it recalled that Caquot did not believe that a 13th sign (y), clearly indicated grammatically, could be accommodated in line 2. If the form is reconstructed as [yrhq], then we can assume a D-form with causative meaning, as elsewhere in Ugaritic.

7.0 Line 7

7.1 $\overset{e}{s}r$: Thus Virolleaud (with a question-mark beside the r); Caquot supports

KTU's $^c\text{šp}$ ("lecture préférable"), but considers the result "énigmatique". The reading $^c\text{šr}$, by contrast, may be plausibly analyzed as a nominal formation of $\sqrt{^c\text{šr}}$ "restrain; retain; confine; constrict" etc., hitherto unattested in Ugaritic but well known from Hebrew and (with slightly variant meaning) elsewhere in Semitic. Cp. e.g. Heb. $^c\text{šr}$ $\text{r}^{\text{h}}\text{m}$ (lit.) "restraint/constriction of the womb". The idea here is that as a result of the swollen tongue and inflamed ($\sqrt{^c\text{šb}}$) gullet, there is a feeling of constriction, or 'tightness', in the victim's throat¹⁷.

7.2 $^c[\text{nq}]$: The restoration is *ad sensum*; note the alliterating $^c\text{ayin}$ phones ($\sqrt{^c\text{šr}}$, $^c[\text{nq}]$) and the sequences involving $^c\text{-R-Ġ}$: $^c\text{šR}$ $^c[\text{nq.}]$ Ġb ¹⁸. Well-known cognates are attested in Aram., Heb., Arabic, etc. A possible Ugaritic attestation is in 1.22 I 19 (cf. WUS, *s.v.* 2062; MLC, 602, *s.v.*).

7.3 $]\text{ġd}^*$ [: This word, read *t?b* by Virolleaud and ġb by KTU, is not commented upon by any of the aforementioned scholars (Caquot, de Moor and Zevit). Although a Ug. verb $\sqrt{\text{ġb}}$ (*b*), related to the Arabic of the same root meaning "swallow, gulp" is perhaps to be restored in 1.4 IV 33¹⁹, the present context is more favourable to a reading ġd deriving from the indubitably attested (1.3 II 25) $\sqrt{\text{ġdd}}$ meaning "swell up". Epigraphically, the missing final third of the *d* sign may be restored at the beginning of the lacuna.

7.4 $[\text{grn}]$: The restoration of this word, unattested hitherto in Ugaritic but with cognates in several Semitic languages²⁰ is indicated by the context, the parallelism with $^c[\text{nq}]$ (if correctly restored), and - not least - the alliteration.

8.0 *Line 8*

8.1 *tat*: Attested in 1.6 II 7, in parallelism with *arḥ*, this word must have introduced a new section in which the role of the talking animal is assumed

by a (presumably ailing) ewe. Note that the change in subject corresponds precisely to the prosodic structure: the preceding monostichic 4(2:2) is strophe terminative²¹.

IV. Conclusions.

1. It is difficult, even precarious, to draw general conclusions from so fragmentary a text. However, granted that the lacunae in lines 1-7 have been successfully restored, a number of conclusions, necessarily tentative, do suggest themselves.

2. Negatively, it seems clear that, *pace* Virolleaud and Caquot, our text bears no relation to the long narrative poems of Ugaritic mythology. There is no reason to identify the *arḥ* of our text with the bovine form *allegedly* assumed by Anat in KTU 1.5 V²². The only deity mentioned in our text is Baal; and his role, here as in RS 24.266 (= KTU 1.119:26ff.), is that of a deity petitioned by a supplicant seeking relief from temporary distress.

3. And yet the image of the talking cow - presumably the first in a series of talking animals - which dominates this composition can hardly be placed on all fours with the realistic prayer of inhabitants whose city has been placed under siege by an enemy force. This datum is surely an indication that *au fond* our text is a 'fairy-tale' - or, better, a 'beast-fable' - of the Aesop variety²³. One is reminded of Baalam's talking ass (Num. 22:28ff.) and Achilles' talking horse (*Iliad* XIX 404ff.)²⁴; of the talking cattle in the Egyptian Tale of Two Brothers²⁵; and, not least, of the plaintive appeal to the sun-goddess by the snake-bitten mare (*phlt*) of RS 24.244 (= KTU 1.100).

4. I therefore proffer the suggestion that our text is (part of) a poem originating in an elementary school primer. Its purpose was to initiate the seven or eight year old pupil into the delightful world of Canaanite literature

while teaching him an important theological lesson, viz., "When sick (or otherwise in need), pray to Baal for help. See, even the animals pray to Baal when *they* are sick; and if Baal helps them, he will surely help you".

5. It is at once instructive and sad to reflect that this lesson, intended for the Canaanite child of the Late Bronze Age, seems to have been learned several centuries later by an Israelite child (tutored by a Canaanite?) destined to become king of Judah (1 Kgs. 1:2ff.)...

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- 1) Cf. Ch. Virolleaud: GLECS, 8 (1957-60), 90. The RS number is 19.54. According to KTU, 458, the text is presently in the Damascus National Museum, where its catalogue number is 5041.
 - 2) UF, 11 (1979), 101-104.
 - 3) *Ibid.*, 104. The allusion is to the Baal-Mot myth recounted in KTU 1.4-5-6.
 - 4) *Contributions to the Ugaritic Lexicon: "A Prayer to Anat"*: UF, 11 (1979), 648-49.
 - 5) *Two Hapax Legomena in Ugaritic: T^CLGT and PŠ*: UF, 13 (1981), 193-97. Zevit does not appear to have had access to either of the above studies nor to the text edition in KTU.
 - 6) Cf. KTU 1.16 V 10ff.; RS 24.266 (= KTU 1.119:35).
 - 7) Cf. KTU 1.5 I 19-20 *bkl̄t. ydy. il̄hm* "Of all that perishes do I eat" (spoken by Mot). Cf. B. Margalit, AOAT 206, 103.
 - 8) Cf. 1.5 VI 17-18, and discussion *ibid.*, 132.
 - 9) An alleged variant *l̄^cg*, found in Is. 33:19, is probably the result of contamination with the word for "mock". Caquot (*art. cit.*, n.2) cites RIH 78/9 *l̄^cg. l̄šn* in support of the received text in Is. 32:4. However, the reading of the RIH text subsequently established by Caquot himself (in collaboration with P. Bordreuil) is *lg. l̄šn*. Cf. *Syria*, 57 (1980), 346.
 - 10) Cf. Zevit, *loc. cit.*, n.9; Lane, vol. 5, 2128.
 - 11) If the reading *l̄^csb* and our interpretation of it are allowed, then the alleged existence of Ug. *l̄^cḡsb* = Heb. *l̄^csb* conjectured by Caquot and Bordreuil in connection with RIH 77/10A, line 3' (*Syria*, 56 [1979], 304) must be disallowed.

- 12) For the relating of Arabic *fašša* to Yaudic *pšš* Zevit is indebted to F. Rosenthal: JBL, 95 (1976), 154, duly acknowledged.
- 13) For the use of the cognate accusative elsewhere in Ugaritic poetry, cf. (e.g.) 1.16 I 39ff.: *krtn. dbḥ. dbḥ / mlk. cšr. cšrt*. "Krt is having a feast / The king is preparing a banquet".
- 14) BO, 23 (1966), 129. The Akk. word is considered to be of unknown meaning by CAD H, s.v., while AHW gives "zerschlagen" with question mark.
- 15) HAL, 302. Cf. also W. Leslau, *Ethiopic and South Arabic Contributions to the Hebrew Lexicon*, 1958, 20; E. Littman - M. Höfner, *Wörterbuch d. Tigrē Sprache*, 1956, 88 (the latter reference courtesy my colleague at Haifa U., Prof. A. Dolgopolski, who further advises me that although theoretically Tig. *ḥäkr(a)* "bite, wound" might reflect PS **ḥkr* as well as **ḥkr*, the laws of consonantal incompatibility make the latter the more likely reconstruction).
- 16) Cf. e.g. KTU 1.24:8-9 (*apud* UF, 11, 556f.): *tzd*[n. ^cl]_{pt}. *lbšrh* "She (= *ḡlmt*) supplie[s] (the baby) [fo]od from her flesh".
- 17) If the reading ^c*šp* should nevertheless prove correct, it may be seen perhaps as a phonetic variant (or dictation error?) of ^c*šb* "pain" encountered in line 3. Cp. Ug. *lbš/lpš*; *mbk/npk* (Heb. *nbk*); etc.
- 18) The phones R, ^c(*ayin*), and ^ġ constitute what I call an "alliterative family"; cf. *Maarav*, 2 (*loc. cit.*), 88f.
- 19) Cf. Margalit, AOAT, 206, 206-208.
- 20) Heb. *ḡārōn*, Arabic *ḡirān*, etc. (*apud* HAL, 194, s.v.).
- 21) Cf. UF, 7 (1975), 309, § 3C.
- 22) The emphasis on 'allegedly' is advised. Since it is Anat who sets out in 1.6 I to look for the slain Baal in the recesses of the Netherworld, it is difficult to see how she can be identified with the 'calf' (^c*ḡlt*) who greets Baal upon his arrival in the Netherworld (*šd. šḥlmmnt*) in 1.5 V. Nor does this identification square with the comparison in 1.6 II of Anat's longing for her brother to "the heart of a cow (*arḥ*) for her calf" (1.6 II 6-7). Finally, the bird-like volatility of Anat, not to mention her stereotyped 'virginity', make it difficult to believe that Anat was ever conceived in Ugaritic tradition as a cow.
- 23) "Fairy tale animals are usually enchanted...; beast fable animals usually participate in no magic... In beast fables animals talk like people, but in most other respects they are more realistically described than animals in fairy tales. Human beings are usually absent because the animals are, or represent, human beings." (R. Sale, *Fairy Tales and After: From Snow White to E. B. White*, Cambridge, Mass., 1978, 77f.).

24) Cf. H. Gunkel, *Das Märchen im Alten Testament*, Tübingen 1921, 30ff.

25) Cf. A. Erman, *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians* (trans. A.M. Blackman), London 1927, 150ff.; J.A. Wilson, in ANET², 24.