Ugaritic *BṮ* and *YBṮ.NN* in *KTU* 1.2 IV: 28, 29, 31
Further Comparative Observations[*]

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Abstract

W. G. E. Watson has recently proposed the new interpretation "to depart" for the Ugaritic forms *bṯ* and *ybṯ.nn* in KTU 1.2 IV: 28-31. In the present article, this interpretation is further supported on the basis of the Classical Arabic and Ancient South Arabian sources. A suggestion on the suffix *-nn* of *ybṯ.nn* is also added.

1. Introduction

The interpretation of Ugaritic verb forms *bṯ* and *ybṯ.nn* in *KTU* 1.2 IV: 28-31 is controversial. Scholars have proposed many different renderings over the years but "to scatter / dismember"[1] and "to be ashamed"[2] are considered the most reasonable.

Recently, Watson[3] has proposed the new interpretation "depart" on the basis of the Akkadian lexical parallel *bēšu(m)*. The new interpretation is convincing as it appears to fit the context.

Here, the author will provide additional comparative material, in Classical Arabic and in Ancient South Arabian, which further supports Watson's proposal.

2. Classical Arabic *bṯṯ*

The interpretation "to scatter", i.e. "to dismember", is based on the comparison with the Classical Arabic root *bṯṯ*, usually rendered "to scatter, to disperse"[4] in the dictionaries. This meaning seems to be particularly suitable for the context of *KTU* 1.2. IV, which recounts the episode of Baal defeating his enemy Yam.

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[*] Professor Wilfred Watson provided many helpful observations and I would like to thank him.

[1] See recently SMITH 1994: 357. For other interpretations, see the survey in WATSON 2014: 59-60.

[2] See *DUL*: 249. This interpretation appears to be unlikely, despite being philologically correct, in view of the general context of *KTU* 1.2 IV (see WATSON 2014: 59-60).

[3] WATSON 2014: 60-61.

[4] See in general LANE 1863: 151 and ZAMMIT 2002: 88.

A close analysis of the Classical Arabic sources, however, indicates that the semantic connotation of the root *btt* does not corroborate the meaning reconstructed for Ugaritic. This is clearly demonstrated by the use of the root *btt* in the Quran.

In Qur 4, 1, the creation of humankind is mentioned, and God is described as the one who:

(… …) *ḫalaqa-kum min nafsin wa-aḥidatin wa-ḫalaqa min-hā zawja-hā wa-batta min-humā rijālan kaṯīran wa-nisāʾ* (… …)

"(… …) created you from one soul and created from her her mate and spread out from both of them many men and women (… …)"

Here, the root *btt* refers to the propitious event of God's creation of humankind, and is not associated with the idea of destruction. Furthermore, this root precisely designates the action of spreading out from a source, implying the concrete idea of going or moving out from one specific point.

A similar context occurs in Qur 2, 164, which provides a more detailed description of the world's creation.

ʾinna fī ḫalqi ʾal-samāwāti wa-ʾal-ʾarḍi wa-ʾiḫtilāfi ʾal-layli wa-ʾal-nahāri wa-ʾal-fulki ʾallatī tajrī fī ʾal-baḥri bi-mā yanfaʿu ʾal-nāsa wa-mā ʾanzala ʾAllahu mina ʾal-samāʾi min māʾi fa-ʾaḥyā bi-hi ʾal-ʾarḍa baʿda mawti-hā wa-batta fī-hā min kulli dābbatin (… …)

"Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the ships which sail on the sea with what benefits the people, and what Allah sent down from the heavens of water through which He gave life to the earth after its death and He spread out over it all of moving creatures (… …)"

Here, the focus is the immense space (*ʾal-samāwāti wa-ʾal-ʾarḍi*; *ʾal-fulki ʾallatī tajrī fī ʾal-baḥri*) within which the beginning of life (*ʾaḥyā bi-hi ʾal-ʾarḍa baʿda mawti-hā*) and the spreading out of moving creatures (*wa-batta fī-hā min kulli dābbatin*) take place. The crucial event of the world's creation is associated with the start of life, identified with the *dābba*, namely any type of creature capable of moving or walking, that are to spread across the immense space of the earth (and sea). Again, the propitious event of God's creation is associated with the idea of the spreading out, the dispersing of moving beings from one original location through physical space.

A similar context occurs in Qur 31, 10, 42, 29 and 45, 4. Significantly, in Qur 42, 29, and 45, 4, the creation of the heavens and earth, and the spreading out of moving creatures are specifically emphasised as the signs (*ʾayāt*) of God.

The other Quranic contexts, where the root *btt* occurs, refer to the dust particles (Qur 56, 6), the moths (Qur 101, 4) and the carpets (Qur 88, 16). Here, the semantic implication is similar to that discussed above, as the root *btt* describes the spreading out of something within a physical space. The only context relevant to the Ugaritic episode of Yam's defeat might be Qur 56, 4-6, reporting God's destruction of the mountains into dust particles. Here, the root *btt*, however, does not refer to the effect of the destruction but describes

the dust particles, namely the way they physically spread out, much as the moths do in Qur 101, 4[5].

The semantic area of the root *btt*, discussed above, appears to be consistent with the meaning "reveal, publish, show, spread" in relation to any type of information, also including discourse, narration and secrets[6]. This sense is largely attested in the non-Quranic sources, and appears to describe a more abstract idea of spreading or disseminating from an original location.

3. The lexical data in Ancient South Arabian

The latter connotation of the root *btt* in Classical Arabic can be connected with the Ancient South Arabian sources. The root *btt* is attested in Sabaic[7] and Minaic[8] with the meaning "to declare, announce publicly".

It is noteworthy that the further connotation of the verb form *yhbt*, with a more concrete sense "to lay out as a religious offering", is attested in the Sabaic inscription R 4782, 1[9]. The context of this inscription suggests that "the object is the three portions of a slaughtered animal: the instruction is to "lay out" these portions for the deity"[10]. This specific connotation also occurs in the recently published Minaic inscription GOAM 315, 2[11]. Despite the fragmentary context, the term *bt* is parallel with the typically Minaic term *s³l'* for dedicatory offering. This semantic development of the Minaic root *btt* implies the idea of "putting aside, removing the best part from a main object" in the propitious event of the dedication to a deity. This is clearly connected to the concrete sense "to spread out from a certain point" of the root *btt* in the Quran discussed above.

A further observation should be made in relation to the root *bht* that is erroneously associated with *btt*[12]. Although the exact sense of this root is difficult to establish, Beeston[13] correctly distinguished the root from *btt*, and suggested the interpretation "to be complaisant". The Ancient South Arabian root *bht*, therefore, must be excluded from this debate.

Broadly speaking, the Ancient South Arabian lexical data appear to confirm the basic semantic area defined by the root *btt* in Classical Arabic. Significantly, the root *btt* also occurs in Jibbālī where it is reported to have the meaning "to spread rumours, dissension, to disclose secrets"[14] which is consistent with Classical Arabic and Ancient South Arabian.

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[5] The same semantic connotation is reported by MANẒŪR 1981: 208 in relation to horses and hounds.

[6] See LANE 1863: 151.

[7] See BEESTON 1976: 411-412 and *SD* 1982: 33.

[8] See the inscription as-Sawdāʾ 37 = M 293a, 7 (BEESTON 1976: 411; MÜLLER 1988: 446; AVANZINI 1995: 145, 148).

[9] See BEESTON 1976: 411 and BRON 1989: 124, 125.

[10] BEESTON 1976: 411.

[11] ARBACH – AUDOUIN 2007: 7.

[12] See RHODOKANAKIS 1915: 37 and WATSON 2014: 60.

[13] BEESTON 1976: 410-411.

[14] JOHNSTONE 1981: 31.

4. Conclusions

The lexical data discussed above indicate that Classical Arabic / Ancient South Arabian (and Modern South Arabic) *btt* and Akkadian *bēšu(m)* share the same general idea of "movement from a specific location", and this may be the original semantic value of the Proto-Semitic root[15]. In particular, the sense "depart" occurring in Akkadian seems to have preserved the basic (more archaic) connotation, while the sense "spreading out from a specific location" may be a semantic specialisation of Classical Arabic / Ancient South Arabian (and Modern South Arabic). As a consequence, the interpretation "scatter/dismember", based on the comparison with Classical Arabic / Ancient South Arabian *btt*, should be discarded. By contrast, the fact that Classical Arabic / Ancient South Arabian *btt* derives from the same Proto-Semitic root as Akkadian *bēšu(m)* lends further support to the hypothesis advanced by Watson. The Ugaritic verb forms *bt* and *ybt.nn* are likely to derive from this Proto-Semitic root and to have the basic (more archaic) meaning "depart"[16].

Significantly, these lexical observations are consistent with the literary structure of the episode in *KTU* 1.2 IV, which seems to rule out any reference to the scattering or dismembering of Yam's body[17]. The text focuses on the *ṣmd*, a magic hitting weapon manufactured by the divine craftsman Kothar[18], and on Baal who strikes Yam twice on his back and head[19], serving as the climax in the utter defeat of Yam. These observations

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[15]   The comparative data suggest the reconstruction of a biradical root such as *BṮ the extensions of which would be both *bt-t* (Classical Arabic / Ancient South Arabian / Modern South Arabic) and *b-w/y-t* (Akkadian / Ugaritic). The oscillation of these extensions (radical *w* vs gemination of the last radical) in the same root is a known phenomenon in the Semitic languages, such as Classical Arabic *gayrun* / Akkadian *girru*, Sabaic *gyr* / Akkadian *garāru*; Judaic Aramaic *pwḥ* / Classical Arabic *fḫḫ* (see in general MILITAREV 2005). The parallel with the Old Egyptian root *bš* "rapid" / "to abandon" (see TAKÁCS 2001: 319-320) further supports this reconstruction, and points to an Afroasiatic root; see also COHEN 1994: 53, 91.

[16]   The relationship with the terms *bty* and *btt* occurring in *KTU* 1.96, 6, 11, 12, 13 remains unclear; see the discussion in DE MOOR 1979: 647-648, DIETRICH – LORETZ 2000: 249-250, DEL OLMO 2010: 49-50 and DEL OLMO 2014: 132-133.

[17]   The only possible reference could be the verb *yšt* in line 27 (from Classical Arabic *šatta* "divide") but its interpretation is controversial and other possibilities are plausible (see SMITH 1994: 353-354). At any rate, even if the Classical Arabic interpretation is accepted (SMITH 1994: 323 "dismembers" [?]), there is no evidence for the dissemination of the body, but only a reference to mutilation, a characteristic feature of single combat (VIDAL 2006: 710); see below the observations in footnote 19.

[18]   Significantly, the weapon *ṣmd* is associated with the verbs *hlm* and *mḫṣ*, which specifically indicate "hit, strike" (see in general BORDREUIL – PARDEE 1993), and can be etymologically connected with Classical Arabic *ṣamada* "hit, strike" (ALBRIGHT 1941: 16).

[19]   The cultural and literary background of the final duel between Baal and Yam in the ancient Near Eastern mythological "Chaos-Kampf motif" was identified by scholars long ago. More recent studies have emphasised that a significant part of the Ugaritic Baal cycle (including the "Chaos-Kampf motif") is the result of a complex stylistical and ideological reworking and revision (TUGENDHAFT 2012). This is particularly conspicuous in the episode of the duel between Baal and Yam. On the one hand, there are typically traditional characteristics such as the intervention of the divine craftsman who provides the god Baal with the magic weapon and Yam being struck twice on the back and head (RENDSBURG 1984). On the other hand, new elements are introduced such as the anthropomorphic features of the figure of Yam (AYALI-DARSHAN 2015: 42-47; on Yam in Ugarit see TUGENDHAFT 2010) and the description of the fight showing the patterns of single combat (see VIDAL 2006: 710).

are particularly true in view of the fact that the scattering of the enemy's body motif is used in the episode of Mot's killing that occurs in *KTU* 1.6 II: 30-37. Here, the text emphasises the destruction of Mot's body so distinctly that scholars have identified an allusion to an "agricultural ritual", related to the working of grain, or the description of an act of total annihilation as a literary source for this episode[20].

Finally, the verb form *ybṯ.nn* requires further discussion in view of the new interpretation "depart". This form has the energic suffix *-nn* that usually occurs in association with the third singular suffix personal pronoun with the syntactical role of object[21]. By accepting the intransitive meaning "depart", the energic suffix *-nn* cannot contain this suffix pronoun. One may suggest, therefore, that the form *ybṯ.nn* is a rare case of the energic verb preserving the original energic suffix *-nVn*[22], before its specialisation in the use with the suffix pronoun. This feature can be considered an archaism that appears to fit the sophisticated nature of the literary language characterising *KTU* 1.2, IV.

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[20] See WYATT 1976: 426-427, WYATT 2002: 135, footnote 83 and MAZZINI 1997: 24.

[21] See TROPPER 2012: 503-504, who states that this energic form is never attested "in absoluter Stellung".

[22] This could be an old suffix as suggested by HASSELBACH 2006: 319, 322-323. The ending *-nn*, occurring in Sabaic and Minaic, however, may have a different origin from that reconstructed by Hasselbach (in accordance with TROPPER 1997 and STEIN 2003: 167, 185), as proposed by MAZZINI 2007.

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