

Evidence of the Trade Between Ugarit and Byblos. Once More on KTU 4.338: 10-18¹

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[This new interpretation of the Ugaritic text KTU 4.338:10-18 suggests a different alphabetic transliteration, some original translations of both alphabetic and syllabic vocabulary and a distinct meaning of the whole text as a sale record of ships from the king of Byblos to the king of Ugarit.]

When dealing with Ugaritic texts I sometimes wonder what would happen if an official committee would ever submit privately the same Ugaritic text to four ugaritologists. Would the four different translations agree upon the main questions? In case they would choose KTU 4.338:10-18 – as a matter of fact a *fortunately* unlikely choice given its uncommon appearance – I am afraid they would condemn the Ugaritic language to be undeciphered even more if one of the four interpretations would be the present paper.

This is the text as it is written on the tablet RS 18.25:

1	<i>spr.npš.d.</i>
	<i>'rb.bt.mlk</i>
	<i>w.b.spr.l.št</i>
	<hr/>
	<i>yrm^l 1</i>
5	<i>sry 2</i>
	<i>iršy 3</i>

I. I wish to thank B. Zouhdi, Director of the National Museum of Damascus, and R. Shaab, Curator of its Ancient Oriental Department, who so kindly granted me permission to study the tablet. This note has been completed during my scholarship granted by the *Comissionat per a Universitats i Recerca de la Generalitat de Catalunya*.

The abbreviations used in this article follow AHw, note however: Boyd *Collection* = J.L. Boyd, *A Collection and Examination of the Ugaritic Vocabulary Contained in the Akkadian Texts from Ras Shamra*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1975; Cowley (AP) = A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*, Oxford 1923; DISO = C. Jean-J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'Ouest*, Leiden 1965; HAL = W. Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament*, Leiden 1967ff.; Heltzer IOKU = M. Heltzer, *The Internal Organization of the Kingdom of Ugarit*, Wiesbaden 1982; Huehnergard UVST = J. Huehnergard, *Ugaritic Vocabulary in Syllabic Transcription* (HSS 32), Atlanta 1987; Ribichini-Xella Tessili = S. Ribichini-P. Xella, *La terminologia dei tessili nei testi di Ugarit*, Roma 1985; Sivan GAGI = 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), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1984.

	<i>y'drd</i>	3
	<i>ayah</i>	2
	<i>bn.aylt</i>	1
<hr/>		
10	<i>hmš.mat.arb'm</i>	
	<i>kbd.ksp.anyt</i>	
	<i>d.'rb.b.anyt</i>	
	<i>l.mlk.gbl</i>	
	<i>w.hmšm.ksp</i>	
15	<i>lqh.mlk.gbl</i>	
	<i>lbš.anyth</i>	
Lo.E.	<i>b'rm.ksp</i>	
	<i>mhrhn</i>	
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There are certainly several attempts to translate KTU 4.338:10-18 although in my opinion they do not provide an intelligible reading of the whole text since its three main problems remain obscure. Lines 11-12 (a) stand unresolved and the terms *lbš anyt* (b) and *b'rm* (c) still defy an adequate interpretation.²

a) Every attempt to translate the sentence *anyt/d.'rb.b.anyt* (ll. 11f.) is based upon the interpretation of the verb *'rb* (b) which some scholars have rendered "to pledge for"(a.1) and others "to enter from/for" (a.2) with no plausible results:

a.1. "(prix du?) navire qu'on a donné en gage pour le navire" (Virolleaud *PRU* 5 129); "das Schiff, das bürgt für das Schiff" (Eissfeldt *NKTRU* 35); "navi che sono di / andate in pegno per le navi" (Liverani *Storia* 149 / *UF* 2 [1970] 99); "Geldsumme der Schiffe, die bürgt für die Schiffe" (Dietrich-Loretz-Sanmartín *UF* 6 [1974] 473); "ships that were pledged from among the ships" (Ziskind *JAOS* 94 [1974] 135); "(shekels) of ship-money which were provided as a guarantee for ships" (Pardee *JAOS* 95 [1975] 612; Pardee-Bordreuil *ABD* VI [1992] 713); "ships, that were pledged among the ships" (Heltzer *GPOTU* 143); "ship-money which went as guarantee for ships" (Miller *Studies* 336).

a.2. "the ships which came out (lit. entered from) of the fleet" (Sasson *JAOS* 86 [1966] 133), "bate-

2. Although a recent study with a thorough and 'stratified' discussion has been provided by M. Dietrich-O. Loretz ("Schiffshandel und Schiffsmiete zwischen Byblos und Ugarit (KTU 4.338:10-18)", *UF* 22 [1990] 89-96) I would prefer to list again (with some slight additions) the different translations of the text under consideration: C. Virolleaud, *Le palais royal d'Ugarit* (= *PRU*) 5, Paris 1965, 129s.; O. Eissfeldt, *Neue keilalphabetische Texte aus Ras Schamra-Ugarit* (= *NKTRU*), Berlin 1965, 35; J.M. Sasson, "Canaanite Maritime Involvement in the Second Millenium B.C.", *JAOS* 86 (1966) 133; M. Liverani, *Storia di Ugarit nell'età degli archivi politici* (= *Storia*), Roma 1962, 149; id., "*kbd* nei testi amministrativi ugaritici", *UF* 2 (1970) 99; E. Linder, *The Maritime Texts of Ugarit: A Study in the Late Bronze Age Shipping* (= *Maritime*), Ph.D. Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1970, 24-26; M. Dietrich-O. Loretz-J. Sanmartín, "Zu *PRU* 5,106 (= RS 18.25), 10-15", *UF* 6 (1974) 473; J.R. Ziskind, "Sea Loans at Ugarit", *JAOS* 94 (1974) 134-137; D. Pardee, "The Ugaritic Text 2106:10-18: A Bottomry Loan?", *JAOS* 95 (1975) 612-619; L.R. Freedman, *Studies in Cuneiform Legal Terminology with Special References to West Semitic Parallels* (= *Studies*), Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University 1977, 57; M. Heltzer, *Goods, Prices and the Organization of Trade in Ugarit* (= *GPOTU*), Wiesbaden 1978, 143; D. Pardee, "La lettre de *pnht* et de *ymhd* à leur maître", *AAAS* 29/30 (1979/80) 34f. n. 47; G.I. Miller, *Studies in the Juridical Texts from Ugarit* (= *Studies*), Ph.D. Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University 1980, 337; D. Pardee-P. Bordreuil, "Texts and Literature" ("Ugarit") in: *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (= *ABD*), vol. VI (1992) 713.

aux qui entraînent pour des bateaux” (Pardee AAAS 29/30 [1979/80] 35 n. 47); “die Schiffe, die zu den Schiffen hinzugekommen sind” (Dietrich-Loretz UF 22 [1990] 93f.).³

One should also note the different and contextual (rather than literal) translations “the ship(s) which were purchased from the ships” (Linder *Maritime* 24f.) and “the ships which were paid for the ships” (Freedman *Studies* 57).

No doubt all these translations show the difficult and even equivocal meaning of the Ugaritic sentence. Therefore I suggest a different approach to this question: instead of pointing the view towards the expression *rb b* I would rather consider its object as the source of the problem. In this regard I was attracted by the evidence that the word *anyt* at the end of line 3 (the object of the sentence) is written on the tablet precisely below the same word *anyt* at the end of line 2. On this basis and unable to find a better solution I suggest a scribal mistake, namely a dittography substituting thus the ‘original’ word. On the other hand if one accepts the general (and logical) assumption that this text is a notice or *memorandum* of an Akkadian original document⁴ a dittography in copying and translating the text should not be excluded. As a result of the ‘new’ aspect of the sentence and consequently of the paragraph, I would be inclined to restore, instead of the word *anyt*, the place name where the ships would be taken in or, to put it in other words, the counterpart of Byblos in this affair, i.e. Ugarit. Accordingly, the text would now rightly fit into the standard composition of the Ugaritic economic texts indicating the amount of money (*hmš mat arb m kbd ksp*) paid for the merchandise (*anyt d rb b GN* – where the purchaser is clearly determined by the GN⁵) to the seller (*l mlk gbl*).⁶

b) The syntagm *lbš.anyt* has also been translated in several different ways: “couverture, revêtement (du navire)” (Virolleaud *PRU* 5 130), “cargo (sails? lit. clothing) of his ships” (Sasson *JAOS* 86 [1966] 133), “sails (?) of his ships (Linder *Maritime* 24), “cargo (lit. clothing) of the ships” (Ziskind *JAOS* 94 [1974] 135), “outfitting of his ships” (Pardee *JAOS* 95 [1975] 612; Freedman *Studies* 57; Miller *Studies* 336; Pardee-Bordreuil *ABD* VI [1992] 713), “pour ‘habiller’ ses bateaux” > “voiles ou tendelettes” (Pardee AAAS 29/30 [1979/80] 35 n. 47), “property (cargo) of his ship” (Heltzer *GPOTU* 143), and as ‘awnings for ships’ (Stieglitz *JAOS* 99 [1979] 19⁷). All of them have been discussed by Dietrich and Loretz who in turn

3. As the last and most recent interpretation, providing a detailed discussion against the previous renderings; however, their alternative still poses the problem of the derived meaning (“als *terminus technicus*” p. 93) ‘hinzukommen’ (< ‘eintreten’) of the verb *rb* as well as the identification of the other ships.

4. First put forward by Ziskind (*JAOS* 94 [1974] 135f.) and followed by Dietrich-Loretz (UF 22 [1990] 89). Certainly the unusual aspect of the written tablet reveals the somewhat peculiar nature of KTU 4.338: first of all the text is divided into two different and independent parts by means of two ruled lines; the second part (ll. 10-18) was defined thus as a *memorandum* on the basis of its source (Byblos) and its find-spot (the oven in Court V). On the other hand, the first text (ll. 1-9) describes a list of people who had entered (into the service of) the palace. However, the interesting matter to be considered here is the fact that they were individuals who had not been previously included (probably by omission (!)) in the ‘original’ document (l.3: *b.spr.l.št*). Accordingly, this first part should be defined in turn as an *addendum*; and one should therefore deduce the nature of KTU 4.338 as a scribe’s ‘note-tablet’.

5. The use of *rb + (b +)* ‘place name’ is coherent in this context and well attested in Ugaritic texts (see for example in the same tablet, l. 2, as pointed out by Dietrich-Loretz UF 22 [1990] 93). Yet KTU 4.337:16f. provides a clearer parallel to my interpretation: *šb m lbš d rb bt mlk / b mit hmšt kbd ksp* “seventy garments which entered the palace for one hundred and five (shekels) of silver” describing thus a distinct purchase.

6. For this interpretation of KTU 4.338:10-18 as a sale record, cf. Sasson *JAOS* 86 (1966) 132f; note also the ‘contextual’ translations by Linder and Freedman. Pardee persuaded by Freedman’s argument (formulated then before the American Oriental Society in his paper “Of Ships and Sales: Ugaritic Text 2106:10-18 Reconsidered”) also understood it as a sale record in AAAS 29/30 (1979/80) 34f. n. 47, although he has recently changed his mind (with Bordreuil in *ABD* VI [1992] 713) preferring again his previous interpretation in *JAOS* 95 (1975) 612.

7. See note 8.

– and probably not finding a better solution – suggested again their (together with Sanmartín in *UF* 6 [1974] 473) previous interpretation as a scribal mistake restoring *l b<n>š.anyt* (so in KTU) with the meaning “die ‘Besatzung’ seiner Schiffe”. However, against this alternative one should note first of all the use of the word-divider between preposition and noun throughout the text (II. [3.] 12 and 13); on the other hand both the lack of evidence in the Ugaritic corpus of such an expression and the attested use of *šbu anyt* to designate its assumed meaning “crew of a ship” (in KTU 4.40:1,7,10; compare in the Akkadian of Ugarit *erín.meš* ⁸*má* in RS 19.46 [PRU 6 138]:20) would also tell against their suggestion. In agreement with other scholars I believe that the term *lbš anyt* must be interpreted in the light of RS 19.28 (PRU 6 126).⁸ This text written in syllabic cuneiform lists several textile items within the framework of the trade between Ugarit and Byblos. The first line runs as follows:

7 túg.meš ⁸*má*.meš *ma-áš-ḥa-tu-ma*.

Both the word for word equivalence and the common context would argue for the equation *túg.meš* ⁸*má*.meš = *lbš anyt*. With regard to its meaning, it seems clear to me on the basis of its etymology and context that this expression is referring to the “sails” or “canvasses” for ships.⁹ Now the next problem arises: what is the meaning of *mašḥaṭuma* in the Akkadian text?

A note on Ug. syll. *mašḥaṭu*: The Ugaritic syllabic (plural) word *mašḥaṭuma* in RS 19.28 (PRU 6 126):1 lacks still of “sufficient explanation”¹⁰ due to its uncertain etymology: some scholars have understood it as the Ugaritic gloss of the previous logogram *túg.meš* ⁸*má*.meš¹¹ while others have taken it to qualify it.¹² It is clear from the above stated equation that *mašḥaṭuma* cannot be the Ugaritic gloss of *túg.meš* ⁸*má*.meš¹³ but a certain qualification of such a ‘generic’ term (“sails”). In this regard, I find significant the mention in the Aramaic text Cowley 15:10 of the term *nšḥt* in the description or qualification of a woollen garment. Also far from a self-evident interpretation, it has been taken to be a “trade-term derived from the language of Phoenician merchants” on account of the Niphal form and translated as “finely woven”.¹⁴ On the basis once more of the common etymology and context, it is likely to suppose that we are dealing with a *terminus technicus* applied to textiles probably original and particular of the Phoenician craftsmanship. As to its meaning, I suggest to relate it to the (well-attested Semitic) root /š-h-t/ “to beat” (see e.g. Hb. *šḥt*, HAL 1353f. s. v. *šḥt* II – referred to metals)¹⁵ denoting in our context the method of manufacture or textile finishing. No doubt beating the cloth (especially of wool and linen, the latter as the specific fibre used

8. This equivalence was first put forward by R.R. Stieglitz, “Commodity Prices at Ugarit”, *JAOS* 99 (1979) 22 n. 38 and recently and rightly upheld by J. Hofstijzer-H.W. van Soldt, “Texts from Ugarit Concerning Security and Related Akkadian and West Semitic Material”, *UF* 23 (1991) 206 n. 55. On the other hand if, as it has been suggested above, this text is the Ugaritic notice of an original document drawn up in Akkadian it is likely to assume that *lbš anyt* was ‘originally’ written with the logogram *túg.meš* ⁸*má*.meš (a West Semitic logographic writing ?).

9. As seen above, already pointed out by Sasson followed by Linder and further assumed by Stieglitz and Hofstijzer-van Soldt. On the other hand, for this translation of the logographic term *túg.meš* ⁸*má*.meš, cf. J. Sanmartín, “Glossen zum ugaritischen Lexicon (VI)”, *UF* 21 (1989) 342; pointed out also by J.L. Boyd, *A Collection*, 212-213 (followed by M. Heltzer *IOKU* 190).

10. As stated by Hofstijzer and van Soldt in *UF* 23 (1991) 206 n. 55.

11. Nougayrol *PRU* 6 159: ‘(couvre-bateau amovible??)’; AHw 625: from Akk. *mašḥatu* ‘Treppchen(?)’; Boyd *Collection* 212f.: ‘a cloth for a boat, sail(?)’; Heltzer *IOKU* 190: ‘type of cloth, sail(?)’; Sivan *GAGI* 245: ‘type of garment’; Huehnergard *USVT* 186: ‘(a cloth item)’ related to Ug. *mš<ḥ>t* (*m*) in KTU 4.689:2 (?); Dietrich-Loretz *UF* 22 (1990) 92 n. 22 (with no translation).

12. Stieglitz *JAOS* 99 (1979) 22 n. 38: ‘detachable’ (apparently from Akk. *šahāṭu*); Sanmartín *UF* 21 (1989) 342: ‘m.-Axt-Form’ connected with Ug. *mšḥt*; CAD *M/I* 365: ‘(mng. unkn.)’; Hofstijzer-van Soldt *UF* 23 (1991) 206 n. 55 (with no translation).

13. Pointed out, although as ‘inverse’ argument, by Dietrich-Loretz *UF* 22 (1990) 92 n. 22.

14. Cf. Cowley *AP* 46,48; *DISO* 294; *HAL* 1353.

15. Where the Aramaic/Phoenician(?) attestation is included.

for sails) is known since ancient times for bleaching and fulling textiles (essential processes in sail manufacture).¹⁶

c) The last 'obstacle' of KTU 4.338:10-18 is the term *b'rm* written on line 17. Faced to this problem, most scholars¹⁷ have preferred to read *b'rm* in order to understand the mention of a place name (preceded by a preposition) which, however, does not make much sense in the context (and where one should note again the aforementioned argument of the use of the word-divider between preposition and noun). Dietrich and Loretz pointing to this unresolved contextual problem¹⁸ suggested again a scribal mistake (following again their previous paper together with Sanmartín *UF* 6 [1974] 473, and followed in turn by Heltzer *GPOTU* 143) – apparently an 'extrametathetic' mistake – restoring *arb'm* (so in KTU).¹⁹

Nevertheless, in view of the equivalence túg.meš = má.meš = *lbš anyt* and the above discussed evidence of RS 19.28 (PRU 6 126):1 it is likely in my opinion that the word *b'rm* in KTU 4.338:17 following the plural term *lbš anyt* in the preceding line stands also (like *mašḥatīma* in the syllabic text) for a qualification (as a *terminus technicus*) of the sails. With regard to its meaning, I suggest to interpret the form as the plural passive participle of the well-attested Ugaritic root /b'-r/ "to burn",²⁰ with the meaning of "to singe" in this context. Singeing was and is undoubtedly another textile fulling process which consists in applying fire to the surface of a cloth in order to remove outstanding fibres or impurities from it and increase thus the lustre (so important for sail manufacture, too).²¹

Translation of KTU 4.338:10-18:

(10) Five hundred and forty (shekels) (11) of silver for the ships (12) that entered Ugarit(?)¹ (13) to the king of Byblos; (14) and (also) fifty (shekels) of silver (15) received the king of Byblos (16) for his (17) singed (16) sails. (17) The silver (18) is the purchase price of them (= the ships).

Commentary

According to this translation the *memorandum* KTU 4.338:10-18 reports on the price that the king

16. Cf. especially Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology IV*, Leiden 1956, 81ff. (e. g. in p. 92: "the fulling operation was often completed by washing the cloth in a vat or in a stream and then beating it with sticks to increase the adhesion of the constituent fibres. Linen cloth too, was beaten to improve the surface").

17. So Sasson *JAOS* 86 (1966) 133; Ziskind *JAOS* 94 (1974) 135; Pardee *JAOS* 95 (1975) 612; Freedman *Studies* 57; Pardee *AAAS* 29/30 (1979/80) 35 n. 47; Miller *Studies* 336; Pardee-Bordreuil *ABD* VI (1992) 713.

18. In *UF* 22 (1990) 91f.

19. Virolleaud – also unable to find a better solution – proposed the scribal omission *b' <š>rm* (PRU 5 130), followed too by Linder (*Maritime* 26).

20. For a recent treatment of this verb in Ugaritic texts, cf. Dietrich-Loretz "Ugaritisch *b'r* I 'anzünden' und *b'r* II 'verlasen'", *UF* 22 (1990) 51-54, where (54 n. 28) they follow of course their restoration *b'rm* > *arb'm* in KTU 4.338:17.

21. A reference to this process of singeing in antiquity by means of hot coals or sulphur fumes can be found also in Forbes, *loc. cit.* (especially 85ff.). For the highly developed use of fire in other well-attested technologies (metallurgy, glassmaking, ceramics, stonework) in the ancient Near East, see T.A. Wertime "Pyrotechnology: Man's Fire-Using Crafts" in D. Schmandt-Besserat, *Early Technologies* (Invited Lectures on the Middle East at the University of Texas at Austin, vol. 3), Malibu, 1979, 17-25.

of Ugarit had to pay for the purchase of several ships to the king of Byblos.²² Turning now to the archaeological context of the text, it is interesting to note that the oven of Court V (the find-spot of this tablet) contained several documents concerning Ugarit naval activity (for food supply to Egypt [2.38] and Alashiya(?) [2.46] and for military(?) purpose [2.47]). This evidence has been taken as a picture of the last days of Ugarit and the struggle against the Peoples of the Sea.²³ In any case what is clear from KTU 4.338:10-18 is that the king of Ugarit was apparently running short of ships and turned to the supply from the king of Byblos. The price of these ships as stated in our text (*ksp mhrhn*) was five hundred and ninety shekels of silver: five hundred and forty shekels for the vessels (*hmš mat arb'm kbd ksp*) plus fifty shekels for their sails (*w hmšm ksp*) which were not included (probably because of their special manufacture: *b'rm*) and so had to be paid separately. Yet this text poses still one more question: what was the number of ships sold by the king of Byblos?²⁴ No text from Ugarit seems so far to help determine the price of either ships or sails.²⁵ However I propose to read the first note (ll. 1-3) of the short text KTU 4.394 found also in the same find-spot as KTU 4.338 as follows:

(1)mi. 'š*[r](2)[l]l.k¹bd(3)b*.anyl²⁶

Accordingly, if this sentence records the price of one ship, namely one hundred and thirteen shekels of silver, then the transaction between Ugarit and Byblos described in KTU 4.338:10-18 might have dealt with about five ships (supported in turn by the cost of the sails which would establish the price of 10 shekels each).

22. The different translations provided so far and mentioned throughout this paper understand obviously KTU 4.338:10-18 in different ways: as a guarantee covering a loan of ships (C. Viroilleaud, O. Eissfeldt, M. Liverani, M. Dietrich-O. Loretz-J. Sanmartín, J.R. Ziskind, D. Pardee, M. Heltzer, D. Pardee-P. Bordreuil); as a document describing the lease or charter of ships (R.R. Stieglitz); as a sale record of ships (J.M. Sasson, E. Linder, L.R. Freedman, D. Pardee) and as a record dealing with both purchase and hire of ships (M. Dietrich-O. Loretz).

23. Cf. e.g. Sasson *JAOS* 86 (1966) 133f.

24. On the basis of their reading *arb'm* (< *b'rm*) Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartín (*UF* 6 [1974] 473) calculated about 10-13 ships.

25. Cf. Stieglitz *JAOS* 99 (1979) 19f.

26. On the basis of the usual composition of the economic-administrative texts (and, in particular, the expression of compound numbers, cf. especially Liverani *UF* 2 [1970] 89-108) as well as on the similitude between the signs *a* and *k* (for this scribal orthographic confusion *k* > *a*, cf. e.g. C.H. Gordon, *UT* § 4.13). On the other hand the space at the end of l.1 would point to the reconstruction of only one sign (disproving thus the possible reading 'š*[*rm* (?)]).