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“Egyptian sqb: A Cognate for Ugaritic tqb 'ash-tree.”

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In KTU 1.17, vi, 20–24 Aqht responds to ‘Anat’s desire to seize his bow by offering to fashion for her another bow made from the choicest materials.

\[\text{wy'\text{n. aqht. g\text{\'}r adr tqbm}}\]
Aqht the hero answers: “The strongest trees
\[\text{blbn\text{n. adr. qdm. brumm}}\]
from the Lebanon,
the strongest sinews from the buffalo,
\[\text{adr. qrnt. by'im. mtnm}\]
the strongest horns from the ibex,
\[\text{b'qbt. tr. adr. qnm' b\text{\'}gil}\]
From the bull’s heels the strongest (?) tendons,
From the great brake the strongest canes.”

Of particular interest is the word tqbm in v. 20, which most scholars translate as “wood,” or a particular type of wood. Thus, Parker’s rendering above, as well as that of G. R. Driver (“birches [?]”) and M. D. Coogan (“wood”). Though some (e.g., Parker, Driver, Coogan) provide no explanation for their

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2 According to the KTU Word List this is the only place where tqbm appears; tqb alone does not appear, and all references to possibly related words (tgby in 4.7:10 and tqbn in 4.63 I:20, 4.379:10 and 4.700:3) are personal names. Johannes C. de Moor, “The Ash in Ugarit,” *UF* 3 (1971), 350, n. 6, however, sees the root tqb also in U 5 V, no. 12, Rev. 9, and suggests that there it means “to pierce.”


translations, or choose not to identify the item, it is probable that they followed A. Caquot, M. Sznycer, and A. Herdner who proposed the following Semitic cognates for *lqbm*: Arabic *taqāfa* “surpasser” and Aramaic *taqīp* “puissant.” Hence their rendering of the verse: “(Prends) le plus beau des géants du Liban.” On the basis of the type of wood used to create the composite bow of King Tutankhamun, Johannes de Moor proposed that we read the word in question as “ash-tree”; a reading subsequently adopted by D. Pardee and N. Wyatt.

While the context of the passage almost certainly demands that we understand *lqbm* as some type of wood (after all, what other raw material used for making compound bows would be associated with the Lebanon?), and while the ash tree is likely the species, the Semitic cognates nevertheless remain problematic. Not only must we assume a switch between labials (e.g., /b/ to /f/ and /p/), but to my knowledge, nowhere are the Arabic and Aramaic cognates attested in reference to trees. The fit, therefore, requires that we also propose a semantic shift from “surpass, be higher than” and the like, to “tree(s).”

It is in this light that I should like to propose a new cognate, the Egyptian *sqb* (𓊲𓊻) typically translated “sandalwood.” The word does not appear frequently. R. O. Faulkner offers only one citation, P. Westcar 5:9. This text, known more commonly as “The Boating Party,” dates to the Hyksos Period and mentions raw materials used for constructing a boat. The pertinent passage

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5 E.g., Baruch Margalit, *The Ugaritic Poem of Aqht: Text, Translation, Commentary* (BZAW, 182; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989), p. 303, who leaves “... the exact botanical definition of Ug. TQB remaining uncertain.”

6 With the exception of Driver, of course, whose translation antedates Caquot’s, and who probably picked up the translation “birch,” based on the observation of Y. Sukenik, “The Composite Bow of the Canannite Goddess Anath,” *BSOR* 107 (1947), 11–15, with reference to an Egyptian bow.


8 Caquot, *Textes ougaritiques: tome I. mythes et légendes*, pp. 431. Italics are the author’s.


11 de Moor, “The Ash in Ugarit,” 349, n. 4, suggests Yemenite *šqāḇ, šuqāḇ* (a species of Grewia) as a possible cognate, but as he admits, a problem is posed by the different sibilants.

reads: "Let there be brought to me twenty oars of ebony plated with gold, their handles of sandalwood (sqb) plated with electrum."

Dictionaries relate the word sqb by way of metathesis and contraction to the verb šb′q "be excellent, precious, wise, sensible," and sqb "make splendid" (sometimes written š bq). While the metathesis and semantic shift is possible, only the form sqb refers to wood. The form sqb "make splendid," also appears with the tree determinative, but it is likely that it either was influenced by, or attracted to the written form of sqb "sandalwood," due to a similarity in sound between them. Alternatively, it could be a denominative verb based on the luxury item.

Regardless of possible Egyptian etymologies, the Egyptian sqb "sandalwood" dates no earlier than the Hyksos Period, thus making it likely that we have here a Northwest Semitic loan into Egyptian. We can explain the direction of influence by noting the well-known practice of Egyptians obtaining wood from Lebanon, especially for building boats (e.g., the famous Tale of Wenamon).

The proposed Egyptian cognate poses no philological difficulties since its phonetic correspondences to Ugaritic are exact. Moreover, unlike the proposed Arabic and Aramaic cognates, the word sqb has an attested meaning that perfectly fits the Ugaritic passage. If de Moor is correct in his identification of the wood as "ash," then we probably also should change "sandalwood" to "ash" in the Boating Party text as well. In any event, the combined philological, histori-

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