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Manfried Dietrich · Oswald Loretz

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“He of Two Horns and a Tail”

Scott B. Noegel, Washington

One of the most enigmatic aspects of the story of El’s feast occurs just before El’s inebriation overcomes him and he descends into his defecation and urine. Just at the moment when El staggers home, we are told the following:

<i>y’msn . nn tkmn</i>	“Thukamuna and Shunama carry him,
<i>wšnm . wngšnn . ḥby</i>	Habayu then berates him,
<i>b’l . qrm . wdnb</i>	He of two horns and a tail.”

(CAT 1.114, r. 18–20)

The appearance of the word *ḥby* in this passage has provoked a good deal of discussion, but it is fair to say that most scholars have treated it as a demonic figure who accosts El as he succumbs to his drunkenness.¹ To my knowledge, the first to suggest this reading was C. H. Gordon, who offered it in the supplement to his *Ugaritic Textbook* in 1967, and who later expanded upon this by suggesting that the same demon appears in an incantation from Ebla (*ARET V*) and in two biblical passages (Isa 26:20, Hab 3:4).² Though this view has received acceptance by a number of exegetes, it poses fundamental problems in that a) it does not accord with what we know of demonic possession in antiquity, and b) it make little sense given the widespread ritual use of intoxicants in the ancient Near East. Indeed, as I explain below, a demonic attack upon the inebriated would be unprecedented. Consequently, this brief note challenges the interpretation of *ḥby* as a demon in the Ugaritic passage and argues instead that the term in question is an epithet for El.

¹ Hence the cited translation by Theodore J. Lewis in Simon B. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (SBL Writings from the Ancient World, 9; Atlanta, GA.: Scholars Press, 1997), p. 195. See also Manfred Dietrich / Oswald Loretz, *Studien zu den ugaritischen Texten, Volume 1: Mythos und Ritual in KTU 1.12, 1.24, 1.96, 1.100 und 1.114* (AOAT, 269/1; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000), pp. 468–469, 489; P. Bordreuil / Dennis Pardee, *Manuel d’ougaritique, volume 2. Grammaire et Facs similes* (Paris: Librarie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner S. A., 2004), p. 45, and p. 162, where the authors label a *ḥby* a “théonyme d’identification incertaine.”

² C. H. Gordon *Ugaritic Textbook* (AnOr 38; Roma: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1965 [1967]), p. 552. For the Eblaite and biblical parallels see his “The Devil, ḥby,” *Newsletter for Ugaritic Studies* 33 (1985), 15; “ḤBY, Possessor of Horns and Tail,” *UF* 18 (1986), 129–132.

I begin with the problem posed by the passage's interpretation as a demonic attack. As a wealth of comparative evidence from Mesopotamia illustrates, though some symptoms of chronic alcoholism, such as ataxia, ophthalmoplegia, nystagmus, and delirium tremens, were believed to be the work of an unhappy ghost, simple inebriation was not.³ Indeed, seizures caused by alcohol withdrawal were believed to be caused by the moon God Sin.⁴ Moreover, that medical professionals offered different treatments for afflictions caused by ghosts and demons demonstrates that they did not fall into the same category.⁵ Indeed, I am unable to locate a single reference to a demon attacking someone who is inebriated in all of the texts available in Sumerian, Akkadian, Greek, or Coptic. This is likely because the cause of drunkenness was well-known. Charges of demonic possession, on the other hand, usually occurred when the cause of an ailment was unknown.⁶

Moreover, heavy drinking was considered a tool for accessing the divine.⁷ In Mesopotamia there was even a deity associated with the brewing of beer (Akk. *siraš*) whose very name was *Siraš* "Beer" (Sum. ^dŠIM).⁸ Ugaritic texts (e. g., CAT 1.39:16, 1.102:9) similarly attest to a deity named *Trt* "Wine" (= Heb. חִירוֹשׁ).⁹ Such references could be multiplied, but suffice it to say that the abundant comparative data makes it highly unlikely that inebriation would have been considered a liminal opportunity for demons to attack.

³ See, e. g., JoAnn Scurlock / Burton R. Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine: Ancient Sources, Translations, and Modern Medical Analyses* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), pp. 360–363.

⁴ JoAnn Scurlock, "Some Mesopotamian Medicine for a Greek Headache," forthcoming. I thank Dr. Scurlock for sharing an advance draft of her paper with me.

⁵ JoAnn Scurlock, *Magico-Medical Means of Treating Ghost-Induced Illnesses in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Ancient Magic and Divination, III; Leiden: Brill/Styx, 2006), pp. 67–71.

⁶ This reasoning was suggested to me by Dr. Christopher Faraone via email, January 13, 2007.

⁷ See Piotr Michalowski, "The Drinking Gods: Alcohol in Mesopotamian Ritual and Mythology," in Lucio Milano, ed., *Drinking in Ancient Societies: History and Culture of Drinks in the Ancient Near East* (Padua: Sargon, 1994), pp. 27–44; Cristiano Grottanelli, "Aspetti simbolici del latte nell Bibbia," in *Drinking in Ancient Societies*, pp. 381–397. On strong drinks in rituals at Mari see Jack Sasson, "The King's Table: Food and Fealty in Old Babylonian Mari," in Cristiano Grottanelli and Lucio Milano, eds., *Food and Identity in the Ancient World* (History of the Ancient Near East, Studies 9; Padua: Sargon. Editrice e Libreria, 2004), pp. 179–215.

⁸ See CAD S 306, s. v. *siraš*.

⁹ See J. F. Healey, "Tirash חִירוֹשׁ, חִירוֹשׁ," in K. van der Toorn / B. Becking / P. W. van der Horst, eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 872 (= DDD).

With this in mind, I turn to a philological consideration. The etymology of the Ugaritic term *hby* is unknown.¹⁰ However, given the well-known correlation between geminate and final weak verbs in Semitic,¹¹ it is possible to relate the term *hby* to the onomatopoeic root *hbb* "murmur, babble." The root appears in Akkadian as *hbb* (*h* here represents the Semitic phoneme /h/¹²), where it is used in reference to the indistinct sounds of water, people, and animals.¹³ See, for example, the following apposite citation.¹⁴

¹⁰ The etymological possibilities for this word have been discussed by K. Cathcart / E. Watson, "Weathering a Wake: A Cure for a Carousal. A Revised Translation of Ugaritica V Text 1," *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 4 (1981), 35–58, who opt for the root *hb* "hide, conceal." The many other interpretations of this word are conveniently collected in D. Pardee, *Les textes para-mythologiques de la 24^e campagne (1961)* (Publications de la Mission Archéologique Française de Ras Shamra-Ougarit, 77; Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1988), pp. 60–64, and more recently by Dietrich / Loretz, *Studien zu den ugaritischen Texten, Volume 1*, pp. 468–469. See also G. del Olmo Lete / J. Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*. Trans. W. G. E. Watson (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), p. 354, s. v. *hby* (= *DULAT*), who marks the lexeme as "etymology uncertain."

¹¹ One can cite many examples of geminate and final weak verbs that share the same meaning. See, e. g., חָפַה and חָפַף "cover," חָרַה and חָרַר "be hot, burn," מָסַה and מָסַס "melt, dissolve," קָצַה and קָצַף "cut off," as well as שָׁנַה and שָׁנַנ "go astray," to list a few from biblical Hebrew.

¹² The Akkadian use of *h* for a Semitic cognate containing the phoneme /h/ should not deter us since the expected /e/ vowel in Akkadian for cognates containing *h* (e. g., Hebr. *hgr* "gird" = Akk. *egēru*), does not always occur. Indeed, there are many examples of this. See, e. g., Hebr. *hḥ*, Tigr. *hāhōt* "thorn" = Akk. *hāhu*, Hebr. and Ug. *hš* "urge on" = Akk. *hīāšu*, Hebr. and Ug. *hkm* "wise" = Akk. *hakāmu*, Hebr. *hbl* and Arab. *habl* "rope" = Akk. *naḥbalu*, Hebr. *ḥalil* Syr. *hlilā* "flute" = Akk. *ḥalhallatu*, Hebr. *hš* and Syr. *hlišā* "strip, take off" = Akk. *ḥalāšu*, etc. Of course, this is also the way Akkadian typically renders Ugaritic words containing *h*. See, e. g., Akk. *hu-du-ru* = Ug. *hḏr* "room" and Akk. *hu-ul-ma-tu₃* = Ug. *hlm* "strength, potency," in John Huehnergard, *Ugaritic Vocabulary in Syllabic Transcription* (HSS 32; Atlanta, GA.: Scholars Press, 1987), pp. 123, 125. Indeed there are many more such correspondence between Akkadian *h* and West Semitic *h*. See J. Huehnergard, "Akkadian *h* and West Semitic **h*," in Leonid Kogan, *Studia Semitica Papers of the Oriental Institute* 3; Moscow: Russian State University for the Humanities, 2003), pp. 112–119, who posits the existence of a hitherto unrecognized Proto-Semitic phoneme **χ*, i. e., in addition to **h* and **ḥ*, to account for the correspondence.

¹³ For the Akkadian references, see *AHW*, 301, *CAD* H 2, s. v. *ḥabābu* A "to murmur (said of water), to hum, low, chirp"; *AHW*, 305, *CAD* H 16, s. v. *ḥābibu* "mankind (lit. 'noisemaker')."

¹⁴ G. A. Reisner, *Sumerisch-babylonische Hymnen nach Thontafeln griechischer Zeit* (Königliche Museen zu Berlin. Mittheilungen aus den orientalischen Sammlungen, 10; Berlin: W. Spemann, 1896), p. 121: 19, cited in *CAD* H 2, s. v. *ḥabābu* A.

[gud.z]u tūr.ra KA ḥé.mi.ni ìb.du₁₁

[al]-pī ina tar-ba-ṣu lu-ša-aḥ-bi-ib

“I shall cause your bulls to low in your cattle pen.”

Though the root *ḥbb* is not attested in Ugaritic (with one possible exception),¹⁵ it does occur in an Aramaic letter from Hermopolis in reference to a river (i. e., a “babbling brook”),¹⁶ and possibly in Arabic.¹⁷ A correlate final weak form (חבי) meaning “lower one’s voice” also appears on an incantation bowl written in Babylonian Aramaic.¹⁸ Thus, the comparative linguistic evidence demonstrates that the semantic range of *ḥbb/ḥby* suggests indistinct vocal or natural sounds.

¹⁵ The word *ḥa-AB-BI/BU* occurs in an Ugaritic text transcribed into Akkadian, but it is of uncertain derivation. See Huehnergard, *Ugaritic Vocabulary in Syllabic Transcription*, p. 190. Since in that text the word appears in reference to a topographical feature in a field, could it too refer to a “babbling” river? If so, the Aramaic term *ḥbb* would be cognate (on this see n. 16).

¹⁶ On its meaning “river” in Official Aramaic, see J. T. Milik, “Les papyrus araméens d’Hermoupolis et les cultes syrophéniciens en Égypte perse,” *Biblica* 48 (1967), 553, who suggested the word is a loan from the Egyptian *ḥbb(t)*. For the Egyptian term see Adolf Erman / Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache*. Vol. 3 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1982), p. 63, s. v. *ḥbb.t*. However, this view has been challenged by P. Swiggers, “Note sur le papyrus IV d’Hermoupolis,” *Aegyptus* 61 (1981), 65–68, who relates the lexeme to the Aramaic root *ḥbb* “love.” I prefer to relate the Aramaic term in the letter from Hermopolis to the Akkadian cognate. I note that it is similarly used in reference to water. In any event, the lexeme *ḥbb/ḥby* “love” is cognate with Akkadian *ḥbb* “caress” (*CAD* Ḥ 2–3, s. v. *ḥabābu* B) and appears also in Aramaic personal names. See Walter Kornfeld, *Onomastica Aramaica aus Ägypten* (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, 333; Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978), p. 49. Cited in J. Hoftijzer / K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*. vols. 1–2 (Leiden: Brill, 1995). (= *DISO*), p. 344, s. v., *ḥbb₂*. Moreover, it may be that *ḥbb* “murmur, babble” and *ḥbb* “love” (both *ḥabābu* in Akkadian) are not two homophonous roots, but a single root. See the remark of A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*. Vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 797, who “sees no reason to separate *ḥabābu* into two verbs: movement, as well as sound, is characteristic of lovemaking.”

¹⁷ This root is perhaps reflected in the Arabic *ḥubāb* (or *ḥibb*) “serpent, certain black aquatic insect, or small animal,” probably because of the sound these creatures make (cf., the Akk. “the Gods of Uruk turned into flies buzzing [*j-ḥab-bu-bu*] in the squares,” cited in *CAD* Ḥ 2, s. v. *ḥabābu*, and Akk. *ḥabubitu* “bee,” *CAD* Ḥ 22, s. v. *ḥabubitu*), and the Arabic word *ḥūb* or *ḥaubḥaub* “the name and sound of a camel.” See Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*. Part 2 (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1968), pp. 497, 662, respectively.

¹⁸ Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002), p. 425, s. v. חבי. Though conceivably the term could derive from חבי “conceal, hide,” Sokoloff lists it as a separate root.

If this etymology is accepted, we may treat the term *hby* in the Ugaritic passage as an epithet meaning "the Babblers" (based on a construction similar to the epithet שר"י "Almighty," which is derived from the root שרד, and other like apprelative constructions).¹⁹ Such an epithet fits well the context of the passage which tells of El slipping into a drunken stupor.

Of course, the proposed reading also requires that we rethink the rendering of the verb *ngšnm* in l. 19. Typically has been understood to have *hby* as its subject. However, it is equally possible to read it as a 3. m. dual referring to Thukamuna and Shunama, with a 3. m. s. anticipatory pronominal accusative suffix (referring to El). I thus propose that we translate CAT 1.114, r. 18–20 as follows:

"Thukamuna and Shunama carry him,
They berate him, the Babblers,
He of two horns and a tail."²⁰

Elsewhere in the Ugaritic corpus we learn that one of the filial duties of a son was to help his father when he became inebriated (CAT 1.17 II, 19–20). As sons of El,²¹ it is understandable that Thukamuna and Shunama would be embarrassed by their father's behavior and berate him. Moreover, the proposed reading of the passage fits the well-known iconographic and literary images of El as

¹⁹ See similarly the name of the prophet חני (from the root חננ) and the name עזי, e. g., in 1 Chron 5:1 (from the root עזז). The Ugaritic epithet *hby* would represent a doubling of the second radical (akin to the *dagesh* in the Hebrew examples), but this would not be reflected in Ugaritic.

²⁰ Concerning Gordon's Eblaite term, see the criticisms raised by P. Xella, "Un antecedente eblaite del 'demon' ugaritico ḤBY?," *SEL* 3(1986), 17–25. Xella also notes, in "Haby חבי," *DDD*, p. 377, that the term that Gordon considers to be a demon's name (i. e., *ḥa-ba-ḥa-bi*) "deals rather with part of the door or a tool." I note that it likely relates to the Akk. *ḥaphappu* "part of the door," *CAD* H 84, s. v., *ḥaphappu*. Concerning the biblical parallels that Gordon suggested, I note that forms are not identical in the biblical passages (Isa 26:20 has חָבִי and Hab 3:4 has חָבִיּוֹן [the Eblaite term would be yet a third form]). I also aver that the biblical texts are simply employing the verb "hide, conceal," as the common translations suggest. Thus JPS translates Isa 26:20: לֵךְ עִמִּי בָּא: "Go, my people, enter your chambers, and lock your door behind you. Hide but a little moment, until the indignation passes"; and the difficult passage in Hab 3:4: וְנִגְהַר אֶזְרוֹר תְּהִיָּה קַרְנִים מִיָּדוֹ לּוֹ: "It is a brilliant light which gives off rays on every side—and therein his glory is enveloped." However, I concur with David Tsumura (who is cited by Gordon, "ḤBY, Possessor of Horns and Tail," 131), that the term קַרְנִים "horns" in this passage constitutes a Janus Parallel. As "power" it faces ahead to עִזָּה and as "light" it faces back to אֶזְרוֹר. In neither of its meanings must we understand קַרְנִים literally.

²¹ The literature on this binomial figure has been collected by D. Pardee, "Tukamuna wa Šunama," *UF* 20 (1988), 195–199. See also B. Becking, "Thukamuna," *DDD*, pp. 866–867; "Shunama," *DDD*, pp. 776–777.

a bull (hence his epithet *tr il* “Bull, El”).²² If we also consider the aforementioned Akkadian text in which the root *ḥbb* (Akk. *ḥbb*) is used for the lowing of bulls, then the portrait of the drunken Bull El, lowing as he descends into his own mire, becomes all the more vivid.

²² See W. Herrmann, “El אל,” *DDD*, pp. 274–280; “Baal בעל,” *DDD*, pp. 132–139; N. Wyatt, “Calf עגל,” *DDD*, pp. 180–182. Baal too possesses horns, as the god El makes clear in his words to Tūlish, the maiden of Yarikh (CAT 1.12 I 30–33): ³⁰*bhm . qnm* ³¹*km . trm . wgbūt* ³²*km . ibrm* ³³*wbhm . pn . b’l*, “They will have horns like bulls, bulk like that of bullocks; they will have the face of Baal” (cf. CAT 1.12 II 53–55). Baal also copulates with a heifer in CAT 1.5,18–22. Xella, “Haby הבי,” *DDD*, p. 377, also sees the two horns and tail in our passage as a bovine image, but suggests they might belong to an infernal god. For El as a bull in ancient Israel see Num 23:22, 24:8 and see the discussion in Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*. Trans. Thomas Trapp (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress, 1998), pp. 118–120.

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