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

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Egyptian *śqb*: 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.

wy'n. aqht. ġzr adr tqbm

Aqht the hero answers: "The strongest trees

blbnn. adr. gdm. brumm

from the Lebanon,

the strongest sinews from the buffalo,

adr. qrnt. by'lm. mtnm

the strongest horns from the ibex,

b'qbt. tr. adr. qnm¹ bgil

From the bull's heels (the strongest) (?) tendons,

From the great brake the strongest canes."¹

Of particular interest is the word *tqbm* in v. 20,² 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 [?]")³ and M. D. Coogan ("wood").⁴ Though some (e.g., Parker, Driver, Coogan) provide no explanation for their

¹ The translation (with some modification) is that of Simon B. Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (SBL Writings from the Ancient World, 9; Scholars Press, 1997), pp. 60-61. Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (AnOr, 38; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), p. 248, read the word as 'qbm "tendon(s) of a bull." See also his *Ugaritic Literature: A Comprehensive Translation of the Poetic and Prose Texts* (Roma, Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1949), p. 90 "the mightiest of sinews of the Lebanons." This reading has been adopted by Svi Rin and Shifra Rin, *Acts of the Gods: The Ugaritic Epic Poetry* (Philadelphia: Inbal Publishers, 1996), p. 570 (in Hebrew), who cite the word as *מִקְבֵּי (m/qb)*, and translate as "sinews," equivalent to *גִּיד* (p. 576). This reading has been rejected as erroneous by most scholars. Joseph Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch der ugaritischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1974), p. 342, leaves the word untranslated.

² According to the KTU² Word List this is the only place where *tqbm* appears; *tqb* alone does not appear, and all references to possibly related words (*tqby* 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."

³ G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1956), p. 55.

⁴ M. D. Coogan, *Stories from Ancient Canaan* (Philadelphia, PA.: Westminster, 1978), p. 36.

translations, or choose not to identify the item,⁵ it is probable that they⁶ followed A. Caquot, M. Sznycer, and A. Herdner who proposed the following Semitic cognates for *tqbm*: Arabic *taqāfa* “surpasser” and Aramaic *taqīp* “puissant.”⁷ Hence their rendering of the verse: “(Prends) le plus beau des géants du Liban.”⁸ 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”;⁹ a reading subsequently adopted by D. Pardee and N. Wyatt.¹⁰

While the context of the passage almost certainly demands that we understand *tqbm* 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.¹¹ 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 *šqb* (𓆎𓆏𓆑) typically translated “sandalwood.” The word does not appear frequently. R. O. Faulkner offers only one citation, P. Westcar 5:9.¹² 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

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.

⁷ A. Caquot, M., Sznycer, and A. Herdner, *Textes ougaritiques: tome I. mythes et légendes* (LAPO 7; Paris: Cerf, 1974), p. 431, n. q.

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

⁹ de Moor, “The Ash in Ugarit,” 349–350; *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Nisaba 16; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), p. 237.

¹⁰ D. Pardee, “The ‘Aqhatu Legend,” in W. W. Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture: Volume I. Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 346; N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilmilku and his Colleagues* (The Biblical Seminar, 53; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 272.

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

¹² Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute-Ashmolean Museum, 1988), p. 249, s.v., *šqb*, translates it as “a kind of wood.”

reads: "Let there be brought to me twenty oars of ebony plated with gold, their handles of sandalwood (*šqb*) plated with electrum."¹³

Dictionaries relate the word *šqb* by way of metathesis and contraction to the verb *šb²q* "be excellent, precious, wise, sensible," and *šqb* "make splendid" (sometimes written *šbq*).¹⁴ While the metathesis and semantic shift is possible, only the form *šqb* refers to wood. The form *šqb* "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 *šqb* "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 *šqb* "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,¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ Moreover, unlike the proposed Arabic and Aramaic cognates, the word *šqb* 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-

¹³ Translation by Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature. Vol. 1: The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1973), p. 216. She is followed by R. B. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 110. For the original text see A. Erman, *Die Märchen des Papyrus Westcar* (Mitteilungen aus den orientalischen Sammlungen, 5–6; Berlin, 1890); K. Sethe, *Ägyptische Lesestücke zum Gebrauch in akademischen Unterricht* (Leipzig, 1924).

¹⁴ Thus, Adolf Erman und Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*. Vol. 4 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1971), p. 304, s.v. *šqb*; *Ägyptisches Handwörterbuch* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1995), p. 157; Rainer Hannig, *Die Sprache der Pharaonen: Grosses Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch (2800–950 v. Chr.)* (Kulturgeschichte der antiken Welt, 64; Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1997), p. 770, who also treats it as a by-form of *šbq* (p. 689). The word does not appear in D. Ansee Meeks, *Lexicographique*. 2 vols. (Brassac-les-Mines: Imprimerie de la Margeride, 1980).

¹⁵ See, e.g., Peter Ian Kuniholm, "Wood," in Eric M. Meyers, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Ancient Near East*. Vol. 5 (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2000), pp. 347–349.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Yoshiyuki Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords in North-West Semitic* (Atlanta, GA.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), pp. 284–285.