

# Two Rare Ugaritic Terms for Garments

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*Abstract:* On the basis of a Punic cognate, it is proposed that Ugaritic *mšlt* means “stitched garment” and from reference to Hebrew and Syriac cognates it is argued that Ugaritic *sgr* means “collar”. It is also suggested that Ugaritic *tprt* may mean “sewn garment”, based on Aramaic cognates.

*Keywords:* Aramaic, Hebrew, Neo-Punic, Syriac, Ugaritic, textiles

The two Ugaritic words discussed here are *mšlt* and *sgr*, both of which have homographs, with surveys of the various solutions previously proposed. First, a Punic cognate is indicated for Ug. *mšlt* and then a new meaning is put forward for Ug. *sgr*, based on unnoticed cognates. However, due to the scarcity of occurrences, any proposal remains very uncertain.

## 1. Ugaritic *mšlt*

As mentioned, the Ugaritic word *mšlt* (I)<sup>1</sup> occurs only rarely in the texts, which may explain why its meaning is uncertain,<sup>2</sup> although to some extent, context does help.<sup>3</sup> There are no more than four occurrences (three in economic or

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<sup>1</sup> To be distinguished from its homograph *mšlt* (II), possibly meaning “whetstone”; see Heltzer 1984, 68 n. 392; Watson LSU, 96, §2.2.02.1 (180) and DUL, 584-585. As De Moor (1970, 310) aptly remarked (apropos KTU 1.148:19): “What would a travelling goddess do with seven grindstones?”. In any case, *mšlt* (II), has a different etymology. M. Fisher (1969, 132) noted that, in view of Eth. *sāhlā*, “to whet, sharpen”, this may be an instance of Ug. dropping an /h/. However, according to Tropper (UG, 161 §33.144) “Das Phonem /h/ bleibt im Ug. in der Regel an allen Silbenpositionen bewahrt”. More probably, Ug. *mšlt* may simply be a direct loan from Akk. *mešēlu(m)*, “Schleifstein” (AHw, 648b), from *šēlu*, “schärfen” (AHw, 1211a). Incidentally, I am indebted to Gregorio del Olmo Lete for lending me his personal copy of Fisher’s thesis.

<sup>2</sup> For previous surveys of the various meanings proposed see Pardee 2000, II, 794 n. 65; Vita 2004, 528-529; Watson LSU, 96 and Vita 2010, 331.

<sup>3</sup> Significantly, KTU 4.337 mentions several other terms for types of cloth or clothing, mostly of uncertain meaning: *ūtb*, “fringed garment (?)” (line 10); *rt*, “(dyed garment ?)” (line 11; cf. Watson 2000; 2016); *lbš*, “garment” (lines 14, 16); *ktn*, “tunic” or “linen” (line 18); *kdwL*, “(undergarment)” (line 24) and *š’rt štt*, “spun wool (?)” (line 9; cf. Ribichini / Xella 1985, 16: “filato di lana” or “filo

administrative texts and one in a religious text), one of them unfortunately in a broken context:

- (a) *ṭmn. lbšm. w. mšlt l. ṽdmym. b. ṭmnt. ṽšrt. ksp*  
 “eight garments and (one) *m.* for the Udumites, for eighteen (shekels) of silver” (KTU 4.337 [RS 18.024]:14)
- (b) *mšlt. b. ṭql. ksp*  
 “(one) *m.* for (one) shekel of silver” (KTU 4.337 [RS 18.024]:23)
- (c) *šb ʿ. mšlt*  
 “seven *m.*” (KTU 1.148 [RS 24.643]:19)
- (d) *mš[lt...]* (KTU 4.193 [RS 15.176 *bis*]:4)<sup>4</sup>  
 “a/one *m.*”

Both the etymology and the specific meaning of *mšlt* are disputed.<sup>5</sup> There seem to be four possibilities, as follows.

(1) As noted several years ago by Durand,<sup>6</sup> it may be cognate with Mari Akk. *massilātum*, “ein Gewand” (AHw, 1573). “Le *massilatum* ... est un vêtement de prix, qui fait souvent l’objet de cadeaux diplomatiques”.<sup>7</sup>

– Critique: The difficulty here is the required correspondence between Akk. /s/ and Ug. /š/, which cannot be excluded but would certainly be unusual.<sup>8</sup> Note also that Akk. *massilātum* was not included either in CAD or in CDA. In any case, it may have been a tapestry weave<sup>9</sup> rather than clothing.<sup>10</sup>

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di ordito”). For the whole text see Ribichini / Xella 1985, 86-88 and McGeough / Smith 2011, 225-227. For all these terms see also Vita 2010, 328-332.

<sup>4</sup> The text as established by Vita (2004, 527-529) reads *b yr[ḫ...] pgr[m...] yš-[...] mš[lt...] [b]d. m[...]*, which he translates: “Au moi[s de] *pagrū[ma]* est sort[ī] (un) vêtement-*mš[lt...]* à la charge de M[...].” Note that the reverse (lines 6-10) has exactly the same wording, except that there *lbš*, “garment”, replaces *mšlt* in line 9, which shows that both terms denote items of clothing.

<sup>5</sup> Del Olmo Lete (1988, 13) suggests “‘camisas’/‘gualdrapas’”, both in inverted commas, which is reflected in the rendering “garment or harness (“shirt, caparison” (?))” (DUL, 584). Heltzer (1978, 45) simply has “textile or garment” and the translation by Caquot (TOug II, 226) is “manteaux”, with no comment. McGeough / Smith 2011, 226 are equally non-committal.

<sup>6</sup> Durand 1983, 421-422, as noted by Ribichini / Xella 1985, 52.

<sup>7</sup> Joannès 1984, 201, note a.

<sup>8</sup> See generally Tropper UG, §32.143.5, esp. §32.143.54.

<sup>9</sup> Durand 2009, 66, as quoted by Smith 2010, 168 and n. 71; cf. Durand 2009, 63 and Smith 2010, 163. See also Smith 2012, 242.

<sup>10</sup> Which begs the same question posed by De Moor (see n. 1): Why would a travelling goddess carry seven tapestries?

(2) It corresponds to Akk. *šallatum*, “ein Kleidungsstück” (AHw, 1148); “(a cloth used in chariot equipment)” (CAD Š/1, 252-253); “(a heavy cloth) OAKk for chariots” (CDA, 351b).<sup>11</sup>

– Critique: Some support for this meaning<sup>12</sup> comes from Arab. *šalīl*, “A cloth ... that is put upon the rump, or croup, of a camel, behind the saddle ...” (AEL, 1591) and Mod. Arab. *šalta*, “mattress” (DMWA, 484a). However, it could not apply to KTU 1.148:9; see the discussion below.

(3) It is a metathetical form of a noun derived from the verb \**šml*, “to contain, to wrap, enfold etc.”, as in Arabic (cf. DMWA, 487a). Derived nouns are Heb. *šmlh*, “outer garment, cloak, mantle; garments, clothing” (HALOT, 1337-1338); Official Aram. *šā-am-lat*, “mantle” (DNWSI, 1162) and Arab. *šamlat*, “a [garment...] with which one wraps, or inwraps, himself” (AEL, 1600); “cloak, turban” (DMWA, 487a).<sup>13</sup> It would then mean “cloak” or “mantle”.<sup>14</sup>

– Critique: While metathesis is certainly an option, this solution remains only a possibility.

(4) De Moor (1970, 308) translates Ug. *mšlt* as “accessory shirts”. The verb from which it is derived is \**šll*, meaning something like “to sew” or “to chain”.<sup>15</sup> Cognates would be Aram. *šll*, “to sew together” (DJBA, 1150)<sup>16</sup> and Syr. *šll*, perh. “seam” (SL, 1565b, mng 1).<sup>17</sup> See also Arab. *šalīl*, “an innermost covering for the body, worn beneath the coat of mail” (AEL, 1591) and Arab. *mišall*, “a garment with which the neck is covered” (AEL, 1592), as well as Arab. *šalīl*, “a coat of mail” (AEL, 1591), all from the verb *šll*.<sup>18</sup> Also, perhaps, but more remotely, Heb. *šūl*, “seams” (on garment) (HALOT, 1442a) and Mand. *šul*, “lower part (of a garment)” (MD, 454b).

– Critique: Strong additional evidence in favour of option (4), which involves neither an unusual phonological correspondence nor metathesis, is now supplied by Neo-Punic *mšlt*, which occurs as *mšlt š' bš*, “stitchers of byssus”.<sup>19</sup> “The

<sup>11</sup> According to Durand (1990, 662): “ce serait une sorte d’attache”, adding (ibid. n. 25): “Il sert en tout cas pour des chars”.

<sup>12</sup> See Watson 2011, 160, with further possible cognates.

<sup>13</sup> As mentioned in DUL, 584.

<sup>14</sup> As translated by L. Fisher 1970, 494 (in KTU 148:19), but with no explanation. My thanks to Jordi Vidal for help with both this reference and the article by De Moor.

<sup>15</sup> See Pardee 2000, II, 794 n. 65, and 1166. Cf. nn. 17 and 18 below.

<sup>16</sup> The example quoted there is קרעיהו למישל “to sew together the torn pieces (of) their (garment)”.

<sup>17</sup> Note also Aram. *šll*, “to chain” (DJPA, 553b). In fact, Gray (1978, 98 and n. 92) translated *mšlt* as “chains (?)”.

<sup>18</sup> Already cited by De Moor 1970, 311 and by Ribichini / Xella 1985, 52 n. 71. Mod. Arab. *šilla*, “hank, skein (of yarn); coil, spool” (DMWA, 484a) may be unrelated.

<sup>19</sup> The text is Hr. Maktar N 76 line 3; for further details on this text see Schmitz 2010, 33.

word *mšlt* (< š-l-l₂ “stitch, baste”...) designates female specialists in the handicraft of needlework” (Schmitz 2010, 34).

These considerations seem to indicate that Ug. *mšlt* also derives from the Ugaritic verb \*šll, “to stitch”, as yet undocumented, and means “something that has been stitched or sewn” or slightly more specifically, “a garment (of some kind)”. Perhaps this is like Ug. *tprt*, also a term for a garment,<sup>20</sup> which may similarly be derived from undocumented Ug. \*tpr, “to sew”, cognate with Aram. *tpr*, “to sew” (DJPA, 588b; DJBA, 1226) and Aram. *tpyr*, “stitch” (DJBA, 1224-1225); “sewing” (DJPA, 588b).<sup>21</sup> Whether or not Akk. *našpartum* and *našparum*, both denoting garments (CDA, 245b), are also related still remains uncertain.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. Ugaritic *sgr*

The Ugaritic term *sgr* (II)<sup>23</sup> is even rarer than *mšlt*, since it occurs only twice:

- (a) *lpš. d sgr bh*, “garment with a *sgr* on it” (KTU 4.166 [RS 15.078]:6)
- (b) *lpš. sgr. rq*, “garment - *sgr* - fine” (KTU 4.205 [RS 16.004]:2)

The difficulty of establishing what *sgr* means is reflected in the most recent translations. These are, for *lpš d sgr bh*: “a *lpš* garment that has a fastener on it” and rather less specifically, for *lpš sgr rq*: “a fine *sgr*-garment”.<sup>24</sup> The various meanings and interpretations of *sgr* are as follows:

(1) Ribichini and Xella (1985, 46) proposed “una «veste-*l*. con sopra una cucitura (?)»” for (a), and “una veste-*l*. fine, cucita” for (b). Alternatively, they suggest that *sgr* may simply mean “closed” as opposed to *prqt*, which may mean “open”.<sup>25</sup> This follows Gordon (UT §19.1738), who translated *lpš sgr* as “closed garment”.

<sup>20</sup> Occurring in KTU 4.146 [RS 15.035]:4; KTU 4.341 [RS 18.028]:10 and KTU 4.867 [RS 94.2603]:8). For other possible explanations see Watson 2003; 2004; 2006 and DUL, 912.

<sup>21</sup> For Ug. /t/ corresponding to Aram. /t/ see Ug. *tkl* / Aram. *tkl*, “to be childless”; Ug. *tl* / Aram. *tl*, “three”; Ug. *tm* / Aram. *tm*, “then” (DSA II, 953); Ug. *tmn* / Aram. *tmn*, “eight”; Ug. *tny* / Aram. *tny*, “to repeat”; Ug. *tr* / Aram. *twr*, “bull” etc.

<sup>22</sup> See already Watson 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Not identical with Ug. *sgr* (I), “enclosure” or the like (DUL, 743). For a brief survey see Watson LSU, 114.

<sup>24</sup> McGeough / Smith 2011, 383 and 164 respectively. On Ug. *lpš* see DUL, 496 (“cloak, outer garment”) and esp. Ribichini / Xella 1985, 45-46 (“uno specifico capo di abbigliamento”).

<sup>25</sup> Ribichini / Xella 1985, 46 n. 55.

– Critique: The advantage of this solution is that it fits both texts, although strictly speaking, *sgr* means “to close” rather than “to sew”.<sup>26</sup> Also, the meaning of Ug. *prqt* remains uncertain.<sup>27</sup>

(2) The term *sgr* means “a garment”, corresponding to or cognate with Mari Akk. *sí-gu-ri-tum*, “nom d’habit” (Durand 1990, 662).

– Critique: While very attractive, it remains difficult to translate either text (a) or text (b) in Ugaritic on this basis.

(3) “Séame permitido pensar, en este contexto, en la posibilidad de que el misterioso *sgr* esté relacionado con ese tipo de oro que se denomina en ac. *sagru* y en hb. *sgwr*, un tipo de aleación or elaboración del oro, probablemente «oro batido» o «pan de oro»”.<sup>28</sup> He translates the texts in question “un manto con (aplicaciones) de oro” and “un manto fino de (aplicaciones) de oro”.

– Critique: Like proposal (1), this solution fits both texts, although it would require the ellipsis of “appliqués”. In this respect, some support for this meaning may be provided by Akk. *lubušta hurāši sāmi*, “a garment (decorated) with red gold”,<sup>29</sup> where there is a similar ellipsis.

(4) With the transcription *lpš (d) sgr*, Huehnergard (UVST, 155) seems to imply that in both texts the reading should be *lpš d sgr*, which he translates “garment with fastener”, with reference to Ug. */suguru/* or */sukuru/*<sup>30</sup> meaning “bolt, bar”. Similarly, Dijkstra (1999, 148) translates the expression as “a garment that has a fibula”, but with no further comment.<sup>31</sup>

– Critique: This proposal has the merit of applying to both texts.

(5) Van Soldt (1990, 326 n. 43) translates *lpš d sgr bh* as follows: “the cloth in which they were wrapped(?)”, adding: “For *lpš* as a possible textile for wrapping, one could point to Old Assyrian *šubāḫu ša liwitim*, “«textiles for wrapping»”.<sup>32</sup>

– Critique: This would not apply to text (b).

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<sup>26</sup> See the apposite comments by Sanmartín 1992, 102.

<sup>27</sup> See Watson 2015, 34-35; further possible meanings of this word, not mentioned there, are “piece of cloth”, cf. Syr. *prq’*, “piece of cloth; fragment” (SL, 1252a) and “seam”, cf. Syr. *prq’*, “seam (in tunics)” (SL, 1251-1252).

<sup>28</sup> Sanmartín 1992, 102

<sup>29</sup> As cited in CAD L, 235a (under *mng* 3b).

<sup>30</sup> Both reconstructions are followed by interrogation marks denoting uncertainty in UVST, 155.

<sup>31</sup> Likewise, Tropper (UG, 262) translates *sgr* as “Gewandfibel, Verschluss” and *lpš d sgr bh* as “ein Kleid, das einen Schließmechanismus hat” (*ibid.* 899)

<sup>32</sup> See Veenhof 1972, 28-30.

(6) As yet another possibility, it is suggested here that Ug. *sgr* may correspond to or be cognate with Heb. *sûgar*, “collar” (HALOT, 745a) and Syr. *swgr*, “collar, chain for neck” (SL, 976a).<sup>33</sup> If this is correct, then *lpš d sgr bh* could be translated: “raiment with a neckband on it”.

– Critique: It is difficult to apply this meaning to text (b) *lpš sgr rq*. Possibly it may mean “robe (with) a fine collar” or even “fine robe (with) collar”. Alternatively, in this text *sgr* may have one of the other meanings listed above. If the text can be corrected to or understood as *lpš d sgr rq* (see solution (4)), a feasible translation would be: “fine robe which has a collar”, with *rq*, “fine”, in apposition.

It is hoped the what has been set out here may help towards uncloaking the mystery of these two words.

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<sup>33</sup> See also Akk. *šigaru(m)*, *šigaru*, “(neck)-stock” for captives (CDA, 371a).

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**Abbreviations**

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