

# Focus on a Field: Ugaritic *gl*

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*Abstract:* After a brief survey of previous studies, an explanation is provided for Ugaritic *gl*, which occurs only once in the texts, based on terms for “stubble” or “straw” in Aramaic, Mandaic and Syriac, with an etymology from Ge’ez.

*Keywords:* Semitic, Ugaritic, words for “field”.

As yet, the Ugaritic word *gl* in the expression *šd gl* PN (KTU 4.356 [RS 18.046]:3) remains unexplained.<sup>1</sup> There have been three possible proposals, which are set out here. To these another two have been added as further suggestions. They are all based on Semitic cognates, which also applies to all the other terms for “field” and the like in Ugaritic.<sup>2</sup> None is a loanword it would seem.

(1) In spite of the word-divider, the sequence *gl.bʿlz* would seem to be a personal name, matching the formula elsewhere in this text (KTU 4.356), i.e. the word *šd*, “field (of)” followed by a PN.<sup>3</sup>

— Critique: While this is feasible, alternatives are possible: see below. In any case, *glbʿlz* would be a very unusual form for a personal name.

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<sup>1</sup> Denoting a kind of field, it has two other homonyms: see Watson 1999, 132.

<sup>2</sup> These include Ug. *iigr*, “field”; *dmt*, “desolate land”; *gd*, “pasture” (cf. Richey 2017); *gn*, “garden”; *gl*, “scrub land”; *hmdrt*, “parched land”; *hrnq*, “orchard”; *krm*, “vineyard”; *mdrʿ*, “sown land”; *mhrtt*, “ploughed land”; *mrʿ*, “pasture land”; *nrt*, “tilled land”; *pält*, “fallow field” (cf. Watson 2018a); *šbr*, “cultivated field” (cf. Watson 2018b, 411); *šd*, “field”; *šdmt*, “terrace” and *ilm*, “furrow”. Cf. also Ug. *árs*, “earth, ground” and *šp*, “(sand-)dune”. The exception is Ug. *übdy*, “plot of land”, a Luwian term that was probably borrowed through Akkadian (cf. DUL, 8) and in any case is part of legal vocabulary. Some of these terms have even persisted in Nabataean: see Alzoubi 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Watson 1990, 127; cf. Márquez Rowe 1995, 319 n. 4.

- (2) The text (*šd. gl. b'lz*) should be corrected to *šd. šš. b'lz*, “field: salt-works of PN”.<sup>4</sup>  
 — Critique: This is an ingenious proposal, but it is preferable, if at all possible, not to have to emend the text.
- (3) The expression *šd. gl. b'lz* corresponds to A.ŠĀ.MEŠ *ga-al-lu* (or *qá-al-lu*) *ša* PN, “small fields belonging to PN” (PRU 3, 112 [RS 15.126]:5).<sup>5</sup>  
 — Critique: This would require an adjective in the singular to agree with a noun in the plural.<sup>6</sup>
- (4) As a new suggestion, Ug. *gl* may be explained from Harari *gálu* (from Galla *galo*), “hollowed place in an elevated ground” (EDH, 70b).  
 — Critique: This can be no more than a possibility and ultimately, the next solution seems more likely.<sup>7</sup>
- (5) Finally, a second new proposal here is that Ug. *gl* may be cognate with Aram. *gīllā*, “straw, chaff” (DJBA, 280a); Aram. *gyly*, “stubble” (DSA I, 143b); Syr. *gl'*, “dried grass” (SL, 231b); “a straw, chip; straw, hay, dry stalks” (CSD, 69b) and Mand. *gila*, “straw, stubble” (MD, 90a).<sup>8</sup> An etymology may be suggested from Ge'ez *gll* (*galla*, *g'lala*), “(to) separate, pick out, winnow etc.”, with the derived noun *gelāl*, “matter picked out (gleanings), winnowed or cleared grain” (CDG, 191a). If so, *šd gl* may mean “field of stubble or straw” or perhaps even “hayfield”.<sup>9</sup>  
 — Critique: While this is the only occurrence of the term in Ugaritic, in view of its cognates, the meaning suggested seems to be the best possible option.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Corresponding to Ras Shamra Akkadian A.ŠĀ.MUN(.ĪIA): *ši-sū(-ū)-ma* (PRU 3, 124 [RS 15.167+]:12; PRU 6 28 [RS 17.39] rev. 2'), cited in DUL, 781.

<sup>5</sup> See Huehnergard (1987, 174); he adds: “In the field designation *qá-al-lu* in PRU 3 112a:5, another possibility is the rare Akk. word *qallu* ‘forest’” (on which cf. CAD Q, 66 and CDA, 283a). However, this is considered “unlikely” in DUL, 294.

<sup>6</sup> Although this is not insurmountable; see the comments by Márquez Rowe 1995, 319.

<sup>7</sup> A connection with Akk. *gillu*, “(a piece of reed)” (CDA, 93a) also seems unlikely, but cannot be ruled out.

<sup>8</sup> See perhaps, but with all due reservations, Greek γάλιον, “bedstraw” (EDG I, 258).

<sup>9</sup> On straw from fields in Mesopotamia see the texts cited under Akk. *tibnu*, “straw”, in CAD T, 382 (meaning c). The texts cited there indicate its value in the economy.

<sup>10</sup> It would spell out the interpretation as “*gl*-field” given by Dietrich / Loretz TUAT I, 215 (cited by Márquez Rowe 1995, 319 n. 4) and is much more specific than “the *ql* field (saline?)” as in McGeough / Smith 2011, 242, which seems to combine proposals (2) and (3).

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- 2018b: “Updates for the Ugaritic Lexicon: New Meanings and Overlooked Cognates”, *UF* 49: 407-426.

## Abbreviations

- CAD I. J. Gelb *et al.* (eds.): *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vols 1-21. Chicago 1956-2010.
- CDG W. Leslau: *Comparative Dictionary of Gecez*. Wiesbaden 1987.
- CSD J. Payne Smith: *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*. Oxford 1903.
- DJBA M. Sokoloff: *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*. Ramat Gan / Baltimore 2002.
- DSA A. Tal: *A Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic*, vols I-II (HdO I/50). Leiden 2000.
- DUL G. del Olmo Lete / J. Sanmartín: *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* (English Version Edited and Translated by W. G. E. Watson), vols 1-2 (HdO I/112; Leiden/Boston 2015<sup>3</sup>).
- EDG R. Beekes: *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, vols I-II (LI-EEDS 10); Leiden / Boston 2010.
- EDH W. Leslau: *Etymological Dictionary of Harari*. Los Angeles 1963.
- KTU M. Dietrich / O. Loretz / J. Sanmartín: *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places* (AOAT 360/1). Münster 2013<sup>3</sup>.
- MD E. S. Drouwer / R. Macuch: *A Mandaic Dictionary*. Oxford 1963.
- PRU 3 J. Nougayrol: *Palais Royal d’Ugarit III. Textes accadiens et hourrites des*

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- SL M. Sokoloff: *A Syriac Lexicon. A Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum*. Winona Lake / Piscataway 2009.
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