

The Cuneiform Short Alphabet: Part 8.

Medical Text from Tell Taanach: KTU 4.767 (TT 433, Hillers [1964])

Detailed Discussion

Preliminary Remarks:

This tablet was discovered during the final days of the 1963 season of excavation by Paul Lapp's excavation at Tell Taanach (Taanak, Ta'annek). It was "found in a layer of ash and mud brick detritus in the remains of a large building (Hillers [1964] 45)." It is 48 x 22 x 12.5 mm in size. Hillers compared the writing on the tablet with KTU 1.77, KTU 4.710, and KTU 7.60 from Ugarit, KTU 6.1 from the Tabor valley and the abecedary KTU 5.24 from Beth Shemesh (Hillers [1964] 45, n1). Based on the pottery finds, the matrix in which the tablet was found is dated to the 12th century BCE. As will be seen below, the tablet itself is very likely older than its surrounding matrix.

Transliteration and Translation:

Obverse:

1) *k**k**b* . *ā**s**₂**p* . *ʿ**t*

2) *k**p**r**t* . *y**ā**k**l*

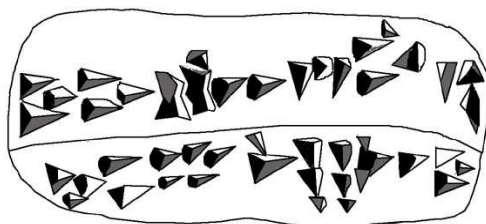
Reverse:

3) *d**w*

"When in pain a wrapping of henna cures, (while) sickness consumes."

Notes on the Orthography:

Below is an approximately 2X scale tracing of the obverse based on a photograph of the tablet published by Rainey (1969), 90.







Hillers (1964) 45-47 published photographs of both sides of the tablet. However, his photograph of the obverse is not as clear as the one published by Rainey and the reading of the three letters on the reverse is relatively uncontroversial.



The tablet has several orthographic peculiarities. The small wedges above or between certain letters appear to function as word dividers. See the one above the right top wedge of the third letter from the right, the b. The word dividers on this tablet appear to me, and

to Dietrich and Loretz (1988), 258, to be unique in morphology and placement among those otherwise seen in alphabetic cuneiform texts. Dietrich and Loretz (1988), 258 note a similarity between the word dividers on this tablet and those on the Amarna syllabic mythical texts EA 356 and EA 357. Also note that the *b* is morphological similar to the *bs* in the short cuneiform alphabet as opposed to the canonical Ugaritic long alphabet. The same holds for the *d* on the reverse of the tablet. Specifically, the bottom wedges appear to point up rather than sideways. While Hillers (1964), 46-47, and Cross (1968), 41-46, read the third (and fourth) sign as the letters *p* ' , most others, including this author, have read a single ' . Compare this letter with the ' in the second line. The two wedges are nearly identical and significantly different from the next to last letter on the line, which is certainly an ' , although not a very canonical one. Both Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartin (1974b), 469-470 and Dijkstra (1986), 122 n. 7 read the *s*₂ as *l*. However, Dietrich and Loretz (1988), 250-251 now see it as *ḡ*, having the same phonetic range as what I call *s*₂. On this letter, compare the *s*₂ on the Tabor Valley knife (KTU 6.1).

The most difficult sign in line one is the last one. Hillers (1964), 47-48, offered no reading for the sign. Cross (1988), 44, read the sign as an *m*. In their 1974 (first edition) publication of KTU Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartin, called the sign as a *z*₂ but more recently (1995, second edition), 477, they read *ḡ* which they take to stand for /s/ or /ṣ/. Dijkstra (1986), 122, n 7, read *s*₂, which he understands in the same way as Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartin (1995), 477 and Dietrich, Loretz (1988), 250, understand *ḡ*. I take the sign to be a *ḡ*. Based on the photograph published by Rainey (1969), 90, the sign

looks like this . The now undisputed *s*₂ or *ḡ* as Dietrich and Loretz (1988), 250, call it looks like this . Dietrich and Loretz explain the difference between the signs by noting that the scribe was at the edge of the tablet and had to squeeze the third wedge under the second one. Of course, this is not at all impossible. However, in the second line of the tablet the scribe seemed to feel no constraint about wrapping a whole letter (an *l*) around the edge and onto the reverse of the tablet. Now Compare this sign from KTU

4.710:7, . This is what most, including this author, have called *ḡ*₂ and it can stand for /ḡ/. While I do not see an exact equivalent with the KTU 4.710 *ḡ*₂, it looks as much like the letter in our texts as that letter looks like the *s*₂ on the same line. How does the sign compare with a canonical *ḡ*? The textbook *ḡ* looks like this  and when rotated 90°

counter clockwise it looks like this . Still not exactly the same as  but all the wedges are in the right position if not quite the right shape. Note that the rotated *ḡ* is also closer to the sign in KTU 4.710. I believe that the context of the word in which this letter appears is supportive of my identification.

There are no real difficulties in the second line.

Notes on the Translation:

- 1) *k^hkb* Starting with Hillers (1964), 46, who saw the first cluster as *k^hkb^h*, the majority of scholars who have dared to read this letter cluster at all have seen some kind of

2) *kprt* . Cyprus flower or stalk when processed becomes henna, *Lawsomia inermis* or more likely *Lawsomia alba*. Using henna as a medication for disease is well known from antiquity. For example, the Ebers Papyrus and the Kahun Medical Papyrus from Egypt both describe the use of henna compounds for various skin, eye and oral maladies (see <http://www.hennapage.com/henna/encyclopedia/medical/ebers.html>). I lack a completely satisfactory explanation of the terminal *t*. On the one hand, one might speculate that the word *kprt* stands for a particular type of henna or henna compound. We know from *Papyrus Ebers* that several different types of henna and various parts of the plant were used for medical purposes in Egypt (for example, “knots of henna”, “thorns of henna”, “henna grass”, “henna from the north”, “henna from the fields”, “henna from the meadow”, and “henna from the marshes”). On the other hand, one might consider the *t* a feminine plural ending. However, in Hebrew and Aramaic the noun is masculine. In KTU 4.611:8 the letter group *kprm* appears. But this is likely a personal name and not our word with a masculine plural ending. The word *kpr* meaning henna appears in the same expression (*kpr šb' bnt*, "henna [for] seven women") on two occasions in Ugaritic (KTU 1.3 II:2 and 1.7:35). In these instances, we are dealing with henna as a cosmetic or a dye rather than a medication. It also occurs earlier in line 15 of KTU 1.7 but in broken context. The specific context of its appearance in the letter KTU 2.72:43 is also unclear.

'*yākl* *yqtl* form of the common Semitic word meaning "to eat." Note that in Akkadian *akālu(m)* can refer to the action of a disease (AHw, 26-27). Note also Ezekiel 7:15, רָעַב וְדָבַר יֹאכְלֵנוּ. In KTU 1.4 VI:24-29 fire "consumes" the temple and the palace.

3) *dw* "sick" (UT #652) in KTU 1.16 II:20, 23. Also see *mdw* in KTU 1:16 VI:35, 51 were a nominal form on the root **dwh* means "sickness." Note Hebrew דָּוָה also means illness or disease. Akkadian *di'u(m)* (AHw, 174), some kind of head disease, may also be related.

Date:

The archaeological context sets the *terminus anti quem* in the 12th century BCE (Lapp [1964], 23; Lapp [1966], 19-20). On paleographical grounds, Dietrich and Loretz (1988), 255 suggestion that it likely dates from the 13th century and perhaps even the 14th century BCE. They cite the word dividers as evidence for this earlier dating. Based on their observation concerning the word dividers, Dietrich and Loretz (1988), 258, suggest the possibility that KTU 4.767 is a school text. Cross's (1967), 12*, desire to see the alphabet cuneiform texts from the south as one to two hundred years younger than those from Ugarit not with standing, it is hard to believe that this tablet is substantially more recent than the other examples. The date of this tablet will remain an issue. If the text of the tablet is indeed school material then the text *per se* may predate the tablet by a considerable time.

Concluding Remarks:

The text on the tablet appears to be a medical text or, perhaps better, a medical proverb. It is indeed possible that the tablet and the text are part of a school tradition. On morphological grounds, one might consider it to be written in the short cuneiform alphabet. However, none of the more secure signs of this possibility are present on the tablet. As has been necessary with a few of the other texts considered in this series, I will postpone definitive judgment on this issue until later.