

The Cuneiform Short Alphabet: Part 7.

Inscription on a knife from Tabor Valley, Wadi Bire: KTU 6.1 (IAA 44.318, Yeivin [1945])

Detailed Discussion

Preliminary Remarks:

KTU 6.1 is inscribed on a broken single edged bronze knife blade. It was found, out of archeological context, in the Wadi Bire. The text is written from left to right. A small portion of the text has been damaged by corrosion. Its place of manufacture is unknown and, at present, unknowable. Dietrich and Loretz (1988), 244, suggest that it may have been made in northern Palestine and argue that it was likely not made at Ugarit. Beyond that little can be said.

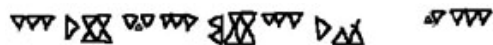
Transliteration and Translation:

š₂lb`l bps₂b`l

Belonging to Silliba'lu son of Pulsiba'lu

Notes on the Orthography:

The following tracing was made over an electronically enhanced version of the picture of KTU 6.1 published in S. Yeivin (1945), pl. 3:2 (and reprinted in Weippert [1966], end of volume). This photograph appears to show more detail than the Palestine Archaeological Museum photograph (also with Weippert [1966], end of vol.) or the photograph published in Courtios (1969), following page 78, both of which were consulted as the tracing was made. It should be noted that the line width of the tracing is greater than that of the inscription itself.



There is corrosion damage to the knife blade between the initial l and the ʔayan with only the first wedge of the first s₂ and lower portion of what can only be a b readable. Yeivin (1945) read the second sign as š based the ninth letter of the inscription and its very loose resemblance to the long alphabet š. Albright (1945), 21; Herdner, (1946), 165; and most scholars up to Dietrich and Loretz (1988) have agreed or could find no other interpretation. While agreeing that this is the same as the ninth letter, Dietrich and Loretz (1998), 245, propose that it be read š and taken to stand for /s/ and /š/. I agree with this understanding but prefer to use s₂ in keeping with the convention I have employed for other unique uses with in the short cuneiform alphabet. More on this question below and when I discuss the inscriptions from Hala Sultan Tekke (KTU 6.68) and the tablet from Tell Taanak (KTU 4.733), both of which have similar signs.

Yeivin (1945) had no suggestion for the sign following s₂. However, Albright (1945), 21 suggested that it was an l. Most interpreters of this inscription have followed Albright in

whole or in part. However, Herder (1946), 165, reconstructs the letter d. Herder's reconstruction is unlikely simply because of the condition of the knife in the lower portion of the engraved area. The lower wedges of a d, like the b that follows this letter, would very likely be visible because it would extend into undamaged area. Because of the spacing, this letter is likely the same width as the first l and the ls in the two instantiations of the theophoric mane element b`l/which, when combined with the fact that it does not appear to extend into the lower part of the inscribed area, makes l a reasonable reconstruction.

The following is the same tracing as above with the most likely reconstruction of the damaged portion of the engraving in red.



The transliterations offered by Weippert (1966), 319, n. 231; Cross (1967), 14*; Puech (1986), 206 and Dietrich and Loretz (1988), 242 are all based on this sort of reconstruction.

It should be noted that the signs are made up of linear engraved triangles, which are intended to represent wedges in clay, but are not wedges themselves. For this reason they are stylized and modified for the media in which they are engraved. The style is very similar to the engraving style used on various axes from Ugarit (e.g. KTU 6.6). However, that the b in the axe inscriptions from Ugarit is stylized after the b in the long cuneiform alphabet while the b in our text is stylized after the b in the short alphabet. Of course, the b in the short alphabet and the b in the long alphabet also resemble each other in general form. They only differ in the orientation of the bottom wedges. We will see an even more stylized "cuneiform" when we look at the inscription from Hala Sultan Tekke (KTU 6.68).

The direction of writing is best documented by the orientation of the p but the orientation of the ?ayin is also indicative of the left to right direction. All other letters show symmetry as to direction.

Notes on the Translation:

While, as we have seen, the preposition l can mean "for," (see KTU 6.70 for example), in this type of usage it almost certainly implies "belonging to." See Sivan (2001), 203, for the general case in Ugaritic. However, the usage is also known in very similar Phoenician identification formulas. See, for example Byblos Cone #2, (Gibson [1982], 12, #3) and #3 (Gibson [1982], 12, #3).

The first part of the person identified as the owner of this knife is, according to the generally accepted reconstruction s₂lb`l Which Dietrich and Loretz (1988), 242, render Silli-Ba?al. Note the personal name sl in KTU 4.114:6. However, it is unlikely that this name is related to the name in our text. I discussed names with the theophoric element b^cl as some length in my discussion of ydnc^cl in KTU 6.70

http://www.telecomtally.com/blog/2005/12/the_cuneiform_s_5.html) and there is no need to repeat that discussion here. Our name may mean something like "Ba'al protects (shades)." In which case, I would read s_2 as /š/ here and read the name Silliba'lu. See the Amorite name sil-lí-ba-ah-li (Huffmon [1965], 257). But this is very speculative.

One of the more interesting features of this text is the use of **b** where one might expect **bn**. Dietrich and Loretz (1988), 243, suggest three possibilities: scribal error, abbreviation or assimilation.

Various examples of **b** where one might expect **bn** have been adduced. Three possibilities have been suggested (Dietrich and Loretz [1988], 243, n 288) from long cuneiform texts from Ugarit: KTU 4.178:2, KTU 4.178:4 and KTU 4.696:9. I have dealt with these examples earlier (http://www.telecomtally.com/blog/2005/12/weighing_the_ev.html) and did not find any of them persuasive. KTU 4.178 is very seriously damaged with so much of the text missing that it is almost impossible to know what any of it means. It's some kind of a list but beyond that not much can be said. And the proposed example in KTU 4.696:9 is most likely a scribal error. In any case, these texts do not provide much help in understanding our example.

A more productive set of examples comes from old Phoenician texts: specifically KAI 6:1, KAI 7:3 (but not in line 2 of this text), KAI 8, and the Byblos Cone #2, (Gibson [1982], 12, #3). The Byblos Cone #2 is nearly an exact parallel to our text: dbb $\text{M} \times) |$. The first **b**, instead of **Nb**, in the letter cluster **dbb** is thought by Gibson (1982), 12, to be the result of assimilation of the **n** into the "first letter of the patronymic." According to Milik (1956), 143, n. 18, Maisler (*Leshonenu*, 14, pp. 172 ff.) first noted the same phenomenon in the name $Kl \text{ } m \times yb$ in KAI 6:1 and 7:3 and $ybl \text{ } kb$ in KAI 8. Maisler is also said to have noted the biblical names $hnyb$ (2 Samuel 4:2 *passim*) and $)nyb$ (Nehemiah 10:28). Milik (1956), 143 mentions these examples in connection with his analysis of the name Nyb in a Phoenician bronze arrowhead inscription from the Biqah valley in a private collection (Gibson [1982], 6). One might worry that because there is no assimilation (or abbreviation) of the **n** in **Nb** in KAI 7:2, that the example of assimilation (or abbreviation) in KAI 7:3 may be a scribal error. However, first, it is not the only example in such texts. Second, the name in KAI 7:3 ($Kl \text{ } m \times y$) also appears in KAI 6:1 and also with only a **b** rather than a **Nb** before it. Third, the name following **Nb** in line 2 begins with an aleph and nuns never (or at least, extremely seldom) assimilate into alephs.

However, other old Phoenician texts like those on the Rapa' arrowhead, the Raweiseh arrowhead, the Al-Biq'ah arrowhead (except for the possibility that the phenomenon is embedded in the name Nyb , who is actually called $Nyb \text{ } Nb$, (see above), the Azarba'al arrowhead (all in Gibson [1982], 6), the Kefar Verdum Bowl (Alexandre [2002], 67), and the Tekke Bowl (Sass [1988], 91) do not show this kind of assimilation or abbreviation.

I would also note the names ^mbi-ri-di-ya, called "the man of Megiddo" in the Amarna texts (see EA 242:3), and ^mbi-di-i-lu, envoy of the king of Qadish to Ugarit, (see RS 20.172:7, 23). However, Hess (1993), 63, suggests that the Amarna example is "Indo-Aryan." These names are particularly interesting when compared to names like ^mben-a-zi-mi (EA 120:32) and ^mben-ar-mu-na (RS 17.150:45) (but ^mben-sà-ra-ti [RS 17.150:38]). *ben* at both Amarna and Ugarit is represented by the DUMU [tur / *mâru*] sign. One might not think much about these names if the determinative came after DUMU rather than before it.

While the evidence from names is weak, I believe that, based primarily on KAI 6:1, KAI 7:3, KAI 8, and the Byblos Cone #2, scribal error can be ruled out. The fact that both b and Nb meaning "son of" occur in KAI 7 seems to rule out abbreviation also. On this issue see Friedrich and Röling (1970), 39 (99b), were they see assimilation in the case of the Phoenician examples KAI 6:1, KAI 7:3, KAI 8.

The patronymic name *pš₂b`l* has onomastic parallels in ^mpu-ul-sí-^dIM from Mari (see Huffmon [1965], 255). From Ugarit comes the names **bn pls** (KTU 4:62 III:31 and 4:283:8), **psy** (KTU 2.10:2, *passim*) = (?) píl-sí-ya₈ (RS 17.150:11), and pí-il-sú (RS 17.20:11'). The "Amorite" name from Mari is of particular interest because of the theophoric element. Several of these names are also spelled with a s as in, for example, **pš** (e.g. KTU 4:617:15). The most interesting of these, for our purposes is **pšb`l** (KTU 4:366:3) which may be the exact onomastic equivalent of our name. It is all the more interesting if ^s was adapted from foreign usage at Ugarit (Segert, [1983]).

If I am correct about **s₂** standing for /š/ in the name **s₂lb`l** and /s/ in the name *pš₂b`l*, then these usages support the notion that **s₂** equals /š/ and /s/. This subject will be discussed in more detail when I consider KTU 6.68 from Hala Sultan Tekke and KTU 4.733 from Tell Taanak.

Date:

Cross (1967), 12* and elsewhere has suggested while the alphabetic cuneiform text from Ugarit date from the 14th and 13th centuries BCE, those from Palestine date from the 13th to 12 century BCE. M. Weippert (1966), 314, suggest that KTU 6.1 was written in the 12th century BCE but in a note (206) indicates that a date as early as the 14th century is possible. In the case of KTU 6.1, found out of archaeological context and written in an "engravers" hand, I see very little to support a late date. As Dietrich and Loretz (1988), 243, say, "*Wie die Schrift und ihre Besonderheiten nahelegen, ist eine Datierung ins 14/13. Jh. Am wahrscheinlichsten.*"