

A Suppliant Surprised (CTA 16 I 41b-53a)

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1. The Entreaty Gesture

Gruber's persuasive study on the ritual entreaty gesture in Mesopotamia¹ may point the way toward solving a problematic passage in the Ugaritic Krt myth.² According to Gruber, who elaborated further the definition given in *CAD*,³ the following can be established for the expression *labān appi*: (i) it is a gesture denoting entreaty, (ii) performed standing, and (iii) can involve one hand or both. In effect this means that previous explanations of the gesture as betokening humility, adoration or greeting can be ruled out. What is of particular importance for the text to be discussed is the existence of a byform to the gesture where the suppliant holds something in the hand which is at nose or mouth level. One example, the Bavian relief of Sennacherib (discussed by Gruber), shows the entreating person with an object held to the nose in his right hand, a spear point downwards in his left. It is also worth mentioning at this juncture that the ritual gesture has already been referred to in elucidating an obscure biblical text.⁴

2. The Text

The Ugaritic text in question, CTA 16 I 41–53, runs as follows (the stichometry and divisions adopted assume the translation to be proposed in section 4):⁵

1 M. I. Gruber, "Akkadian *labān appi* in the Light of Art and Literature," *JANES* 7 (1975), 78–83. The present study was written while on a research fellowship awarded by the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung. My thanks go to Dr. Baruch Margalit of Haifa University for discussing the text with me and for making available his paper "Octavia and the Sun Goddess" (CTA 16:I:36–38, 49ff)" to appear in *UF* 8 (1976).

2 For the classification of the Krt text as "myth," cf. J. C. L. Gibson, "Myth, Legend and Folk-lore in the Ugaritic Keret and Aqhat Texts," *VTS* 25 (Leiden, 1975) 60–68, esp. 65.

3 *CAD* L, 12: "a gesture involving both nose and hand"; "(it) seems to denote the gesture accompanying supplication, a prayer for mercy (etc.)."

4 H. W. F. Saggs, "The Branch to the Nose," *JTSN*. S. 11 (1960), 318–29 on Ezek. 8:16–17; Gruber refers to this article in his study.

5 Notes on the text: for the restoration *bḥntk* (line 44) see M. Held, *Eretz Israel* 9 (1969), 75, n. 36; but *bḥntb* is also possible, as discussed in n. 22, below. In spite of CTA, p. 73 n. 1, *wḥrṣ* is most likely a scribal error for *wyrṣ*, as read by Ginsberg, Gordon and Gray (line 45). Perhaps [*g̃z*]r is to be read at the beginning of line 50, as suggested by B. Margalit in *UF* 7 (1975), 304, n. 23.

- A (41) qḥ. apk byd
 (42) -r- tk. bm. ymn
 (43) lk. škn. 'l šrrt
 (44) adnk. šqrb. [bḥntk ?]
 (45) bmgnk. wy¹rš. ikl
- B (46) apnk. ḡzr ilḥu
 (47) [m]rḥh. yiḥd. byd
 (48) [g]rgrh. bm. ymn
 (49) [w]yqrb. trzḥ
 (50) --- . mḡyh. wḡlm
- C (51) aḥth. šib. yṣat.
 mrḥh (52) ltl yṣb.
 pnh ṭḡr (53) yṣu

3. The Problem

Leaving aside the philological detail for the moment, the main problem crystallizes into one question: What exactly is Ilhu doing? The tablet began with King Krt gravely and mysteriously ill. His son has gone into the sickroom where the king has told him to stop weeping and do something practical instead. He is to go and tell his sister, Octavia (who seems to be away from home) that there is to be a royal banquet—though whether this is offered as an explanation for the king's confinement or as a distracting exercise for the oversensitive girl⁶ is not clear. At this point our text begins. Ilhu has to perform a certain act without letting Octavia know. The obscure act is referred to in each of the sections (marked A, B and C) of the passage. A (lines 41b–45) is the command; B (46–50) describes its performance, and C (51–53a), involving the unexpected appearance of Octavia, narrates the cessation of the act.

In view of the Mesopotamian material outlined in section 1 it seems highly probable that the ritual described is the "gesture of entreaty." Krt is asking his son Ilhu to act as suppliant on his behalf and obtain his recovery. Before this solution can be considered, though, a translation of the text is required.

6 See lines 29–30 where Octavia is described as *bt. ḥmḥb dnn* 'a strongly compassionate girl'; perhaps obscure *ḥmḥ* is to be derived from *nḥm*. For the verb in Hebrew see H. Van Dyke Parunak, "A Semantic Survey of *Nḥm*," *Bib.* 56 (1975), 512–32.

4. Translation

- A "Take your nose in your hand,
Your ('branch?') in your right hand,

Go, stand by the door-jamb.
Cause your Lord to approach, with your plea(?);
At your entreaty he will agree to everything."
- B Accordingly adult Ilhu
Took his spear in his (left) hand,
His 'branch' in his right,
And approached the entreaty-place;
. . . . when he arrived he hid (or: it was dark).
- C His sister came out to draw (water);
His spear in a holder he stuck,
He peered from the portal.

5. Philological Comment

šrrt: 'jamb' with cognates Heb. *šîr* 'hinge' (Prov. 26:14), Aram. *širtā*, and Akk. *šerru* 'door-pivot'.⁷

mgn: 'entreaty, request', Heb. *māgēn* (Prov. 6:11; 24:34).⁸

ğzr: 'hero', or if Xella is correct, a term denoting boys who have undergone a "rite de passage",⁹ hence 'adult'.

mrḥ: 'lance, spear', Heb. *romāḥ*.¹⁰

grgr: 'rocket', botanical name "eruca sativa"; cf. Akk. *girgirû*, a variant for *egingîru* with the same meaning.¹¹ The word "branch" has been used in translation to avoid a comic effect.

7 In Ugaritic liquids are frequently written twice when lengthened ("doubled"), e.g. *kll* for *kullu* 'all'; *mrrt* for *marratu* '(date)-palm'—a phonological feature pointed out to me by José Sanmartín of Ugarit Forschung, Münster. An alternative meaning of *šrrt* is 'alcove'; cf. Caquot-Szzyrmer-Herdner, *Textes ougaritiques* (Paris, 1974), 1:554, n.i. [hereafter *TO*].

8 See, most recently, M. Dietrich - O. Loretz - J. Sanmartín *UF* 6 (1974), 31–32.

9 P. Xella, "Sul ruolo dei *ğzrm* nella società ugaritica," *La Parola del Passato* 150 (1973), 194–202.

10 For cognates, cf. C. H. Gordon, *UT* § 19 . 1547, and for bibliography, J. C. de Moor, *AOAT* 16, 203. Although etymologically *mrḥ* could mean 'windpipe' (Driver, *CML*, 41) or even 'nostrils', it is difficult to imagine Ilhu holding either part of his anatomy while on a long journey, especially if *irzḥb* should mean 'at a run'. The word *mrḥ* 'spear' may be attested in RS 18:364; cf. *AOAT* 13, 40.

11 W. von Soden, *AHw.*, 189; *CADE*, 43. A description of the plant is given in G. Helgi, *Illustrierte Flora von Mittel-Europa* (Munich, 1909), IV/1: 1243.

trẓz: ‘place for petition’—here with directional *-b*.¹² With Held¹³ Driver’s Aramaic cognates¹⁴ have to be rejected. Also to be excluded is a *t*-preformative noun for place from a root *rzy* ‘to entreat’ since this is spelled with *ṣ* in line 15. Although ‘at a run’ from the verb *rûz* cannot be entirely excluded,¹⁵ the form is more probably to be derived from *trẓ* ‘to extend’. The cognate is then Akk. *tarāṣu* ‘to extend’, used elliptically for the expression *tarāṣu + qātu* ‘to beg, entreat’ (lit. ‘to stretch out one’s hand’).¹⁶

ḡlm: either ‘he hid’ (Heb. *‘lm*, niphāl) or ‘it was dark’ (Heb. *ṣalmawet*, Akk. *ṣalāmu*, etc.).¹⁷ De Moor rejects both possibilities when discussing the problematic *ṣlmt // ḡlmt*,¹⁸ and the matter remains undecided. See below in section 7 for further discussion.

nṣb: ‘he inserted’, in view of Aram. *nṣab*.

tl: ‘holder’ is explained by Heb. *tēlî*, found only as *telyēkā* ‘your (weapon) holder’ (Gen. 27:3).

Some notes on syntax can be added here. The ellipsis of possessive suffixes on *yd* and *ymn* (lines 41, 42, 47 and 48) is an accepted feature of Semitic languages.¹⁹ Gray has explained the expression *pnh ḡgr yṣu* by comparing 2 Sam. 17:11²⁰ and *qh apk byd* would seem to be an idiom meaning ‘make the entreaty gesture’.²¹ Lastly, *adnk ṣqr [bḥntk]* is the causative form of the idiom used in CTA 17 I 17 (the passage on which Held based his restoration): *[w]yqrb. b’l. bḥnth* ‘(And) Baal, at his plea, approached.’²²

12 “Il serait tentant d’y voir, avec Cazelles . . . un nom propre: le *-b* serait *-b* marquant la direction”; *TO*, 555, n. w.

13 Held, *Eretz Israel* 9 (1969), 75, n. 36.

14 G. R. Driver, *CML*, 153 suggested Aram. *rggt* ‘desire’ and *rgṣ* ‘was restless (with desire)’.

15 “Context and tone of the Keret passage certainly call for a *verbum movendi* in l. 49, since l. 50 clearly states that Elḥau arrived (*mḡy*) at his destination. Ginsberg is, therefore, justified in rendering l. 49 ‘He sets out at a run’ (*Keret*, p. 27; *ANET*, p. 147b). Thus *trẓzb* must be a derivative of *rwz* ‘to run’ . . . with the adverbial ending *-b*”; Held, *Eretz Israel* 9 (1969), 75, n. 36.

16 See F. Thureau-Dangin, *RA* 27 (1930), 20, n. 4 and J. Nougayrol, *RA* 36 (1939), 33 n. 5.

17 A convenient discussion is provided in *TO*, 555, n. x.

18 De Moor, *AOAT* 16, 172 on CTA 4 VII 54–55. P. Fronzaroli, *La fonetica ugaritica* (Rome, 1955), 33, however, considers the two nouns to be identical, the pronunciation of the first syllable differing merely by a shade.

19 “In Hebrew, as in many other languages, pronominal possession is frequently not denoted in words for parts of the body, if such a word is the direct or indirect object of a verb of which the subject is the person to whom the part of the body belongs”; Saggs, *The Branch to the Nose*, 319. Similarly, D. N. Freedman, in *Near Eastern Studies* . . . Albright (Baltimore, 1971), 198–99 on Ps. 137:6.

20 J. Gray, *The Keret Text in the Literature of Ras Shamra* (Leiden, 1964).

21 Similar to the idiomatic use of *labān appi* to mean ‘entreaty’ and ‘to beg’, as proposed by Gruber, *Akkadian labān appi*, 81–82.

22 In their article “Problematic Passages in the Legend of Aqhātu,” *UF* 7 (1975), 171–315, M. Dijkstra and J. C. de Moor argue that the suffix ‘his’ in *bḥnth* ‘refers to Ba’lu whose feeling of mercy urged him to act as an intercessor’ (p. 174). If they are correct, then a better restoration in the Krt text would be *bḥnth*, resulting in “Cause your Lord to approach in His mercy.”

6. Explanation

In section A of our passage King Krt commands his son to perform a ritual on his behalf: He has to 'make the entreaty gesture', not forgetting to hold a branch (this is a guess: the text has only *r-tk*) in his right hand. The place for this ritual is specified as being near the door-hinge, a site stipulated for certain Assyrian rites.²³ The description brings to mind Ezek 8:16–17 (see above, section 1 and note 4): "Next, he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and there, at the door of Yahweh's temple, between the porch and the altar were about twenty-five men with their backs to Yahweh's temple and their faces toward the east. Then he said to me . . . 'See, they put the branch to their nose'."

Section B tells how Ilhu carried out his orders. The description matches the Assyro-Babylonian model where a branch (or the like) is held in the right hand, a stick or spear grasped point downwards in the left.

Just as Ilhu was in position, though (section C), his sister left the city in order to collect water. Seeing her, Ilhu tried to conceal what he was doing by sheathing his weapon and altering his stance. As the sequel shows (lines 53f.) he obviously was not quick enough. His sister realized what he was up to, jumped immediately to the correct conclusion that her father was desperately ill, and collapsed on the ground in tears, proving Krt's worst fears (lines 29–35) well-founded.

7. Two Ambiguities

The overall interpretation presented here, quite apart from restoration proposed for damaged portions of the tablet, has necessitated choosing between ambiguous meanings several times. In order to provide a balanced picture two options not already discussed will now be set out fully.

pnb tgr ysu (lines 52–53):

It is uncertain whether this refers to Ilhu or his sister since the suffix is ambiguous. In favor of 'his' is the threefold use of NOUN + 3 m.s. SUFFIX to begin successive cola in this tricolon:

<i>ah-t-b</i> . . .	His sister . . .
<i>mrh-b</i> . . .	His lance . . .
<i>pnb</i> . . .	His face . . .

Dusk or dawn?

Although not of crucial importance, it would suit matters very neatly if Ilhu's supplication (in B) was intended to take place at dawn. This would fit in with Ezek. 8:16–17 where the twenty-five

²³ For example *ina bābi(KÁ) kamī(AŠ.ĀM) u šir-ri dalti(ĜĪSĪG) te-te-mir*, "you bury (the magical preparation) at the outer door, by the door-pivot" (KAR 298, rev. 43–44; for translation cf. CAD §, 137).

men faced the rising sun (*ḡlm* would then mean 'it was still dark', that is, before sun-up) and account for Octavia's sudden appearance, too, since her morning tasks presumably included drawing water for the day's needs.²⁴ The crucial couplet determining the time of day is

[] m t [] . ṣ b a r b t ṣ p ṣ
w t g h . n y r . r b t

(CTA 16 I 36–38), which can be rendered either

E. Wait (?) till Lady Sun is hidden,
And the 'Illuminator of Myriads' shines,²⁵

or

M. Wait (?) till Lady Sun appears,
And the Lady shines with light.

The first word is usually restored *tmtn*, from the verb *mtn* 'to wait'.²⁶ In version E (evening), *ṣba* is explained by Arab. *ḏaba'a* 'to hide',²⁷ with *tgb* (from *ngy*) a 3 m.s. *tqtl* form having *nyr rbt* 'Illuminator of Myriads (of stars)', namely the moon, as subject. In favor of E is CTA 15 V 18–19: '*rb. ṣpṣ. lymḡ l krt ṣbia. ṣpṣ* "Sunset he will not reach, Keret, (nor) sundown."²⁸ Version M (morning) is a description of sunrise. Here the Arabic cognate would be *ṣaba'a* 'to rise' (predicated of the moon and stars). *tgb* would agree in gender with *rbt*, *nyr* being an adverbial accusative. Dusk is indicated, then, but the evidence is not conclusive.

24 Pughatu's triple epithet *ṭkmt my ḥspt lš'r tl yd't blk kbkbm* (CTA 19 II 55–56 etc.) may indicate water-drawing at dawn if the translation "She who shoulders water, collecting dew on her hair, familiar with the constellations" is correct. (For *š'r* 'hair' cf. *TO*, 445, n. i and Song 5:2). The OT evidence is not clear-cut. Gen. 24:11 states specifically "at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water"; cf. 2 Sam. 17:18–21 and 1 Sam. 9:11. However, texts such as Gen. 29:7 ("broad daylight") and John 4:7 ("sixth hour") indicate water was sometimes collected, if exceptionally, in the morning. Relevant, perhaps is Prov. 31:15 ("she rises while it is still night"), though fetching water is not mentioned; Exod. 2:16 is ambiguous. For the view that maidens performed this task both morning and evening see *La Sainte Bible*, Pirot-Clamer (Paris, 1949) 3:383 and P. Reymond, *L'eau, sa vie et sa signification dans l'ancien testament*, VTS 6 (Leiden, 1958), 149, n. 1 who adds that these were the two coolest parts of the day.

25 So *TO*, 546.

26 Virolleaud's restoration is relegated to a footnote in *CTA*, p. 72, n.6; Ginsberg, *Keret*, 45, translates "wait" in view of the verb *mtn* attested in Talm. Heb. and Aram.; cf. Jean-Hoftijzer, *DISO*, 172.

27 *TO*, 546, n. i.

28 It is difficult to tell whether *b'iny* 'our joint master' belongs with this colon or the following. Further in favor of dusk is the passage CTA 19 IV 208–12 where *ṣbi* 'setting' is parallel to *m'r[b]* 'sinking', both times in reference to the sun.

8. Final Observations

The proposal defended here is based squarely on the insight of Driver and Gray who had already understood the passage to involve a gesture of supplication for the dying monarch.²⁹ This insight, combined with Gruber's conclusions concerning an expression in Akkadian, illustrates that no single scholar can alone resolve all the problems still remaining in the Ugaritic texts as well as showing yet again that some solutions are to be gained from a study of Mesopotamian material.³⁰

²⁹ Driver, *CML*. 41, n. 10; Gray, *The Keret Text*, 68, though Gray attributes the gesture to Octavia.

³⁰ After this article had been accepted for publication, G. Del Olmo Lete's "Notes on Ugaritic Semantics I", *UF* 7 (1975), 89-102 appeared, with a novel interpretation of our passage. He considers Ilhu's action to be one of disguise, masking the bad news he had to impart, and translates "Squeeze your face with your hand, /your neck with your right hand . . . He squeezed his face with his hand, /his neck with his right hand . . . His face he turned to the heights(?), /he stuck his visage through the door" (p. 95).

Dr. J. C. L. Gibson, who read an earlier draft, reminded me that the lack of a preposition before *sib* (line 51) renders the translation 'to draw' problematic, a difficulty discussed in *TO*, 555, n. y.