

AN ALASHIYAN MERCHANT AT UGARIT

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Edward Lipiński (1977) recently interpreted Ugaritic text *KTU* 2.42 + 2.43 as the report of an Egyptian sealbearer directed to Pharaoh Amenophis III after a “business journey” to Alashiya (Cyprus).¹ Lipiński’s edition of the text not only contained errors in restoration and interpretation but also demonstrated a lack of familiarity with Ugaritic epistolary formulae. Since the letter was written in Ugaritic, found in the main palace at Ugarit (Court VI, Room 77 of the Annex to the central archive deposit), and sent by an official apparently belonging to the (military?) bureaucracy of Ugarit, it seems more reasonable to conclude that it was directed to the king of Ugarit. The mention of *Nmry* (nb-m3 ‘t-r’: “Re’ is lord of truth” = Nebmare Amenophis III) in obv. 9 of the text obviously led Lipiński to regard Amenophis III as the recipient of this document. Such an interpretation, however, fails to take into consideration the formulaic nature of Ugaritic letters. The reference to *Nmry* at least gives a provisional date in Amenophis III’s reign (1386–1349 B.C.E.; Wente and van Siclen, 1977). *KTU* 2.42 + 2.43 would thus be the earliest Ugaritic document pertaining to Cyprus (*alty* in Ugaritic).

This letter was sent by an official, the *rb ml[š]* “commander of the 100” (i.e. of a division of troops) to his king, presumably the king of Ugarit.² A recent study of Ugaritic epistolary formulae has demonstrated that letters addressed to a king or other high-ranking person never mention the addressee by name, but rather by title (Kristensen 1977). This is indeed the situation with the present letter. Lipiński’s first error of interpretation was to infer that a name listed in another, entirely distinct formulaic context could be equated with the *mlk* in the “address” section of the text (obv. 1) or in the main body of the text (obv. 10, rev. 23, 26).

Kristensen’s study divides the introductory section of Ugaritic letters into five parts: the address, the prostration formula, the greeting formula, the well-being of sender, and the well-being of addressee. The document under consideration includes only the first three parts. Following *KTU* (Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartín 1976: 156-157), the first section of the text may be read as follows (my translation):

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- 1 For the original publication, see Vroilleaud (*PRU* V:14-15, No. 8, *RS* 18.113A). A re-edition with a new fragment (*RS* 18.113B) has been published by Dietrich and Loretz (1976:21-22, S 33, S34; Pl. VII) and by Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartín (1976:156-157, *KTU* 2.42 + 2.43). See also Gordon (1965:4). I wish to thank William J. Fulco S.J. for his ready advice and assistance in interpreting this text.
- 2 For another example of this type of title in the Ugaritic texts, see *KTU* 4.609:2, 5, 7, 8: *rb šrt*, “chief of the 10.” Note שרי מאות “chief of the 100s” (Ex. 18:21, 25; 2 Kgs. 11:4, 9, 10, 15); I owe these references to William J. Fulco S.J. In the Hurrian texts from Nuzi, *emantuhlu* also denotes an officer commanding a group of 10 soldiers (*JEN* 494:1; *HSS* 14 11:2, 5; *et al.*); I thank Anne D. Kilmer for these latter references.

Obverse

1.	l.mlk.b[^l ly] rġ[m] thm.rb.mi[t. 'bdk]	To the king, [my] l[ord], sp[eak] Message of the chief of the l[00, your servant].
	l.p'n.b ^l ly[.mrhqt ^m]	At the feet of my lord [from afar]
5.	šb'd.w.šb'd [qlt] ankn.rġmt.l.b ^l ly x[] l.špš. 'l ^m .l. 'ttrt l. 'nt.l.kl.il.alfy<l.? > nmry.mlk. 'lm	7 times and 7 times [I have fallen] Indeed I have spoken to (invoked?) Ba'al [], to the eternal sun, to Astarte, to Anath, to all the gods of Alashiya, < to? > Nimmuria, eternal king (or: Let Nimmuria be eternal king).

Lines one to three, separated from the following section by a broken line, make up the “address” of the letter and give both the rank of the addressee and the position of the sender. In more than half the corpus of letters analyzed by Kristensen, the formula found in *KTU* 2.42+2.43 was repeated: the addressee was always a person of higher rank than the sender. In support of his identification of *mlk* with *Nmry*, Lipiński restored line 3 as follows:

thm.rb.mi[šmn. ']bdk Message of the [seal-bearer], your [se]rvant

Lipiński regarded this phrase, literally “chief of the seal”, to be the Ugaritic equivalent of Egyptian *'imy-r3 htm(.t)* “sealbearer”, a title held by administrators of royal estates in 18th Dynasty Egypt (Lipiński 1977:214). The original edition of this text proposed, for the broken section of obv. 3, three possible readings of *mi[dh]*, *mi[h^d]* or *mi[h^dym]* (Vroilleaud, *PRU* V:14-15), thus implying a *lacuna* of up to four signs. Gordon (1965: *4) suggested the reading *mi[t 'bdk]*, which has adopted by Dietrich and Loretz (1976:21-22; S 33, S 34; Pl. VII) who added a word divider: *mi[t. 'bdk]*. This disagreement over the number of signs that could be inserted into the *lacuna* may be resolved by reference to the hand copy of Vroilleaud (*PRU* V:14): there is space for a maximum of two signs plus the word divider; four signs are simply impossible. It must be pointed out, however, that the signs at the end of the line (‘bdk) have now disappeared; apparently the tablet was in better condition when Vroilleaud examined it. All complications considered, the restoration proposed by Dietrich and Loretz, *rb mi[t. 'bdk]*, “chief of the 100, your servant,” seems most plausible and it has been adopted in this study.

In her brief analysis of this letter, Vincentelli concluded that it had been written to the king of Ugarit but that the sender was an Egyptian merchant or official residing in Cyprus who invoked *Nmry* as his king and lord (Vincentelli 1976:36, 43). Vincentelli thus presumed that the phrase *mlkn.b^lly* . . . “our king, my lord . . .” (obv. 10) was closely associated with *Nmry* in obv. 9. Like Lipiński and Hermann (1969:36), Vincentelli has ignored the ruled line separating obv. 9 from obv. 10.

Among the Ugaritic corpus of letters analyzed by Kristensen, the “prostration formula” and the “greeting formula” are usually separated from the preceding or following units of the letter (Kristensen 1977:147, 150). In the text under consideration, the prostration formula (obv. 4-5) is followed immediately by an abbreviated version of the greeting formula (obv. 6-9). This latter part of the salutary section (obv. 4-9) is then divided from the

remainder of the letter by another horizontal line. Obv. 9, in other words, is part of the salutary section and does not necessarily have any relation to the episode described in obv. 10 and following. Different sections of Ugaritic (and Akkadian) letters typically treat quite different subjects.

The rather restricted "greeting formula" (obv. 6-9) presents both syntactic and interpretive problems. While most Ugaritic greeting formulae express wishes for peace and divine protection (Kristensen 1977:150), the letter under discussion contains only an abbreviated list of divine names.³ Although the list in *KTU* 2.42 (obv. 6-9) is thus unique, it seems reasonable to regard it as a "greeting formula" (where gods [*ilm*] are regularly invoked for protection and well-being).

Lipiński suggested that the end of obv. 6 might be restored as *l.b'l.y*, "to rising Ba'al"; indeed, there seem to be traces of a *p* in the Virolleaud edition of the text (1965:14; cf. Liverani 1979:1303 *b'l. sp[n]*). In the context of a list of divinities, Ba'al seems more appropriate than *b'ly*, "my lord" (as Muhly understood this passage [1972:207]). Muhly also took *špš. 'lm* (obv. 7) to be a royal epithet rather than a reference to the sun god. Thus Muhly also ignored the salutary nature of obv. 1-9, a section which has limited relevance for interpreting the main body of the text.

Obv. 8, with its reference to *l.kl.il.alty*, "to all the gods of Alashiya," is herein taken to be in apposition to the preceding citation of Semitic divinities. Onomastic evidence also demonstrates that Semitic elements were at least known and probably present on Cyprus during the Late Bronze Age. Of 33 "Alashiyan" names rendered in contemporary Akkadian, Ugaritic, Hittite and Egyptian documents, 21 were definitely Semitic while three others may have been. The remaining names were either of Hurrian or Anatolian derivation (Knapp 1981). Since onomastic evidence of this sort provides only a general impression of the ethnic makeup of a given region, it is difficult to determine whether the person mentioned by name was a native Cypriote, a foreign visitor or merchant, or an immigrant into Cyprus. Cyprus was nonetheless an integral part of the eastern Mediterranean ethnic sphere and, in all likelihood, was typical of other contemporary eastern Mediterranean lands with a polylingual, poly-ethnic mix of indigenous peoples — Semites, Hurrians, Anatolians and Egyptians, similar in that respect to Ugarit and Alalakh.

The final problem of interpretation in the greeting section is line obv. 9: *Nmry.mlk. 'lm*. Either we assume that the preposition *l* is lacking (the end of the line *is* broken), in which case *Nmry* would join the other gods in the list, or else we understand, with Lipiński, that the author of the letter has invoked all the other gods in acclamation of Nimmuria's everlasting kingship. Lipiński's suggestion is hardly remarkable: it is well-established that Ugarit was under Egyptian control from ca. 1400—1350, i.e. throughout the reign of Nebmare Amenophis III (*Nmry*) (Liverani 1979:1298-1303). Whether *Nmry* is invoked as a divinity or is the object of those invocations is irrelevant to the problem at hand. The terse greeting section of the text (obv. 6-9) is logically and syntactically one unit and should not be construed otherwise.

3 Kristensen (1977:150) lists 17 Ugaritic letters with the fuller greeting formulae and 10 (including *KTU* 2.42) with no greeting or else only a terse "address."

The remainder of the obverse (10-13) and the beginning of the reverse (14-18) are quite fragmentary and unplaceable. The final eight lines of the text (rev. 19-27), preserved on the lower and left edges of the tablet, were virtually complete when Virolleaud published the text (*PRU V*:14); much of this section has since disappeared. While the *lacunae* in the text are rendered herein according to the *KTU* edition, one may presume that Virolleaud's hand copy was reasonably accurate since the *KTU* edition restores the text exactly as Virolleaud had it (Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartín 1976:156-157). Agreement on these restorations is very significant since these lines (rev. 19-27) reveal the intention of the letter: to convince the king of Ugarit to permit some ships to be sold by (presumably) Ugaritic merchants to another, (presumably) Alashiyan merchant. This section may be read as follows:

Reverse

19. bhm.w[.rgm.hw.al] . . . And [he said: "I shall not]

Lower edge

20. atn.ks[p.lhm.'d] give silv[er to them until]
 ilak[.'m.mlk] I send [to the king.]
 ht.lik[.'m.mlk] Now, he sent [to the king]

Left edge

w.mlk.yštal.b.hn.[] and may the king let himself be asked about these matters [. . . .]
 hmt.w.anyt.hm.t'ṛ[bn.l?] them, and let their ships pass [over to]
 25. mkr.hnd.w.rgm.ank[.l?] this merchant. And I said [to]
 mlkn.ybqt.anyt.w.atw̄ [] the king: "He is seeking ships and he ca[me]
 w.mkrn.w.mlk.lāk.'m.[] in order to buy (trade for) them.
 O king, send (approval?) to [me]!

Lipiński's translation is essentially maintained in this section, the exception being the verb *tmkrn* in rev. 27. Lipiński read the sign (𐎠𐎵𐎶) (*w*) at the beginning of rev. 27 as two signs (*k*! *t*! 𐎠𐎵𐎶). Although the context is somewhat ambiguous due to the *lacuna* at the end of rev. 26, the suggested use of the subordinating conjunction *k* (*ki*) makes the syntax awkward. Lipiński considered the verb *tmkrn* to be the third feminine plural *niph'al* imperfect with *n* assimilated to *m*, and thus to refer to the ships: "... they will be sold." The form reconstructed by Lipiński could also be analyzed as third masculine plural *qal* imperfect and would then refer to the merchants selling the ships: "... they will sell/deliver (them)" (both *y* and *t* preformatives may refer to the third masculine plural; see Gordon 1965:74, sec. 9.14). The form in Virolleaud's hand copy, however, clearly indicates *w*, not *k*! *t*! and this is also the reading adopted by *KTU*. The form *mkrn* may best be regarded as the infinitive absolute of the *qal* stem with accusative pronominal suffix *-n* (Gordon 1965:121, sec. 13.57 and n. 2; Sasson 1966:134 and n. 44); the verb would thus refer to the Alashiyan merchant: "... he came in order to buy (literally trade for) them" (*-n* for *-hn*).

Lipiński argued that this letter was the report of an Egyptian sealbearer written to Amenophis III after a "business journey" to Alashiya (1977:215). Uncritical restorations in rev. 14-18 led Lipiński to discussions of Egyptian shipbuilders or shipowners, of Amenophis III and his wife Queen Tiy, and of the king of Alashiya, none of whom are mentioned in the

extant body of the text (only Amenophis III is mentioned in the introductory section). Lipiński concluded that 20 Egyptian ship owners sought authorization from Amenophis III and Queen Tiy — via the intermediacy of the “sealbearer” — to sell their ships to a Cypriote merchant who had come to Egypt in order to take charge of his purchase (Lipiński 1977:216-217). The question remains, however, why a letter written in Ugaritic and found in the archives of the main palace at Ugarit should be regarded as a document sent by an Egyptian sealbearer to Amenophis and bearing upon a Cypriote commercial venture.

Lipiński rightly pointed out that the messengers of Alashiya in the Amarna letters were stated to be merchants (DAM.GAR; see El Amarna letter No. 39:14, 17; for other indications that the messengers of the Amarna letters doubled as merchants, see Holmes 1975). With this in mind, the letter may be reinterpreted as follows. It appears that the Alashiyan merchant wished the king of Ugarit (not Pharaoh) to approve the sale of some ships. The merchant is herein presumed to be from Alashiya, not on the basis of Lipiński's restoration of *altu* in rev. 17, but rather on the basis that the letter's author appealed “to all the gods of Alashiya” (obv. 8). The writer, a member of the Ugaritic bureaucracy, perhaps solicited the gods of the merchant whose case he was mediating. Even if the Semitic deities invoked were not gods of Alashiya (Muhly 1972:207; Hermann 1969:36-37), the author of our text might reasonably have listed his own gods beside those of the merchant for whom he interceded. Such an interpretation also makes it irrelevant whether *Nmry* (obv. 9) is included in the list of divinities or is designated as the recipient of the invocations, as noted above.

For reasons unknown, the author of the letter made himself the arbiter of this sale and sought to gain royal approval. The ships specified in rev. 24 as “their ships” were evidently owned by Ugaritic merchants. Nonetheless the king of Ugarit had to authorize the transaction. Both private (or at least semi-independent) and royal merchants plied their trade at Ugarit (Linder 1981; Heltzer 1978:120-147; Astour 1972; Sasson 1966:132, 134, 136-137; Rainey 1963). Since some merchants were completely exempt from paying taxes or duties (see, e.g., the Akkadian letter from Ugarit, *RS 16.238*, Nougayrol, *PRU III*:107-108), the king of Ugarit obviously had final authority over certain institutions and economic matters. Seeking royal approval for the sale of some ships thus need occasion no surprise.

While no other textual evidence deals explicitly with the actual sale of Ugaritic ships or with the purchase of ships by Alashiya, ample evidence demonstrates that both Ugarit and Cyprus were tightly linked to the eastern Mediterranean exchange network (Linder 1981; Sasson 1966; Portugali and Knapp 1973). Various Ugaritic and Akkadian documents from Ugarit refer not only to the construction, outfitting and use of Ugaritic ships but also to “fleet masters” (*b'l any*), “harbourmasters” (*akil kâri*), “catalogues of ships” (*KTU 4.81*, *KTU 4.366*) and possibly to a trading corporation which may have represented a trading fleet (*hubur*; see Linder 1981:34). Ugaritic ships loaded with grain were dispatched to Ura in Cilicia (*RS 20.212 = Ugaritica V*: No. 33 and to Alashiya/Cyprus (*KTU 2.46:9-15*). The people of Ugarit built ships (*hrš anyt*; see *KTU 4.125*), purchased ships (*KTU 4.338:10-18*), and had a fleet of at least 150 vessels (*KTU 2.47:1-5*; *RS 20.238:19-24 = Ugaritica V*: No. 24). Seacraft available at Ugarit ranged from royal ships (*KTU 2.38:10-25*) to privately owned boats (*KTU 4.366*; see Sasson 1966:134, 137; Heltzer 1978:151-152).

Commercial and diplomatic relations between Cyprus and Ugarit at this time (ca. 1400-

1200) are likewise well documented. Cypriote vessels travelled to Ugarit with cargoes of copper (*KTU* 4.390; possibly attested also in *KTU* 4.394; see Linder 1981:33, 37), grain (*KTU* 2.46), oil (*KTU* 4.352; *RS* 20.168) and perhaps wine (*KTU* 4.149). The Bronze Age shipwreck recovered off Cape Gelidonya in southern Turkey revealed a cargo of items somewhat comparable to those listed in *KTU* 4.390 (Linder 1981:37; Bass 1967). Among the numerous administrative lists from Ugarit, Alashiyan or people named after Alashiya participate in the activities of the town and palace at Ugarit as craftsmen, shepherds, temple officials and royal personnel. The palace at Ugarit distributed rations of food and wine and allocations of shekels to men and women somehow associated with Alashiya (Knapp 1979:228-240). Cyprus evidently served as a place where the king of Ugarit banished undesirable political elements (*RS* 17.352=*PRU* IV:V B1; *RS* 18.114=*PRU* IV:IV E5; see Knapp 1979:199-201). Toward the end of the 13th century B.C.E., a flurry of letters exchanged between the rulers of Cyprus and Ugarit portray not only their common bond but also the common peril faced by both regions from the Sea Peoples (*RSL* 1, *RS* 20.238, *RS* 20. Ugaritica V:No. 22; *et al.*; see Astour 1965; Strobel 1976; Sandars 1978).

CONCLUSIONS

Ugaritic text *KTU* 2.42+2.43, fragmentary and difficult of interpretation, provides additional supplementary evidence for the extensive commercial and diplomatic relations existing between Ugarit and Cyprus during the International era, about 1500-1200 B.C.E. Such relations are also well attested in the archaeological record (Aström 1957:278; Aström and Aström 1972:710-753; Artzy, Asaro and Perlman 1976, 1981; Catling 1973:174, nn. 10-13; 1975:197, n. 11).

The international events outlined above indicate a multi-directional, complex network of trade in the eastern Mediterranean. In such a system, royal merchants, private individuals, "tramping" (Braudel 1972:107) or "joint ventures" (Linder 1981:34) may all be operative. Current interpretations view trade in the eastern Mediterranean as schematic, simplistic and one-directional. Eastern Mediterranean trade often dealt with metals and surplus goods that functioned as valuables and could move in any direction. Demand for such products was neither constant nor uniform over space and time; products that travelled west in one era may have travelled east in another. In the text under consideration, we may be witnessing a Cypriote merchant making a major "capital investment" in the lucrative eastern Mediterranean trade.

Archaeological and textual evidence alike demonstrate that Cyprus had become thoroughly "internationalized" during the early part of the Late Cypriote era (ca. 1600-1400 B.C.E.) and served as *the* nexus between the Aegean and the Levant (Portugali and Knapp 1983). For the Bronze Age merchant, the island of Cyprus not only provided a major source of copper but also served as an ideal location to keep abreast of relative "prices" or of demand and supply fluctuations. Cyprus' copper and its strategic position in the eastern Mediterranean contributed to its advantageous market potential, a potential manifested in the diverse archaeological remains and in the rich and extensive port centres of the island (Enkomi, Kition, Hala Sultan Tekke, Maroni, Ayios Dhimitrios, Toumba tou Skourou, *et al.*). A Cypriote merchant investing in ships offered for sale by Ugaritic merchants and seek-

ing the royal seal of approval fits squarely into the network of eastern Mediterranean trade, a network whose structure has been erected on the basis of a thorough evaluation of the textual evidence, of innovative approaches to the archaeological data, and of continuing research in metallurgical studies of the eastern Mediterranean.

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