

A First Look at the Ugaritic Poetic Text Corpus

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Abstract

For the Ugaritic poetic texts there is currently no digital corpus including extensive philological and poetological annotations. Within the research project “Edition des ugaritischen poetischen Textkorpus” (EUPT), these texts are digitised and provided as an online-accessible corpus. This paper briefly introduces the project and outlines the principles of the data model. The focus is on the different annotation levels and their connection with each other.

1 Introduction

1.1 Ugarit and Ugaritic

The kingdom of Ugarit, located on the northern Syrian Mediterranean coast, had its heyday in the 14th and 13th centuries BC.¹ Its territory covered large parts of today’s Syrian province of Latakia with its most important archaeological sites being Tell Ras Shamra and Ras Ibn Hani. Ugarit was a significant trading hub. Since the middle of the 14th century BC, it was a vassal state of the Hittite Empire. Shortly after 1200 BC, Ugarit was destroyed by unknown conquerors and the kingdom fell into oblivion.

In 1929, archaeologists discovered the first clay tablets preserving texts written in cuneiform alphabetic script. This script was probably brought into use in Ugarit in the 13th century BC. It was mainly employed to record texts in Ugaritic (the local Northwest Semitic language), including a number of poetic texts (e.g., epics/myths, prayers and incantations). The Ugaritic alphabet covers 30 signs. The script is primarily consonantal; the texts’ vocalisation is to be reconstructed as part of the modern philological analysis.

¹For up-to-date summaries and exhaustive references to secondary literature on Ugarit and Ugaritic, see [Tropper and Vita \(2020, p. 15–41\)](#).

1.2 Related Work

To date, most collections of Ugaritic texts have been published in print only (e.g., [Smith, 1994](#); [Smith and Pitard, 2009](#); [Pardee, 1997](#); [Parker, 1997](#)). A notable exception is the “Ras Shamra Tablet Inventory” (RSTI)² ([Prosser, 2018](#)), which provides a digital collection of Ugaritic texts as part of the University of Chicago’s OCHRE Data Service.³ RSTI includes metadata and transliterations for each tablet. Several texts are vocalised, translated and morphologically annotated. Further, the transliterations from [Cunchillos et al. \(2003\)](#) (Ugaritic Data Bank) are offered as a module of the *Accordance Bible Software* (for a fee; selected texts are morphologically annotated and translated). [Zemánek \(2007a,b\)](#) outlines the construction of a treebank for Ugaritic, but did not make such a treebank available.

For other texts from ancient West Asia there are more electronic resources available than for the Ugaritic texts (e.g., for Sumerian, Akkadian and Hittite sources; an overview is given on the openDANES website⁴). For instance, there has been developed a Universal Dependencies⁵ treebank based on a sample of Akkadian royal inscriptions ([Luukko et al., 2020](#)).

1.3 EUPT

Although the Ugaritic poetic texts have already been treated several times, there is still no comprehensive digital corpus reflecting the latest state of research. Also, there is no existing corpus of Ugaritic texts (or other cuneiform texts from ancient West Asia) that includes annotations of their poetic structure or their stylistic and motivic features. The research project “Edition des ugaritischen poetischen Textkorpus” (EUPT) aims to

²<https://voices.uchicago.edu/rsti/>

³<https://digitalhumanities.uchicago.edu/project/ochre/>

⁴<https://opendanes.org/nav/DANES-resources.html>

⁵<https://universaldependencies.org/>

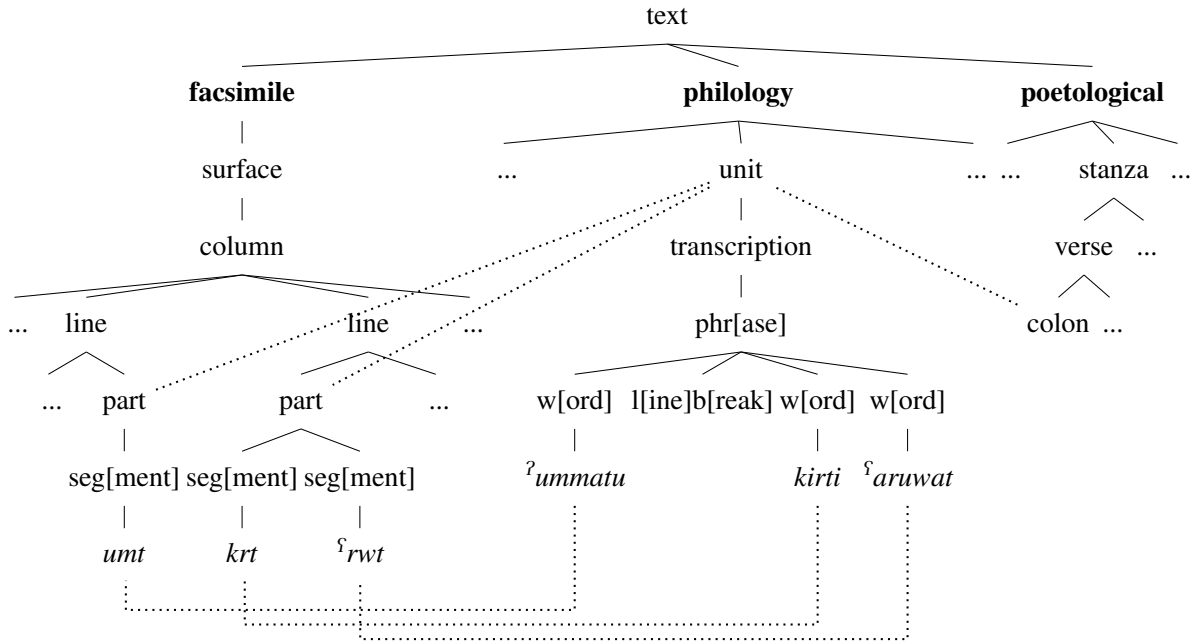


Figure 1: Pruned tree representation of a text, showing a single clause in the epigraphic (left), philological (middle) and poetological (right) (sub-)tree. Ellipses (...) indicate siblings of the same type; parentheses (e.g., w[ord]) write out abbreviations; dashed lines indicate connections via IDs.

close this gap: EUPT is preparing a digital edition of all known Ugaritic poetic texts. The texts are transliterated, vocalised and translated, as well as morphosyntactically and poetologically annotated; further included are hand copies of the tablets and commentaries on the philological reconstruction.

A key focus lies on the analysis of the texts' poetic characteristics, especially their verse structure, the forms of parallelism, various stylistic features and the motifs that the texts revolve around.⁶ Philological and poetological analysis are closely intertwined. This is evident in the linguistic structure of the texts: Lines on a tablet do often not correspond to a specific syntactic or poetic unit. In EUPT, the texts are not only prepared line-by-line according to the original tablets' layout, but also in their reconstructed linguistic/poetic structure. Reconstructing the texts' verse structure is a crucial prerequisite for an adequate edition of the texts.

2 EUPT's Three-Fold Annotation Scheme

In EUPT, the texts are annotated on three linguistic levels: the epigraphic level (named "facsimile" in our data and the corresponding figures), the philological level and the poetological level. Figure 1 shows a simplified excerpt from the corpus, com-

prising only one clause / three words. The three levels constitute separate sub-trees under the root node, but linguistic units that correspond to each other are connected via unique identifiers (IDs).

2.1 Epigraphic Tree

The epigraphic tree aims to represent the original tablet surface. It is structured into columns, lines, parts and segments, where segments correspond to words and parts are auxiliary elements that build up units (= clauses) in the philological and the poetological tree.⁷ The segment nodes contain the transliterations of the respective cuneiform signs. Since alphabetic cuneiform generally does not represent vowels, the transliteration also does not include vowels (see the leaf nodes in the left sub-tree in Figure 1). Damaged parts and segments on the tablet, or such that are completely broken-off, are annotated accordingly. Furthermore, potential misspellings by the scribe and their most probable corrections are annotated (e.g., when the scribe wrote *d* but probably meant *b*).

2.2 Philological Tree

The philological tree aims to capture the linguistic/ logical structure of the text. A text is segmented

⁶A subset of the project's poetological glossary is already published on the EUPT website: https://eupt.uni-goettingen.de/lab/Glossar_der_ugaritischen_poetischen_Formen.html

⁷In case of enjambment a clause can also be annotated as several units. These cases are specifically annotated in the poetological tree.

into units/clauses, which are connected to their corresponding parts in the epigraphic tree. Since a unit can contain a line break but a part cannot exceed a line, one unit can correspond to multiple parts (see Figure 1). Each unit has a German translation⁸ (not shown in Figure 1) and a transcription, that is further segmented into (possibly nested) phrases and words. The word nodes contain the vocalised words (see the leaf nodes in the middle sub-tree in Figure 1) and are connected to the corresponding segment nodes that contain the unvocalised words. Elements that are annotated as damaged in the epigraphic tree are also annotated as damaged in the transcription and the translation. All words are annotated with lemma and morphological analysis.

2.3 Poetological Tree

The poetological tree segments a text into stanzas (= strophes), verses and cola. The colon corresponds to the clause annotated as unit in the philological tree (see the connection in Figure 1). The colon nodes of the poetological tree do not contain any string content, since the unvocalised and the vocalised text is already represented in the epigraphic and the philological tree. Poetic devices, such as semantic/grammatical parallelism, enjambement, metaphor and others, are annotated on stanza, verse and colon level.

3 Corpus

The digital corpus construction is divided into three phases. In the first phase, the *Kirtu* epic (KTU 1.14–16⁹), the *Aqhatu* epic (KTU 1.17–19) and the *Rāpi'ūma*-fragments (KTU 1.20–22) are digitised. The second phase is devoted to the *Ba^llu* cycle (KTU 1.1–6). In the third phase, the shorter mythological texts, prayers, incantations and ritual texts that contain poetic forms will be digitised. The entire corpus contains 68 tablets with about 4,000 lines.

3.1 Annotation Process

The project's Ugaritology team consists of three Ugaritic experts (one PhD candidate, one postdoc and one professor), who are assisted by five students with adequate knowledge of Ugaritic. In a first step, a text is transliterated, vocalised and translated by one of the Ugaritic experts. After that, a student assistant segments the text into

⁸English translations of the texts are planned to be added in the future.

⁹The KTU identifiers refer to [Dietrich et al. \(2013\)](#)

words, phrases, parts etc. and annotates each word's lemma and morphology,¹⁰ while an Ugaritic expert performs the poetological annotation. All annotations are reviewed collaboratively by the three experts and corrected when necessary.

3.2 Commentary

Another special feature of EUPT is that the Ugaritic experts also add philological comments/notes to all texts. In theory, each element in a text's tree can be annotated with notes. In practice, most lines or even words have been annotated with notes about their epigraphy, reconstruction, lexis, grammar, content or poetology. An example follows in the next subsection.

3.3 Format

The Ugaritic texts and their annotations are stored as XML trees (based on TEI-XML¹¹), where each column of a tablet has its own XML file. The outer structure of an XML file looks as follows:

```

1 <?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
2 <edxml
   xmlns="http://sub.uni-goettingen.de/edxml#"
   xmlns:tei="http://www.tei-c.org/ns/1.0">
3 <header>
4 ...
5 </header>
6 <text>
7 <facsimile xml:id="fac1_1">
8 ...
9 </facsimile>
10 <philology xml:id="phil_1">
11 ...
12 </philology>
13 <structure type="poetological" xml:id="poet_1">
14 ...
15 </structure>
16 </text>
17 </edxml>

```

The header element (ll. 3–5) contains metadata, such as title and license. The text element (ll. 6–16) contains the three sub-trees (epigraphic, philological, poetological).

To keep it short, we only present an excerpt from the philological tree in Figure 2, showing the same unit as in Figure 1. The unit element (ll. 4–18) contains a transcription, a translation and a notes element. The transcription element (ll. 5–12) stores the syntactic structure of the clause, which consists of one phr[ase] element (ll. 6–11) that contains three w[ord] elements (ll. 7, 9, 10) and one l[in]e[b]reak element (l. 8). The corresp attributes in the unit and the w elements store the IDs

¹⁰Our tagset is based on [Tropper \(2012\)](#) and can be found at https://eupt.uni-goettingen.de/Einfuehrung/Editorische_Prinzipien_Kommentar.html (> Editorische Prinzipien > Kommentar).

¹¹<https://tei-c.org/>

```

1 <philology xml:id="phil_1">
2 <units>
3 ...
4 <unit xml:id="unit_1.14_I_7" n="i 6b-7a" corresp="#line_1.14_I_6_2 #line_1.14_I_7_1">
5 <transcription type="vocalisation">
6 <phr xml:id="phr_vqv_34m_q1c">
7 <w xml:id="opc_rlr_pzb" corresp="#seg_jcy_2jv_4zb" lemma="lemma:umt-1" ana="Nom.f.Sg.
  St.cstr.">iummatu</w>
8 <lb n="i 7"/>
9 <w xml:id="u1m_rlr_pzb" corresp="#seg_vpx_d4v_4zb" lemma="lemma:krt-1" ana="PN
  Gen.m.Sg."><tei:damage>kirti</tei:damage></w>
10 <w xml:id="r2b_slr_pzb" corresp="#seg_k3l_jjv_4zb" lemma="lemma:rw-1" ana="G-SK 3.f.Sg. / alt. Vok.:
  arawat"><tei:damage degree="low">sa</tei:damage>ruwat</w>
11 </phr>
12 </transcription>
13 <translation xml:lang="de">Die Sippe <tei:damage>Kirtu</tei:damage> war entblöbt,</translation>
14 <notes>
15 <note type="lx" target="#r2b_slr_pzb">
16 <label>i 6b-7a: <textBlock>iRWT</textBlock></label>
17 <p><textBlock>iRWT</textBlock>, wörtl. <quote>"sie war entblöbt / nackt"</quote>, im übertragenen Sinn
  <quote>"sie war vernichtet (/ leer)"</quote> (KWU 20 s.v. <hi>srw</hi> G; vgl. auch <bibl
  zotero="eupt:SBKFHDM"de Moor, 1987: 192 Anm. 4</bibl>).</p>
18 <p>Etymologisch ist <textBlock>iRW</textBlock> &#60; <textBlock>iRWT</textBlock> mit der in
  verschiedenen semitischen Sprachen bezugten Wurzel
  <textBlock>iry</textBlock>/<textBlock>w</textBlock> <quote>"nackt sein"</quote> zu verbinden (KWU 20
  s.v. <hi>srw</hi>). Anders del Olmo Lete / Sanmartín (DUL&#179; 182 s.v. <hi>s-r-w</hi>) und
  <hi>s-r-y</hi>): Sie verknüpfen ug. <textBlock>iRW</textBlock> (<quote>"to be consumed"</quote>) mit
  ar. /<textBlock>sarā</textBlock>/ / <textBlock>srw</textBlock>. Das ar. Verb bedeutet jedoch nicht
  <quote>"aufbrauchen"</quote> oder <quote>"vernichtet sein"</quote> o. Ä. (beachte die Form
  <textBlock><tei:choice><tei:corr>ITBD</tei:corr></tei:choice></textBlock> <quote>"[das Haus] war
  völlig zerstört"</quote>, die in der <hi>Kirtu</hi>-Passage parallel zu <textBlock>iRWT</textBlock>
  steht), sondern <quote>"aufsuchen, besuchen; heimsuchen, überkommen"</quote> (<bibl
  zotero="eupt:AV8XGRME">AEL 2027-2028</bibl>; <bibl zotero="eupt:KSEIKH8R">Wehr / Kropfitsch, 2020:
  609</bibl>; ausgehend vom vermeintlichen ar. Kognat analysieren del Olmo Lete / Sanmartín
  <textBlock>iRWT</textBlock> in KTU 1.14 i 6b-7a als Gp-Form). Von <textBlock>iRW</textBlock> &#60;
  <textBlock>iRWT</textBlock> unterscheiden sie <textBlock>sRY</textBlock> <quote>"to be
  naked"</quote>. Für <textBlock>sRY</textBlock> verweisen sie auf die Form <textBlock>sRYT</textBlock>
  in KTU 2.38 24-25 (dort bezogen auf ein Schiff; nach UG&#178; 569 wahrscheinlich <quote>"es [scil.
  das Schiff] wurde entleert"</quote> oder <quote>"es wurde 'entkleidet' [i. e. die Segel des Schiffes
  wurden entfernt]"</quote>; DUL&#179; 182 s.v. <hi>s-r-y</hi>: <quote>"[it] is unrigged"</quote>; del
  Olmo Lete / Sanmartín analysieren <textBlock>sRYT</textBlock> als G-SK-Form, Tropper [UG&#178; 569]
  als Dp-SK-Form [alt. als D-SK-Form]). Vermutlich sind die Formen <textBlock>iRWT</textBlock> (in der
  <hi>Kirtu</hi>-Passage) und <textBlock>sRYT</textBlock> (in KTU 2.38 24-25) jedoch beide auf das sem.
  Verb <textBlock>sry</textBlock>/<textBlock>w</textBlock> <quote>"nackt sein"</quote> zurückzuführen
  (zu <textBlock>sRYT</textBlock> vgl. UG&#178; 195 / 569).</p>
19 </note>
20 ...
21 </notes>
22 </unit>
23 ...
24 </units>
25 </philology>

```

Figure 2: XML excerpt of a text, showing the clause from Figure 1 in the philological tree.

of the corresponding part and seg[ment] elements in the epigraphic tree (not shown in Figure 2, but in Figure 1). The lemma and ana attributes of the w elements store a word's lemma and morphological analysis, respectively. The embedded tei:damage elements (ll. 9, 10) mark up damaged signs on the tablet. The translation element stores a translation of the unit. The notes element (ll. 14–17) contains the philological notes (see previous subsection) as individual note elements. Each note element (l. 15) has a type attribute (here lx for “lexicographic”) and a target attribute with the ID of the element that the note refers to (here the ID of the third w element). Notes are in German; a translation of this note can be found in Appendix A.

3.4 Ambiguities and Alternatives

The analysis of the Ugaritic texts is beset with ambiguities and uncertainties, primarily due to the fact that most tablets are incomplete and, moreover, the grammatical analysis and vocalisation of the consonantal texts remain a matter of debate. EUPT provides various annotations to indicate that remnants of a sign are unidentifiable (<pc type="non_identifiable_sign_single"/>), that the identification or reconstruction of a grapheme, phoneme or word *x* is uncertain (<w cert="low">*x*</w>), or that the scribe mistakenly included a sign *x* (<tei:surplus>*x*</tei:surplus>), omitted *x* (<tei:supplied>*x*</tei:supplied>), erased or overwrote *x* (<tei:del>*x*</tei:del>), or wrote *x* instead

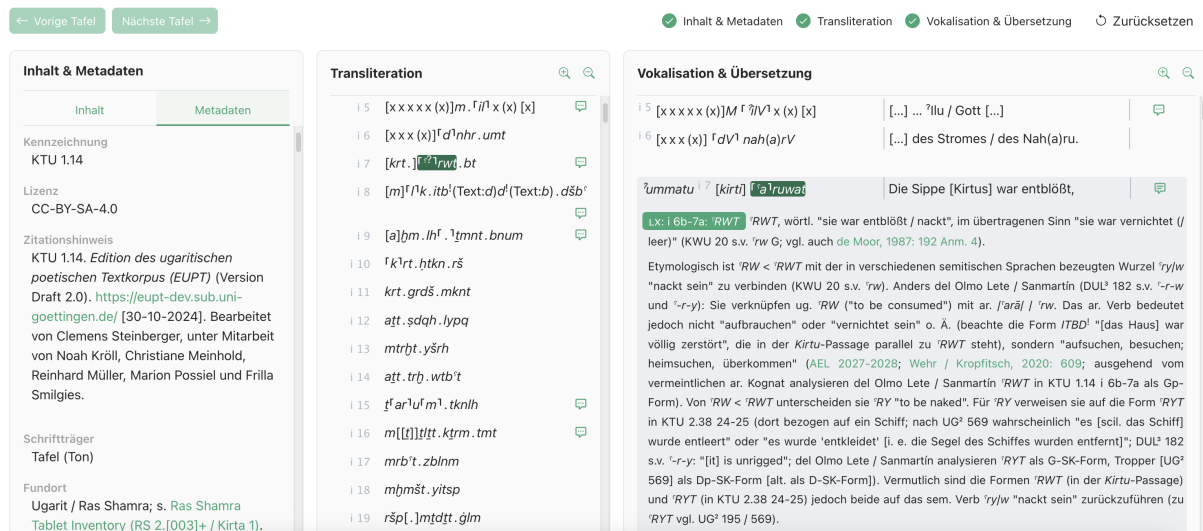


Figure 3: TIDO with three panels (left to right): “Content & Metadata”, “Transliteration” (for epigraphic information), and “Vocalisation & Translation” (for philological and poetological information). The excerpt from Figures 1 and 2 can be seen from line i 6 (last word) to line i 7 (first and second word). Note that lines in the inner panel correspond to actual lines on the tablet, while lines in the right panel correspond to clauses (hence the line number i 7 appears in the middle of the line). When a user hovers over a word (here: $\text{ar}^{\text{f}}\text{a}^{\text{r}}\text{ruwat}$), it is highlighted in both panels. Philological notes can be expanded by buttons at the end of the corresponding lines (speech-bubble symbol).

of y ($\langle \text{tei:choice} \rangle \langle \text{tei:corr} \rangle y \langle / \text{tei:corr} \rangle \langle \text{tei:sic} \rangle x \langle / \text{tei:sic} \rangle \langle / \text{tei:choice} \rangle$). These annotations correspond to the notation conventionally used in Ugaritic transliterations/vocalisations, e.g., $m \langle \text{tei:del} \rangle \langle \text{t} \rangle \langle / \text{tei:del} \rangle \langle \text{t} \rangle \langle \text{t} \rangle$ is typically represented as $m[[\text{t}]]\text{t}\text{t}$. Any more far-reaching uncertainties relating to the philological analysis are discussed in the commentaries.

3.5 Access

Access to the corpus data is provided on the EUPPT website at <https://eupt.uni-goettingen.de/edition.html>. On the back-end side, the XML files are converted to HTML using handwritten XSLT rules. The HTML files are then embedded into the website using the interactive Text Viewer for Digital Objects (TIDO)¹² (Göbel et al., 2024). Figure 3 shows the TIDO interface on the website.

A workflow for versioned releases of the raw XML and HTML files is currently under development. Meanwhile, it is possible to view the raw files at <https://gitlab.gwdg.de/subugoe/eupt/eupt-textapi/-/tree/main/assets>. Note that only one tablet has been fully digitised and made accessible so far. Given the nascent state of the project, we advise contacting the authors directly to request access to the data.

¹²<https://www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/en/digital-library/digital-tools/text-viewer-for-digital-objects-tido-textapi/>

4 Future Work

Until 2032, the entire Ugaritic poetic text corpus shall be digitised and fully annotated, including the annotation of grammatical roles. New features will be successively implemented on the project website, including display of hand copies of the tablets, visualisation of all philological and poetological annotations, online publication of the project’s lexical glossary, search tools, and additional options for users to configure the corpus view.

In the future, the XML data will be extended by a graph database—currently, the team is developing the graph data model. The text-as-graph approach (cf. Kuczera, 2016) will open up new possibilities for the granular annotation of different elements and their relationships to each other.

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A Translation

This is a translation of the note in Figure 2:

^šRWT, literally “she was naked”, figuratively “she was destroyed (/ empty)” (KWU [= Tropper, 2008] 20 s.v. ^šrw G; cf. also de Moor, 1987: 192 note 4).

Etymologically, ^šRW < ^šRWT is to be connected with the root ^šry/w “to be naked” attested in various Semitic languages (KWU 20 s.v. ^šrw). Differently del Olmo Lete / Sanmartín (DUL³ [= del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, 2015] 182

s.v. r-w and r-y): They link ug. RW (“to be consumed”) with ar. $\text{arā} / \text{rw}$. However, the ar. verb does not mean “to consume” or “to be consumed” or the like (note the form *ITBD*¹ “[the house] was completely destroyed”, which is parallel to RWT in the *Kirtu* passage), but “to visit; come upon” (AEL [= Lane, 1863–1893] 2027-2028; Wehr and Kropfitsch, 2020: 609; based on the supposed ar. cognate del Olmo Lete / Sanmartín analyze RWT in KTU 1.14 i 6b-7a as a Gp form). From $\text{RW} < \text{RWT}$ they distinguish RY “to be naked”. For RY they refer to the form RYT in KTU 2.38 24-25 (there referring to a ship; following UG² [= Tropper, 2012] 569 probably “it [scil. the ship] was emptied” or “it was ‘stripped’ [i. e. the sails of the ship were removed]”; DUL³ 182 s.v. r-y : “[it] is unrigged”; del Olmo Lete / Sanmartín analyze RYT as G-SC form, Tropper [UG² 569] as Dp-SC form [alternatively as D-SC form]). Presumably, however, the forms RWT (in the *Kirtu* passage) and RYT (in KTU 2.38 24-25) are both to be derived from the semitic root ry/w “to be naked” (on RYT cf. UG² 195 / 569).