

A Note on *ršʾt* in the Karatepe Inscription

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In 1975 F. Bron proposed a new interpretation of a difficult term in the bilingual Karatepe inscription (*KAI* 26).¹ The term occurs as one of a series of blessings that Baal-KRNTYŠ and the other gods are asked to give (לחתי) king Azitawadda:

אֲרַךְ יָמִים וְרַב שָׁנָה וְרִשְׁמָה נְעֻמָּה וְעַז אֲדָר עַל כָּל מֶלֶךְ
(III:5-7)
... length of days and multitude of years and good
רִשְׁמָה and mighty power over every king.

אֲרַךְ יָמִים had been taken to mean “authority”² or “reign.”³ But Bron argued that the word derives from the root רשׂא which appears in ancient Ethiopic *rasʾa*, “to be old,” rather than from רשׂי/רשי, “to have authority over.”⁴ His translation of רִשְׁמָה נְעֻמָּה, “vieillesse heureuse,” has been enthusiastically endorsed by G. Garbini.⁵

Translated this way, רִשְׁמָה נְעֻמָּה fits well with the preceding שָׁנָה וְרַב שָׁנָה. But did the drafter(s) of the inscription intend the phrase in question to go with the preceding or the following words? One could conceivably make a case for “good authority/rule” as an appropriate complement to עַז אֲדָר, “mighty power.” In such an arrangement the first two terms in the blessing would refer to the length of the king's life, and the last two to his efficacious sovereignty. Thus as compelling as Bron's interpretation is, further evidence is needed to confirm it. Unfortunately the hieroglyphic Luwian version of the inscription provides no help in resolving this problem; for although the Luwian term corresponding to רִשְׁמָה is preserved (*tā-mi-hi-s²*), its meaning has not been established independently of the Phoenician term.⁶

1 “Phénicien RŠʾT = ‘vieillesse,’” *AION* 25 (1975), 545-46.

2 The translation of F. Rosenthal in *ANET*³, 654; cf. *DISO*, 283: “poss[ibly]ment[ly] autorité.”

3 The translation of F. Donner and W. Röllig in *KAI* II, 37 and 42 (“Vielleicht ‘Herrschaft, Regierung’”).

4 Bron, 545.

5 “L'iscrizione fenicia di Karatepe,” *AION* 31 (1981), 156.

6 See Bron, 546; P. Meriggi, *Hieroglyphisch-Hethitisches Glossar* (Wiesbaden, 1962), 116; *Manuale di eteo geroglifico*: II/1: *Testi neo-etei più o meno completi*, Incunabula Graeca 14 (Rome, 1967), 85.

Of particular significance is the fact that the terms “days, years, old age” follow the same sequence and are closely associated in both texts. In other Akkadian blessings for the king one also finds “old age” mentioned just after a request for long life. One letter, for example (*ABL* 427), contains a blessing in which the sender prays that the gods let the king live “a hundred years” (*1 ME MU.MEŠ*), which is simply a less poetic equivalent of “long days, many years.” He then goes on to pray that the gods “satisfy” (*lu-šab-bi-ù*; cf. *šebè* in *ABL* 733) the king with “great old age” (*ši-bu-tu lit-tu-tu*) and appoint a guardian(-deity) over his “health and life” (*šul-me u ba-la-ti*), a hendiadys also found (in reverse order) in the blessing in the Karatepe inscription: חיים ושלם (III:3).¹²

Close correspondence of wording and sequence between East and West Semitic royal texts has been demonstrated in the case of other inscriptions, for example, those of Nērab II (*KAI* 226) and Nabonidus.¹³ Hence such correspondence between the Azitawadda text and the Akkadian letters discussed here should come as no surprise and in fact constitutes further evidence that “old age” is the correct translation of רשׁת in *KAI* 26.

D = “old man” (220a). Earlier translations of *littūtu* erroneously connected it with *littu* C (e.g., Waterman, *Royal Correspondence*, 15).

12 The blessing “a hundred years” followed by “great old age” (*šibūtu littūtu*, a hendiadys) also appears in *ABL* 113 obv 9-13; 114 obv 10-12; 115 obv 10-11. The petition for “a hundred years . . . great old age . . . health and life” is found not only in *ABL* 427 obv 9-13 (see above) but also in 1133 obv 4-8 and 453 obv 9-13 (the last containing the sequence “a hundred years . . . health and life . . . great old age”). Note also the following Neo-Assyrian royal blessings: *ABL* 76 rev 9-12 (= 353 rev 5-8): *balāṭi umē rūqūte šibūtu littūtu ana šarri beḥiya liddinū*, “a life of far-distant days (and) great old age may they give the king my lord”; *ABL* 204 rev 6-9: *ša umē arkūte šibūtu littūtu šulmu balāṭi ana šarri beḥiya taddanūni* . . ., “may [the goddess] who gives long days, great old age, health [and] life to the king my lord . . .”; *ABL* 493 obv 7-10: *umē arkūte šanāte dārāte labbur balāṭi . . . ana šarri beḥiya liddinū*, “long days, eternal years, long duration of life . . . may they give the king my lord.” Moreover several texts in Akkadian indicate that “length of days/long days” is formulaically related not only to “(many) years” but also to “old age” in a fixed sequence in which “old age” always appears as the second member (cf. *ורשׁתת נעמת* . . . *מך יום*). Nebuchadnezzar II prays *ibi arāku ūmiya qibi littūti*, “Pronounce length of days for me // Order old age for me” (S. Langdon, *Die neubabylonische Königsinschriften*, VAB 4 [Leipzig, 1912] 88 ii 28-29; cf. 188 ii 43); and *ibi arāku ūmiya šuṭur littūti*, “Pronounce length of days for me // Write down (on the tablets of fate) old age for me” (ibid. 100 ii 25 [read *li-it-tu-ù-ti* rather than Langdon’s *li-it-tu-ù-tim*]).

13 In “Some Literary Elements in the Opening Sections of the Hadad, Zakir, and the Nērab II Inscriptions in the Light of East and West Semitic Royal Inscriptions” (*Or* 43 [1974], 40-65), H. Tawil has pointed out five phrases in the Nērab II inscription that correspond in wording and sequence to an inscription of Nabonidus (see esp. 65).