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**The Kōšārôt/kīrt:
Patroness-saints
of Women**

References in Ugaritic literature to a band (hbl) of divine females (ilht) designated ktrt, widely known since the twin publications by Virolleaud in 1936,¹ have focused attention time and again on the seventh verse (Eng. Vrs. sixth) of Ps. 68.² If three and a half decades after the Ugaritic publications the biblical verse remains as enigmatic as ever, this is due, in part, to the problematic nature of the Ugaritic data which have given rise to a number of divergent views, and in part—though this has generally not been noted—to the dubious textual state of the OT passage in question.

Discounting nuances in formulation one can readily distinguish two main trends of thought concerning the identity and role of the aforementioned Ugaritic personalities. One theory, first propounded by Ginsberg³ and subsequently endorsed by Albright,⁴ Gordon,⁵

¹ Ch. Virolleaud, La légende phénicienne de Danel (MRS I, 1936); *idem*, "Hymne phénicien au dieu Nikal et aux deesses Košarot," Syria XVII (1936), 209-228.

² On the Psalm generally cf. the recent commentaries by Weiser, Kraus, and Dahood; and Cassuto, Tarbiz 12 (1940/1), 1-27 (Heb.); Albright, HUCA (1950-51), pt. 1, 1-39; *idem*, in Norsk teologisk tidsskrift (1956), 1ff.; Mowinkel, Das sechs und achtzehntend Psalm (1953).

³ BASOR 72 (1938), 13-15; *idem*, Orientalia N.S. 8 (1939), 317-327. Cf. already Virolleaud, Danel, *op. cit.*, 105.

⁴ Archaeology and the Religion of Israel (1956), 82.

⁵ Ugaritic Manual (1955), 200, 203; Glossary s.v. 989.

Mowinckel,⁶ Gaster,⁷ Pope,⁸ and Rinaldi,⁹ cites Heb-Aram kšr "skilful" in defining the ktrt as divine "song-stresses" or "artistes," in Gordon's colorful phrase "female jubilantes," reckoned as Canaanite counterparts of the Latin Carmentes. The competing theory, which once claimed the fealty of Albright, Gordon, and especially Gaster, and today counts Aistleitner, van Selms, Hermann, Astour, and de Moor (the latter two most recently and in the wake of the new material to be discussed forthwith)¹⁰ among its adherents, rejects minstrel activity in favour of midwifery and related functions, and is adequately and succinctly comprehended in Gaster's "patronesses of all domestic bliss."¹¹

The paper by Astour, based on pre-publication access to RŠ 24.643 (Ugaritica V, pp. 580-584) and RŠ 20.24A (Ugaritica V, pp. 42ff.)—the latter an Akkadian version of CTA 29 (the so-called "Ugaritic Pantheon")¹²—established the unequivocal correspondence of Ug. ktrt (RŠ 24.643, 5) with Akk. ša-su-ra-tum (RŠ 20.24A, line 12) who figure prominently in the Atrahasis epic as goddesses of birth and creation.¹³ Though the connotations and ramifications of the Akkadian term are as yet imperfectly understood,¹⁴ and notwithstanding the possibility that the equation may involve less than complete congruency, it is clear that the "minority" view has been considerably strengthened by the new data. It is our contention, however, that the proponents of the latter theory, while essentially correct, have overlooked or underplayed some important evidence bearing on the role of the ktrt as prototypal bridesmaids, and that it is this aspect of ktrt activity that offers a key to penetrating the mystery of the biblical Kosharot.

⁶ Op. cit., 30.

⁷ Thespis (21961), 338-340).

⁸ In Wörterbuch d. Mythologie I (1965), 296-297.

⁹ Aegyptus 13 (1954), 201.

¹⁰ Aistleitner, Die Mythologischen und Kultischen Texte aus Ras Shamra (1959); Hermann, BZAW 106 (1968); van Selms, Marriage and Family Life in Ugaritic Literature (1954), 85; Astour, JAOS 86 (1966), 280; de Moor, UF 2 (1970), 200.

¹¹ JBL 57 (1938), 82; cp. also JRAS (1938), 37-56; Goetze, JBL 60 (1941), 360; Cassuto, op. cit., 12.

¹² Cf. de Moor, UF 2 (1970), 187-228.

¹³ Lambert-Millard, Atrahasis (1969), 56-57, 62-63.

¹⁴ Cf. the forthcoming discussion in Lambert, Babylonian Creation Myths and see Atrahasis, 196 s.v. s/šassuru.

The ktrt make two principal appearances in the Ugaritic literature known thusfar. In CTA 17 1 [= UT 2 Aqht] 25ff, we find them partaking of a feast of six days duration hosted by Danel, the royal hero recently bereft of his only son Aqht, prior to the beginning of a nine month "countdown" (spr yrb; cp. Atraḥasis, op. cit., line 278) at the end of which Danel is to become presumably a father once again.¹⁵ In addition to the connection between the ktrt and the reproductive process that is established, albeit indirectly, by this account, we encounter in this setting as elsewhere what is evidently a stereotyped epithet and stock poetic parallelism of ktrt, viz., bnt hll snnt, the precise meaning of which is unfortunately controversial. The word hll has been associated alternatively with "singing" (Heb. hallēl) and "shining" (Akk. elēlu), in the latter case with or without reference to Arabic hilāl "new-moon crescent." snnt has been understood for the most part as cognate with MHeb. and Akk. sēnunt/sinuntu "swallow," a view strenuously criticized, however, by Van Selms¹⁶ who proposes, on the basis of an Aramaic root snn, "refined, bright."¹⁷ In support of his "swallow" hypothesis, Virolleaud, followed by Gaster,¹⁸ pointed to the Akkadian cognate allegedly attested as an epithet of Ištar in her capacity as daughter of the moon-god Sin--whose wife Ningal is the Sumero-Akkadian equivalent (and cognate) of Nkl, the latter a main figure in the second major literary context featuring the ktrt. The suggestion is, however, undocumented and otherwise unsupported;¹⁹ if demonstrable, however, it would be seen to tally with the additional evidence to which we now turn our attention.

¹⁵ Cf. van Selms, op. cit., 85-87. Jirku (Kanaanäische Mythen und Epen, 77, n. 5) and others see the feast as following on the birth of a son to Danel.

¹⁶ Op. cit., 86, n. 24.

¹⁷ Cp. Jastrow, Dictionary, 1007-1008; cf. also Driver, CML, 125, who renders "shining daughters of the crescent moon" citing (Glossary, 147, n. 5) additionally Arabic masnūnu "brilliant." Pope, op. cit., argues both possibilities while Jirku (op. cit.) renders "Töchter des Helal (= Is. 14:12), ihr Schwalben."

¹⁸ JRAS (1938), 37-56.

¹⁹ Tallqvist (Akkad. Götterepitheta, 330ff.) knows no such attribution of sinuntu; neither do the older Assyrian dictionaries (no CAD or AHW entry exists as yet for sinuntu). Thus Delitzsch, Assyr. Handw. (1896), 504a s.v. "'Stern des Euphrat' erklärt durch si-nun-tum."

Considerably more important, though insufficiently recognized, for understanding the ktrt, is CTA 24 [= UT 77], commonly designated The Marriage of Nkl and Yrh.²⁰ This fifty-line poem falls into two unequal parts: part 1 (lines 1-39) deals with the somewhat obscure premarital negotiations and the betrothal proper in which the ktrt play a significant if not precisely definable role, while part 2 is a paean dedicated to the ktrt who, it would appear, are cited by name:

hn(.) bpy(.) sprhn	2	}	4
bšpty(.) mnthn(.)	2		
tlhḥ(.) wmlgh(.)	2	}	6
yṯṯqt(.) cm(.) hbqCt ²¹	2		
tqCt(.) cm(.) prbhṯ	2		
dmqt(.) šgrt(.) ktrt(.)			3

The opinion, associated with the name of Aistleitner and recently adopted by Hermann and de Moor,²² that we are dealing with the seven proper names of the ktrt is (notwithstanding certain linguistic anomalies)²³ most probable both on internal literary grounds ("Behold, their 'numbers' are on my tongue [lit., 'mouth'], the count of them on my lips") and in the light of the evidence for "twice seven" šassurātu in the Atrahasis epic.²⁴ Of the seven names only three can be interpreted with certainty, but these are of the utmost significance: tlhḥ is cognate with Heb. *šillu^{ah}, plu. šilluḥim (Ex. 18:2; 1 Kgs. 9:16; Mic. 1:14) denoting a type of marriage

²⁰ Cf. now W. Hermann, op. cit., with bibliography; A. F. Rainey, JAOS 90 (1970), 533-536.

²¹ Reading with Gordon, Rinaldi, and v. Selms. The alternative cmh(.) bqCt(.) involves an additional stress-unit, thereby disrupting the metric pattern which is a rhythmic variant of [4 + 3]; [3 + 3].

²² Op. cit.; cf. already Albright apud Gordon, BASOR 65 (1937), 31, n.8a.

²³ The main difficulty is the morphology of the first two names (cf. Rinaldi, op. cit., 208; Rainey, op. cit., 536). It should be noted however that the ending h, though rare in fem. personal names, is so attested (Rainey, op. cit.) and more importantly, there is no plausible antecedent to which a presumed 3 fem. sing. suffix could refer.

²⁴ Op. cit., p. 63 (lines 9ff).

gift or dowry;²⁵ mlqh is Akk. mulūqu, MHeb. mēlôq "a gift from father to daughter usually bestowed in the context of marriage and intended to accomplish the purposes associated with dowries."²⁶ dmqt, called the "youngest of the ktrt" is doubtless to be connected with Akk. damqu "good, noble, fair," but no less certainly—though this point seems to have been overlooked—with Akk. dumāqu which designates "an ensemble of ornaments and jewels which the husband has bestowed on his wife and which she may enjoy all the years of her life."²⁷

The foregoing evidence—to which may be added the reference in Atrahasis 301 (op. cit., p. 65) to the šassurātu as "instituting marriage" (<a-na> aš-š[u-ti] ù mu-tu-ti)—points unmistakably to a nuptial role for the ktrt with a particularly close interest in the well-being of the female partner.²⁸

It is against this background that we proceed to examine the Biblical data.

Ps. 68:7a.b. reads per MT as follows:

אלהים מושיב יחידים ביתה מוציא אסירים בכושרו

which LXX renders via ὁ θεὸς καταλύσει μονοτρόπους (V: solitarios; unius moris) ἐκ οἴκῳ // ἐξάγων πεπεδημένους ἐν ἀνδρείῳ (V: fortitudine); RSV by "God gives the desolate a home to dwell in; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity." But the Aramaic Targum, followed by some of the medieval Jewish commentators (e.g. Ibn Ezra, Qimḥi) was aware that the initial hemistich had marriage as its theme, with the Deity cast in the role of a marriage broker, an interpretation which is today all but certain in the light of Ugaritic. First, it should be pointed out that yšb in the causative (hiph'il) formation, with or without an accompanying bay(i)t, occurs as an idiomatic if not technical designation for "marriage": cp.

²⁵ Cf. already Gordon, BASOR, op. cit., 30.

²⁶ Levine, JAOS 88 (1968), 280.

²⁷ Cardascia, in Reallexicon d. Assy. III, 4 (1966), 281-82.

²⁸ Van Selms speaks of "the handmaids of Nikkal," while Gaster designates them as "bridesmaids" (JBL, op. cit.). We should note as well the implication of bridal guardianship that emerges from the prospective groom's (= Yariḥ) consultation with the ktrt prior to formally requesting Nikkal's hand in marriage (lines 14-19, reading [with Hermann and others] šm^c. m^c. lktrt ...).

Esr. 10:17-18, Neh. 13:23, and especially Ps. 113:9, "He gives (Hiph'el yšb) the barren woman a home (bay(i)t)," which shares a common theme as well as idiom with the verse in question, viz., marriage as an act of divine mercy for those who might otherwise remain alone and uncared for.

To this we can now add the evidence of yēhîdîm "solitary ones" which in view of Ug. yhd (CTA 14 [= UT Krt] I 96) may be defined more precisely today as "bachelor" or the like.²⁹

It is less obvious—though as we shall endeavour to show equally probable—that the second hemistich is likewise concerned with the theme of wedding, i.e., that we are dealing with a parallelism which, though "complementary," is more than merely "formal."³⁰

It is to be noted at the outset that the verb yš' "go out, exit"—in the hiph'el (causative) formation "lead out, escort"; cp. the technical military expression hammôšî' w'hammēbî' (II Sam. 5:2)—carries a special connotation when employed in a nuptial context: Ps. 19:5-6 (E.V., 4-5) "...He (= God) has set a tent for the sun, the latter like a bridegroom leaving (yš')—better: emerging from—his nuptial chamber (cp. also Joel 2:16)." The "emerging from the nuptial chamber (huppā)" must be understood as part of the wedding ceremony in which the groom goes forth to receive the bride on her way to his house. The question arises at this point: what, if any, nuptial significance may be attributed to yš' in the causative formation that confronts us in Ps. 68:7, and as a predicate of Divine activity?

From the Ugaritic material we inferred that the ktrt, seven in number, could be viewed as fulfilling on the mythic level a role as bridesmaids for the moon-goddess Nkl, a "ritual" reflex of which is perhaps the reference to seven attendants on the bride-to-be Esther (2:9).³¹ Now from Sumerian sources, in a sacral marriage context, we learn that Tammuz (Dumuzi), the bridegroom of Ištar, is designated "the lord of the

²⁹ Cf. Albright, HUCA, op. cit., 19.

³⁰ Cf. already Spiegel, in L. Ginzberg Jubilee Volume (1945), 312, n.5, who sees the subject as "childbirth," comparing Ps. 113:9.

³¹ Cf. already Gordon, BASOR, op. cit., 31.

'bridesmen'"—Akk. susapinū—also seven in number.³² What precisely are the susapinū (Sum. libir.si)³³? The Akkadian term is cognate with MHeb./Aramaic šušbîn, defined in Rabbinic sources³⁴ as a male friend (rē'a) of the bridegroom sent to the home of the bride to escort her and her entourage—including the bridesmaids (rē'ot) who bear the bridal gifts (cf. Ps. 45:14-15)—to the home of her future husband. In at least one rabbinic passage (Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer, 41) the term used to describe the act of escort performed by the šušbîn is yš', in the Hiph'il formation:

Then did Moses go out unto the camp of Israel... and said to them: "Wake up! The bridegroom (= God) has already arrived and desires the bride (= Israel) that he may cause her to enter³⁵ the nuptial chamber (huppa)³⁶...." Thus did (Moses) come as a šušbîn and escort (hōšî') the bride, as one who performs the act of šušbîn - escort for his friend...while the bridegroom (= God) went forth (yš') to receive the bride....

In another passage (TB Ber. 61) it is God himself who is assigned the role of šušbîn. Commenting on Gen. 2:22 "And (God) brought her to the man," R. Jeremiah is reported to have said: "From this we learn that the Lord became šušbîn to the first man."

While the term šušb/pin is apparently unknown to the OT,³⁷ note may be taken of Genesis 24 in which some of the šušb/pin functions appear to be performed by Abraham's servant, while in vss. 61-67 are to be found seemingly unmistakable traces of the wedding-processional pattern described above: "Then Rebecca and her maids (na'ārōtêhā) arose...and followed the manAnd Isaac went out (yš'!)...(v. 67) and brought her ...to the tent...and she became his wife."

³² Langdon, Tammuz and Istar (1914), 28-29, n.2; Kramer, Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society (1963), 485-527, esp. 497ff.

³³ So Kramer, op. cit.; Langdon reads ligir. si.

³⁴ Cf. Ben-Yehuda, Thesaurus Totius Hebraeae (ed. Tur-Sinai [Torczyner] vol. xiv (1952), s.v.

³⁵ lehaknîsāh (causative of kns "enter"); cp. Ug. (š)crb, Akk. erēbu in identical usage.

³⁶ Corresponding to Akk. bit emūtīm (Finkelstein, RA 61 [1967], 131-32; differently Greengus, JAOS 89 [1969], 524).

³⁷ Tur-Sinai, op. cit., 6999, n. 2 compares mōšibî in the aforementioned Ps. 113 on the assumption that šušbîn is to be derived from yšb "sit."

Thus daring though it appear, the conclusion seems probable that in speaking of the Deity as one who "leads out, escorts," along with or by means of the Košārôt, the Psalmist has in mind the idea of God as šušb/pin, as one who is instrumental in effecting marital unions. Yet this interpretation--which is based on internal as well as comparative data, first and foremost the role and identity of the ktrt/Košārôt--appears to founder hopelessly on the middle word of the hemistich in question, viz., àsîrîm "prisoners," which no amount of philologic and hermeneutic skill can convincingly reconcile with the idea of wedding marches and nuptial bliss. The latter can be demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt as constituting the theme of the initial hemistich. It is possible, to be sure, to conceive of the second hemistich as describing Divine mercy towards prisoners, rather than as continuing the nuptial theme; however, one is then faced with the no-less-serious difficulty of reconciling partonesses of wedlock and childbirth with mercy to prisoners, the latter almost certainly male (in effect the state of affairs that confronts the exegete today).

This "dead end" can only be resolved, if at all, by recourse to textual emendation, on the assumption that the impasse is the result of a scribal error or related disturbance. The criteria of its acceptability will be: (a) the likelihood of the emendation considered on purely text-critical grounds, i.e., in terms of textual support in the versions and/or frequency and intrinsic probability of the corruption-phenomenon alleged and/or the overall text-critical state of the material; (b) its suitability on linguistic grounds; and (c) its contextual aptness.

In this connection it is worth recalling that few if any chapters in the Psalter are so notoriously disturbed as is Ps. 68.

It is thus our submission that MT 'asîrîm "prisoners" is a corruption via metathesis of an original *'arûsîm, the passive participle Qal of (MHeb) 'rś "betrothe," OT Heb 'rś (e.g. Hos. 2:21-22), Akk. erēšu (cf. ērišu "bridegroom"),³⁸ a disturbance presumably generated by the proximity with sôrêrîm in the adjacent line.

³⁸ Cp. perhaps also Ug. iršt "fiancee(?)" (JBL 89 [1970], 295ff.).

The spelling with s rather than ś may be seen to reflect Second Commonwealth orthographic practice, under the influence of the vernacular Aramaic, and is in fact but one of numerous indications for the orthographic and stylistic revision of the Psalm in this period.³⁹

Ps. 68:7a.b. is now seen to read as follows: "The Lord finds a mate⁴⁰ for the solitary; He escorts the betrothen along with⁴¹ the Košarot," a fitting sequel, it will be allowed, to "the father of orphans, the adjudicator of widows (v.6)" and rather eloquent testimony to the biblical belief in Divine providence.

³⁹ Cf. especially the substitution of אֲדָנִי for the Tetragrammaton at vss. 18, 20, 23 to be viewed in light of the use of κύριος in the LXX tradition; cp. also Sanders, *DJD* IV (1965) 6, 26. A similar substitution of s for ś is perhaps to be found in *mitrappes* (v. 31), presumably from **rpś* "stamp, tread" (e.g. Prov. 25:26; Ez. 34:19) which comes into MHeb (via Aramaic), and sporadically in (late) OT Heb (e.g. Ez. 32:2) as *rps*.

⁴⁰ Literally, "house"; cf. Ibn Ezra and Qimḥi ad loc., and the Rabbinic expression *bêtô zû ištô* "His house (e.g. Lev. 16:6), i.e., 'his wife'" (e.g. Mish. *Yoma* I, 1).

⁴¹ For this signification of the preposition *et*, cf. W. Baumgartner *et al*, *HAL*, 100b-101a.