

A NOTE ON GREEK τύραννος*

by

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ABSTRACT: This paper throws new light on the debate about the etymology of Greek τύραννος ‘absolute ruler, monarch, tyrant’. The author puts forward a hypothesis that it was borrowed indirectly from Hurrian *šarrini-* ‘~ the king’. This is a so-called determined form of the noun *šarru-* ‘king’, borrowed, in turn, from Akkadian *šarru* ‘id.’. Another word that goes back to Hurrian *šarrini-* is Biblical Hebrew/Philistine *seren* (attested in pl. *sarnê* or *srānîm*) ‘Philistine ruler’.

Since the Hieroglyphic Luvian title *tarwani-* ‘ruler, judge’ is now believed not to have existed (in lieu of it is the adjective *tarrawann(i)-* ‘just, righteous’)¹, and the meaning ‘prince’ of the Ugaritic noun *srn* seems to be doubtful², the only certain counterpart for Greek τύραννος m. ‘absolute ruler, monarch, tyrant’³ is Biblical Hebrew *seren* (attested in pl. *sarnê* and *srānîm*, with the Masoretic

* This research was funded by National Science Centre, Poland (research project no. UMO-2020/39/B/HS2/00934).

¹ This interpretation has been affirmed by MELCHERT (2019), who concludes his analysis as follows: “A thorough review of all currently available evidence fully upholds the claim of Pintore that Luvian *tarrawann(i)-* referring to persons is in origin an adjective meaning ‘just, righteous’, secondarily used as an honorific epithet ‘the just/righteous one’ like ‘hero’. It refers to a moral quality just like the homonymous abstract *tarrawann(i)-*, whose meaning is assured by its equivalence to Phoenician *šdq*. Neither has anything directly to do with the office of judge or ruler” (p. 344); see also PINTORE 1979 and 1983; ORESHKO 2018: 111–112; moreover, cf. EICHNER 1992: 72–73; PARKER 1998: 148–149; RUTHERFORD 2020: 102.

² This word is attested twice as pl. *srnm*: in *KTU* 1.147 10 (here without a context, because the text is damaged) and in *KTU* 1.22 I 18 together with *yn* ‘wine’, i.e. *yn srnm* interpreted as ‘wine of princes’ in *DUL* 759. According to another hypothesis, *srn* means ‘cup’; see WATSON 2007: 20 and 106. Cf. GARBINI 1991: 516–517: “it seems right to think that *srnm* is either a geographical name [...] or a name specifying a quality of wine; in both cases there is no mention of princes or the like”.

³ The noun appears in the sources since the 5th cent. BC, but two of its derivatives are attested earlier: τυραννίς, -ίδος f. ‘monarchy, tyranny’ (since the 7th cent. BC) and τυραννεύω (or -έω) ‘to be a monarch, tyrant, ruler’ (since the 7th/6th cent. BC); τύραννος occurs once in the *Homeric Hymns*, namely in the *Hymn to Ares* (8, 5), but this poem was created probably during the Roman period, at least not earlier than the 1st cent. BC; see CASSOLA 1975: 297. On τύραννος and its derivatives, see Greek-English dictionaries: *CGL* 1402–1403; *GE* 2167–2168; *LSJ* 1836. For more details, see PARKER 1998: 149–172; LURAGHI 2013; KÖIV 2021.