An Introduction to
UGARITIC

JOHN HUEHNERNERGARD
An Introduction to
UGARITIC
An Introduction to Ugaritic

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to Frank Moore Cross
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Preface and Acknowledgments

The present textbook was first created some twenty-five years ago and has been revised sporadically since then. It presents a précis of the grammar of Ugaritic for students who already have some familiarity with Biblical Hebrew. Following the presentation of the grammar, a number of short practice exercises are given to reinforce the main points of the grammar and to introduce some common vocabulary. Thereafter, a few sample texts in several genres are given, with glosses and explanatory notes.

Several other introductions to, or manuals of, Ugaritic have appeared recently, and so the publication of the present volume may seem superfluous. But I have been encouraged by colleagues and students who have used it in manuscript form to make it more widely available, and now do so.

My sincere thanks go to Ryan Davis, Jo Ann Hackett, Jeremy Hutton, Josef Tropper, and Aren Wilson-Wright for their careful reading of a pre-publication draft of the present work and for offering many substantive comments and suggestions for improving it. Earlier drafts of the textbook also benefitted from the suggestions and corrections of a number of students and of colleagues who have used it in their Ugaritic classes, whom it is my pleasure to thank here: Elitzur Bar-Asher Siegal, John Beckman, John (Jay) Ellison, Andrew Gross, Jo Ann Hackett, Cynthia Miller, Saul Olyan, Mark S. Smith, Greg Ward, and the late Michael Patrick O’Connor. None of these kind individuals should be held responsible for any remaining mistakes or errors of judgment.

I am very grateful to Jay Ellison and to Wayne Pitard for providing their superb photographs of many of the sample texts and for their gracious permission to include them here. Jay Ellison also has my heartfelt thanks for allowing me to include an abridgement of his fine essay on the Ugaritic script, as Appendix A, as do the editors of the volume in which the longer essay will appear (Ellison forthcoming), for their permission to print the abridgement here.

Much detail of grammar, and a good number of examples, have been taken from Josef Tropper’s monumental *Ugaritische Grammatik*, and I acknowledge here both my debt to him and my admiration for his work. I also want to express my appreciation for the painstaking work of Dennis Pardee to place the textual basis and the grammatical study of Ugaritic on a reliable foundation.
Allan Emery, my former student, my friend, and now my editor at Hendrickson, has my deep gratitude for his unfailing good advice, his unstinting efforts to improve the book, and his constant, gentle encouragement.

The author, his editor, and the publisher will be grateful to our readers if they would report to the publisher (editorial@hendrickson.com) any errors (whether typographical or in content) that they discover in this work.

This book is dedicated to Frank Moore Cross, a giant in the comparative study of Ugaritic and Hebrew literature, and a beloved teacher and friend. My first conversation with Frank, almost forty years ago, was about Ugaritic grammar; I have been learning from him ever since.

Austin, Texas
January, 2012
Abbreviations

I. Bibliographical

AOAT Alter Orient und Altes Testament.


KTU see CAT.

PRU Le Palais royal d’Ugarit; for PRU 2, 5, see Virolleaud 1957, 1965 in the bibliography; for PRU 3, 4, 6, see Nougayrol 1955, 1956, 1970.

RIH Ras Ibn Hani excavation number.
RS Ras Shamra excavation number.

Ug. 5 Ugaritica, Vol. 5; see Nougayrol et al. 1968 in the bibliography.


II. Other

acc. accusative
adv. adverb(ial)
Akk. Akkadian
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Language/Abbreviation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arab.</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aram.</td>
<td>Aramaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ass.</td>
<td>Assyrian (Akkadian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bab.</td>
<td>Babylonian (Akkadian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BH</td>
<td>Biblical Hebrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>common (gender)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cj.</td>
<td>conjugation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conj.</td>
<td>conjugation; conjunction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cst.</td>
<td>construct (form)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d(u.)</td>
<td>dual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DN</td>
<td>divine name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eth.</td>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f(em.)</td>
<td>feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gen.</td>
<td>genitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GN</td>
<td>geographical name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heb.</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imptv.</td>
<td>imperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indic.</td>
<td>indicative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>infin.</td>
<td>infinitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intr.</td>
<td>intransitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>International Phonetic Alphabet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>juss.</td>
<td>jussive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lit.</td>
<td>literally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m(asc.)</td>
<td>masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nom.</td>
<td>nominative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>num.</td>
<td>number, numeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obl.</td>
<td>oblique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pass.</td>
<td>passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pl.</td>
<td>plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN</td>
<td>personal name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pref.</td>
<td>prefix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prep.</td>
<td>preposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pret.</td>
<td>preterite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Proto-Semitic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ptcpl.</td>
<td>participle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r.</td>
<td>reverse (of a tablet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s(g.)</td>
<td>singular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suff.</td>
<td>suffix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tr.</td>
<td>transitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ug.</td>
<td>Ugaritic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volit.</td>
<td>volitive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1,2,3 1st, 2nd, 3rd person

v any vowel; a vowel of uncertain quality

v̄ a long vowel

v̄̆ (1) an “anceps” vowel, a vowel that may be either short or long (ā̆, ĭ̆, ū̆; see below, §III.B.1., p. 28); (2) a vowel of uncertain length

v̂ a vowel resulting from the contraction of a diphthong or of two vowels

/xx/ the slash marks are used to enclose phonemic vocalizations

x/x a slash mark may separate alternative spellings or words, e.g., malku/i

[xx] enclose (1) phonetic pronunciations; (2) broken text

[xx] enclose partially broken text

<x> enclose a scribal omission

«x» enclose a scribal plus

√ verbal root

| line break

. word divider

* unattested or reconstructed form or writing

! correction of scribal error

Transliteration Guide for Biblical Hebrew

<table>
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<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>ä</td>
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<tr>
<td>ב</td>
<td>b</td>
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<td>ג</td>
<td>g</td>
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<tr>
<td>ד</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ה</td>
<td>h (when consonantal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ו</td>
<td>w (when consonantal)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ז</td>
<td>z</td>
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<tr>
<td>ח</td>
<td>h</td>
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<tr>
<td>י</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>י</td>
<td>y (when consonantal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ק</td>
<td>k</td>
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<td>ל</td>
<td>l</td>
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<td>m</td>
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<td>פ</td>
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<td>צ</td>
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<td>ק</td>
<td>q</td>
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<td>l</td>
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<td>ו</td>
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<td>ש</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ת</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Plate 1: The ancient Near East in the Late Bronze Age period during which the city of Ugarit flourished (ca. 1300–1190).
I.

Introduction

A. The Ugaritic Language

Ugaritic is an ancient Semitic language that was spoken in the city of Ugarit, modern Ras Shamra (“Cape Fennel”), at the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean, in present-day Syria. The site of Ugarit and its indigenous language were discovered by accident in 1928–1929. Archaeologists have excavated the site almost every year since; the excavations have revealed a large city that was occupied from the late Neolithic period. The texts that are written in the indigenous Ugaritic language, however, date only to the end of the long period in which the city was occupied, to the second half of the Late Bronze Age, roughly 1300–1190 BCE.

As the following diagram shows, Ugaritic is part of the Northwest branch of the Semitic language family. Its closest relatives are the Canaanite languages, including Hebrew and Phoenician, and the large set of Aramaic dialects. There is a scholarly debate about whether Ugaritic is itself a form of Canaanite; in this textbook, it is assumed that Ugaritic constitutes a branch of Northwest Semitic that is distinct from the Canaanite branch (and from Aramaic). But the relationship of Ugaritic to Hebrew and to Aramaic is sufficiently close that knowledge of the latter languages can be of great assistance to the student learning Ugaritic, as well as to scholars interpreting Ugaritic texts and grammar. Conversely, knowledge of Ugaritic has helped scholars clarify many obscure features of early Hebrew (see §I.E., pp. 10–11).

Ugaritic texts are recorded in a unique script. It is a consonantal alphabet, but unlike other West Semitic alphabets the letters were written in cuneiform on clay tablets, like the logograms of the Mesopotamian civilization to the east of Ugarit (and of the Hittites to the north). It is likely that this writing system was invented not long before the earliest of the attested texts, that is, early in the thirteenth century.

The alphabetic nature of the script—the fact that there is a relatively small number of individual signs—allowed for a swift decipherment, by several scholars working independently, within a year of the discovery of the first texts. For accounts of the decipherment, see Cathcart 1999 and P. Day 2002. The history of Ugaritic studies is recounted in Smith 2001.
B. Ugarit

In the early part of the Late Bronze Age, Ugarit was, like much of the Levantine coast, under the control of the Egyptian Empire. In the period of the Ugaritic texts, however, Ugarit was under Hittite suzerainty. During this period, Ugarit had an important port and was a center of international trade. Indeed, in addition to the Ugaritic texts, texts in seven other languages have been recovered during the excavations: Akkadian, Sumerian, Hittite, Hieroglyphic Luwian, Hurrian, Egyptian, and Cypro-Minoan. But the vast majority of the texts are in Ugaritic, which was the local language, or in Akkadian, which was the international language of the time. Ugarit also maintained political connections with neighboring states and cities, such as Amurru and Qadesh, and cities farther south along the Mediterranean coast, such as Byblos, Sidon, Tyre, and Beirut (see Texts §VIII.A.6., pp. 108–10, and §VIII.B.2., pp. 112–13, for mentions of the latter two sites).

The city of Ugarit was the capital of a kingdom of the same name, the size of which changed over time, but generally covered about 2,000 square kilometers. During the period of the texts, Ugarit was ruled by a king, a member of a royal dynasty that claimed to be many centuries old. Many of the non-mythological texts—letters, administrative texts, rituals—reflect the fact that the palace controlled much of the economy of the city and kingdom.

The kingdom came to an end in the early 12th century, following attacks by the “Sea Peoples,” who created havoc throughout much of the eastern Mediterranean and Anatolia.

An excellent survey of the history of Ugarit is Singer 1999. For an overview of the archaeology of the site and the archaeological finds, see Yon 2006.
C. Ugaritic Texts and Genres

1. Text Finds

Over 1,500 Ugaritic texts and fragments have been discovered, and it can be expected that more will be found in the ongoing archaeological excavations. Some of the texts constitute just a few lines, while others appear on large, multi-column tablets with hundreds of lines.

Most of the texts have been discovered at the site of Ras Shamra—Ugarit itself. But nearly 200 Ugaritic texts have come to light at the nearby site of Ras Ibn Hani (about 4.5 kilometers southwest of Ras Shamra), which served as the summer residence of the Ugaritic kings. A small number of texts in the cuneiform alphabet have also been found at a few sites in present-day Lebanon (for example, Kāmid el-Lōz, ancient Kōmidu) and Israel (Beth Shemesh); most of these are written right-to-left, rather than the usual left-to-right (and so they are referred to as mirror texts), and exhibit a reduced number of letters.

The Ugaritic texts span at most two centuries, and possibly as little as two or three generations (Bordreuil and Malbran-Labat 1995; Dalix 1996; Pardee 2007a), in the 13th and the beginning of the 12th centuries. The short period of attestation of the Ugaritic texts means that the grammar of the texts is quite uniform. It is sometimes suggested that the literary texts reflect an earlier stage of the language than what was spoken when the texts were actually written down. In any case, it may be said that there are at least two linguistic “registers,” since, as in Biblical Hebrew, the poetic literary language of the mytho-epic texts differs in several important respects from that of the prose texts such as the letters, administrative documents, and rituals (for example, in verb usage, word order, vocabulary).

2. Types of Texts

For surveys of Ugaritic texts and genres, see Pardee and Bordreuil 1992; Parker 1995, 1997; Pitard 1999, 2009; Smith 2009.

a. Poetic Texts

The most famous of the Ugaritic texts are the roughly fifty poetic texts that have mythological and epic content. These are stories about the gods of Ugarit and about legendary kings. Three of them are much longer than the others: Baal, Kirta, and Aqhat. Each of these has been the focus of intense scholarly study, and many translations of each are available. Each of the texts has suffered considerable damage, and so, despite the scholarly attention, there remain many uncertainties in the interpretation of some passages, although the general outline of each is fairly well understood. The longest is the Baal cycle, a series of six tablets (CAT
1.1–6; for “CAT” see below under “Tools and Resources” §I.D.1., pp. 6–7), which comprises three large episodes concerning the storm god Baal: in the first, Baal successfully challenges the god Yamm (‘Sea’) for leadership of the divine assembly (part of this episode is presented as text §VIII.E., pp. 133–38 in the “Selection of Texts”); in the second, a house is built for Baal; and in the third, Baal is defeated by the god Mot (‘Death’), only to rise again from the underworld. The Kirta epic (CAT 1.14–16) concerns king Kirta, who, having lost his entire family, seeks with divine assistance to restore his family and ensure his succession (the first two columns of the first tablet are given as text §VIII.D., pp. 120–32 in the “Selection of Texts”). In the Aqhat epic (CAT 1.17–19), the pious patriarch Dan(i)el successfully prays for a son, only to lose the son, Aqhat, to the wrath of the goddess Anat. It is likely that the final tablets of both the Kirta and the Aqhat stories are missing. The copies of these long texts were all the work of the same scribe; see the introduction to text §VIII.D., pp. 120–21 in the “Selection of Texts.”

There are several shorter poetic texts about Baal (CAT 1.10–12), others about the high god El (CAT 1.23, 1.114, the latter including a recipe for relief from a hangover), and a series of texts about beings called rpûm /râpî’ûma/ ‘healers’ (CAT 1.20–22; see Pitard 1992a; Pardee 2011b). Other mythic texts concern the marriage of the West Semitic moon god Yariḫ and a Mesoptamian moon goddess, Nikkal (CAT 1.24); and the quest
of a mythological mare for a cure for her foal’s snake-bite (CAT 1.100). Still other poetic texts include a prayer (CAT 1.119) and a funerary ritual (CAT 1.161).

b. Prose Texts

Some 150 texts concern the cult: sacrificial rituals for the gods (including, for example, šlmām /šalamūma/ ‘peace offerings’; cf. BH šalāmūm), lists of gods, and incantations (see Pardee 2000, 2002). A few divination texts are also attested.

Over 100 letters have been discovered. A number of these were written by or to the king, some of them sent by other rulers, such as the king of Tyre and the Hittite emperor (these are probably translations from Akkadian). The correspondents of other letters include the queen mother, as well as private individuals, most or all of whom would have been members of the elite of Ugarit society. Six letters are presented in the “Selection of Texts.”

The number of legal texts attested is small, undoubtedly because Akkadian was the normal language for legal documents at the time. The “Selection of Texts” contains four of these legal texts.

Plate 3: A view of the ruins of Courtyard V taken from above and looking down (at the left side of the photo) into the room below the “international office” into which the archived letters from the floor above fell when the palace was burned. Note there is a tree growing in that narrow room. For other photographs of the ruins of Ugarit see Plates 45–51 on pages 243–46.
The largest group of texts, by far, are the administrative, or economic, documents. These are lists, receipts, and records of transactions. Two such documents appear in the “Selection of Texts.”

A few school texts—scribal exercises—are also attested. These include abecedaries, that is, practice listings of all of the letters in alphabetical order; lists of names; repeated words; and sample form-letters. (Photos of two abecedaries appear in Plates 5–7, pages 223–24.)

D. Tools and Resources

1. Text Editions

The standard collection of Ugaritic texts published up to 1995 is $CAT =$ *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places*, by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín (1995). In $CAT$, each text is given a unique number, consisting of a single digit followed by a period followed by one to three more digits, as in $CAT$ 1.14, 3.2, 4.143, in which the first digit indicates the genre of the text, as follows:

1. literary and religious texts
2. letters
3. legal texts
4. economic or administrative texts
5. scribal exercises
6. inscriptions on seals, labels, ivories, etc.
7. unclassified texts
8. illegible tablets and uninscribed fragments
9. unpublished texts

$CAT$ is the second edition of a work that was first published in German, by the same authors, as *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit einschliesslich der keilalphabetischen Texte ausserhalb Ugarits*, 1: Transkription (1976). This was abbreviated $KTU$, and some scholars continue to refer to the newer edition, here abbreviated $CAT$, as $KTU$ or $KTU^2$, or as $CTU$.

In text citations, line numbers follow the text number and a colon, as in $CAT$ 4.143:4. For multi-column texts, the column number must also be given, usually in Roman numerals, as in $CAT$ 1.14.ii:30.

In some scholarly works, Ugaritic texts are cited by their excavation numbers rather than by their $CAT$ designation. The excavation numbers of the Mission de Ras Shamra are preceded by the siglum “RS”; for example, $CAT$ 3.2 = RS 15.111, in which “15.” in “RS 15.111” denotes the fifteenth season of excavations (“111” is the artifact number for that season); more recently, the excavation years themselves, or the last two digits of the years, have been used as a prefix in RS numbers, as in “RS 1994.2401” or “RS
Texts excavated at Ras Ibn Hani have the prefix “RIH” followed by the excavation year and artifact number, as in RIH 77/25 = CAT 2.79.

Other books and articles cite Ugaritic texts according to their initial place of publication. The texts found in the first ten seasons of excavations were (re)edited by Andrée Herdner in CTA = Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939 (1963; CTA texts 1–25 = CAT 1.1–25). Many other texts were first edited by Charles Virolleaud and published in the volumes PRU 2 = Le Palais royal d’Ugarit. Vol. 2: Textes alphabétiques des Archives Est, Ouest et Centrales (1957), PRU 5 = Le Palais royal d’Ugarit. Vol. 5: Textes alphabétiques des Archives Sud, Sud-Ouest et du Petit-Palais (1965), and Ug. 5 = Ugaritica, vol. 5: Nouveaux textes accadiens, hourrites et ugaritiques des Archives et Bibliothèques privées d’Ugarit, commentaires des textes historiques (Nougayrol et al. 1968). These volumes include hand drawings and photographs of the texts in addition to transliterations and translations. The hand drawings are often quite stylized, and more recently some scholars, such as Wayne Pitard, Theodore Lewis, and especially Dennis Pardee, have produced new, more accurately representative, hand copies based on close inspection of the tablets (for example Pardee 1988a, 2000; Pitard 1992b; Lewis 1996; Bordreuil and Pardee 2009). A digital drawing of one Ugaritic tablet, CAT 4.143, is included in this book, on Plate 4, p. 118; the drawing is copied from a photograph of that tablet, which appears on Plates 37–38, p. 239; the text of the tablet is presented in §VIII.C.1., pp. 118–19.

A comprehensive index of all inscribed finds excavated at Ras Shamra and Ras Ibn Hani up through 1988 is Bordreuil and Pardee 1989–1990. CAT also includes a cross-index of RS and RIH numbers, as well as indexes of the designations of texts in previous compilations and editions of Ugaritic tablets.

The online Ugaritic Data Bank, produced by a Spanish team of scholars, includes the texts in CAT, mostly with the same numbers; see Cunchillos, Vita, and Zamora 2003a in the bibliography.

Texts published since the appearance of CAT have appeared in volumes produced by the official epigraphy team of the excavations, in the series Ras Shamra–Ougarit: see Bordreuil 1991, Yon and Arnaud 2001, Bordreuil, Pardee, and Hawley 2012; in these, the majority of the Ugaritic texts are edited by Pierre Bordreuil and Dennis Pardee. A new edition of CAT is in preparation.

High-quality photographs of many Ugaritic texts, produced by Bruce Zuckerman and his team at the West Semitic Research Project, may be accessed at inscriptifact.com.

2. Grammars and Textbooks

The standard reference grammar of Ugaritic is Josef Tropper’s magisterial Ugaritische Grammatik (first edition 2000; second edition, thoroughly
revised, 2012; abbreviated UG, and cited in the present textbook by section numbers, which are the same in both editions). A very long review (over four hundred pages) of the first edition of UG by another great scholar of Ugaritic, Dennis Pardee, written for the journal *Archiv für Orientforschung*, may be accessed (in four pdf files) at http://orientalistik.univie.ac.at/publikationen/archiv-fuer-orientforschung/.

Recent article-length surveys of Ugaritic grammar may be found in the bibliography under P. Day 2002; Giano 2011; Pardee 1997, 2004, 2007b, 2011a; Tropper 1999.

A number of other textbooks of Ugaritic have appeared recently:


3. Dictionaries and Concordances

There are two recent dictionaries of Ugaritic:


Concordances of Ugaritic words are Dietrich and Lorentz 1996a (indices and corrections in Kottsieper 1997) and Whitaker 1972, as well as the online concordance produced by the *Ugaritic Data Bank* team, Cunchillos, Vita, and Zamora 2003b.

Personal names attested in Ugaritic texts, as well as in the Akkadian texts found at Ugarit, reflect a wide variety of languages, including, in addition to Ugaritic, other Semitic languages (Canaanite, Akkadian, and Amorite), Hittite, Hurrian, and Egyptian. The most comprehensive resource for personal names is Gröndahl 1967, although this is now quite out
of date. See also Hess 1999: 499–515, Pardee 1989–1990: 391–430, Ribi-chini and Xella 1991, and Watson 1990–2003. Many individual personal names appear in both alphabetical and syllabic texts, so that it is possible to have a fairly good idea of their pronunciation. The names should not be used to reconstruct the grammar of Ugaritic, however, since it is clear that many of them are traditional names that do not reflect the contemporary language of the texts.

Divine names appear in the literary mythological texts, but also in rituals and other cultic texts, and, obviously, in lists of god names. Divine names are also frequent components of personal names. For bibliography on Ugaritic divine names, see Pardee 1989–1990: 432–79. A recent study of divine epithets in Ugaritic texts is Rahmouni 2008.

The Ugaritic and the Akkadian documents from Ugarit, especially the administrative texts, contain a large number of geographical names, of the villages, towns, and districts of the kingdom of Ugarit. These place names are discussed most recently and comprehensively in van Soldt 2005; see also Hess 1999: 515–29; Pardee 1989–1990: 480–500; Watson 2001. As with personal names, many individual geographical names appear in both alphabetical and syllabic texts.

In this textbook, well-known names, such as “Ugarit” and a number of divine names, are rendered in English in their traditional form rather than in a more accurate representation of their Ugaritic pronunciation; thus, for example, Baal rather than Baˤlu, El rather than ʾIlu.

4. Other Resources


The Handbook of Ugaritic Studies, edited by W. G. E. Watson and Nicolas Wyatt (1999), is an extremely useful and reliable compendium of articles on all aspects of the history and society of Ugarit as well as Ugaritic literature and grammar.

For over four decades the annual Ugarit-Forschungen, edited by M. Dietrich and O. Loretz, has published technical articles on all aspects of Ugarit and Ugaritic. Other scholarly articles on Ugaritic frequently appear in periodicals devoted to biblical studies, such as Catholic Biblical Quarterly (CBQ), Journal of Biblical Literature (JBL), and Vetus Testamentum (VT), as well as, inter alia, the following periodicals: Archiv für Orientforschung
E. Ugaritic and Biblical Studies

“Ugaritic represents better than any other second millennium language or literature the antecedents of the language and literature of ancient Israel.” (Parker 1989: 225.) It is indeed difficult to overestimate the impact that the discovery of the Ugaritic texts has had on the study of the Hebrew Bible. The culture and society of the Ugaritians were similar in many respects to those of the Canaanites who inhabited Palestine at the end of the Late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age, the period purportedly described in the biblical books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel. (The Ugaritians were not, linguistically speaking, Canaanites, and did not consider themselves such; an individual who is knʾny /kinaʾnīyu/ ‘Canaanite’ is listed in an administrative text that lists other foreign individuals; CAT 4.96:7.) The Ugaritic letters and administrative texts present a vivid picture of life in a large Levantine city in the period just before the beginning of the kingdom of Israel.

The Ugaritic literary texts describe the world of the early West Semitic gods—El, Baal, Anat, and others—that was the matrix out of which Israelite religion emerged; epithets and characteristics of El and Baal in these texts are strikingly reminiscent of those ascribed to Yahweh in the biblical text. The literary texts have also greatly influenced the way biblical poetry is read and understood, since biblical poetry is clearly part of the same literary tradition, with its parallelism and formulaic word pairs (see §VI., pp. 85–87).


Various features of Ugaritic grammar have also helped to clarify previously obscure, or even unknown, aspects of the grammar of Biblical Hebrew. An example is the seemingly anomalous BH verb hišṭahāwā ‘to bow down’, which was listed in some older Hebrew dictionaries under a root ṣḥy; this verb has an exact cognate in Ugaritic yštḥwy (prefix-conjugation), where it is clearly the Št-stem form of a root ṣḥwy; thus, BH hišṭahāwā is now known to be a vestige of a hištapēl stem. Among many other BH features elucidated by Ugaritic may be mentioned the following:
the enclitic particle *mēm* (see §IV.I., p. 79), probably attested in several BH passages, such as *way-yarqīd-ēm* ‘he caused to skip about’ Ps 29:6;

the asseverative proclitic particle *l*- (see §IV.I., pp. 78–79), for example, *lǝ-mišpātekā ˤāmǝdû hayyôm* ‘indeed your ordinances stand today’ Ps 119:91;

the use of the prepositions *ba-* and *l*- in clauses in which they must be translated ‘from’;

the tense–mood–aspect system of the Northwest Semitic verb, much of which was still in force in early Hebrew.

Ugaritic vocabulary has contributed in many ways to our understanding of the Hebrew lexicon. An example is the identification of a new BH root *ḥrš*, and the separation of the noun *ḥārāš* ‘craftsman’ (original Semitic root √*ḥrs*) from the root *ḥrs* meaning ‘to plow, engrave’ (originally √*hrθ*); see §III.A.2. (pp. 23–25) on the reflexes of the Proto-Semitic consonants in Ugaritic and in BH. Among many biblical phrases that have been reinterpreted in the light of Ugaritic is *rōkēb bā-ˤărābôt* Ps 68:5, which has been compared with *rkb ṭpt /rākibu ˤarapāti/ ‘cloud-rider’, an epithet of the Ugaritic storm-god Baal.

F. About This Book

1. Outline of Grammar

In the following pages, the grammar of Ugaritic is presented in essential outline only. Minor details and rare variant forms are not given, so that the student may become familiar with the main grammatical features quickly, and move on to reading texts as soon as possible. The grammatical outline is arranged in traditional fashion, covering orthography, phonology, morphology, and syntax, followed by a brief section on poetic language.

2. Vocalized Transcriptions

Ugaritic is written in a consonantal alphabet, without regular indication of vowels, as in the writing *mlk* for the noun ‘king’ or the verb ‘he ruled’. There are, however, three discrete signs for the glottal stop—the “aleph”—that differ according to the vowel following the glottal stop, as in *āl* ‘not’, *ỉl* ‘god’, *ǚl* ‘military force’ (see below, §II.F., p. 21). The three alephs thus provide a window into the vowel system of the language.

In addition, over three hundred Ugaritic words occur in the Akkadian texts written at Ugarit, and the syllabic nature of Akkadian cuneiform
shows the actual pronunciation of those Ugaritic words (UVST, Huehnergard 1999). Over one hundred such Ugaritic words appear in lexical texts (ancient dictionaries for scribes), in which the Ugaritic word is written beside its Akkadian equivalent, for example, Ugaritic $ma$-al-$ku$ /malku/ beside the Akkadian for ‘king’, Ugaritic $ši$-i-$ru$ /šīru/ beside the Akkadian for ‘song’. Many other Ugaritic words are found in other Akkadian texts, either as glosses of Akkadian terms or simply in place of the Akkadian term, as in $ta$-ba-ʔa /tabaʔa/ ‘he departed’ (for expected Akkadian $i$be), $šal$-li-$ma$ /šallima/ ‘it delivered’ (for expected Akkadian $u$šallim). In a few apparently Akkadian administrative texts listing professions, all of the phonetically written words are Ugaritic rather than Akkadian, such as $li$-ka-4 $b$-[ú] /kābisu/ ‘fuller’, $li$-$na$-ḫi-$ru$ /nāģiru/ ‘guard’ (PRU 6, no. 136: 8–9, RS 17.240, a list that corresponds closely to the alphabetic list of professions CAT 4.99, RS 11.845). Still other Ugaritic words appear in Akkadian texts in the names of local plots of land or other geographical features, as in A.ŠÀ.ḪI.A di-ip-ra-ni-ma corresponding to alphabetic $g$$t$ $d$prnm /gittu diprānīma/ ‘junipers estate’ (PRU 3 p. 64a: 4; RS 16.190), É.AN. ZA.GÀR ma-ba-ri corresponding to alphabetic $g$$t$ $m$ʔbr /gittu maʔbari/ ‘ford estate’ (Ug. 5 no. 96: 6–7, 19–20; RS 20.012). These syllabic transcriptions also furnish explicit evidence for the pronunciation of Ugaritic, and will be cited where relevant throughout this textbook.

With judicious reference to the three alephs and the syllabic transcriptions, as well as comparative Semitic evidence (see §I.E.4., below), it is thus possible to reconstruct the vocalization—the pronunciation—of a large percentage of Ugaritic words. In this textbook, accordingly, most Ugaritic words are presented not only in transliterations of the alphabetic signs used to write the words, but also in vocalized transcriptions, as in $mlk$ /malku/ ‘king’. Vocalized transcriptions allow the student, and the scholar, to specify clearly and succinctly what she considers the form in question to be, and they indicate a close analysis of the wording of a text. The vocalized transcriptions also allow Ugaritic to be seen as a real language instead of an exercise in decipherment (although some scholars might argue that that is in fact the true nature of reading a Ugaritic text). Thus, students are encouraged to vocalize all texts that they read, even while it must be borne in mind that many such vocalizations can be, at best, well-informed suggestions.

3. Transliteration and Transcription Conventions

As the examples already given show, the vocalized transcription is usually given between slashes, in roman type, following the letter-by-letter transliteration, in italic type, of the word as it is actually written; thus, the example $mlk$ /malku/ ‘king’ indicates that the word is written with the three letters $m$, $l$, $k$, and that its pronunciation was “malku” (in the
nominative = subject case). When the vocalization is significantly less certain, the uncertainty is indicated with a parenthetical question mark after the vocalization, as in *idk */ʾiddāka/(?) ‘then’. When there is no consistent and reliable evidence for the pronunciation of a word, a question mark is simply placed between slashes, as in *ānhr */ʔ/ ‘dolphin’. (The slashes enclosing vocalized transcriptions are dispensed with in paradigm charts.)

In a few cases, the pronunciation of a Ugaritic word as indicated by a syllabic transcription differs slightly from the usual indication of the vowel phonemes, because a vowel was pronounced somewhat differently in a particular phonetic environment within a word. For instance, the vowel */i/ was sometimes pronounced “e” rather than “i” after */l/, and an earlier */a/ was pronounced “e” rather than “a” before */y/, and thus closer to */i/ than to */a/ in the language. These variant pronunciations may be cited between square brackets; for example, the syllabic writing *le‑e* indicates the pronunciation [le] of the preposition */li‑/ ‘to, for’, and the syllabic writing *ḥé‑yu‑ma* indicates [ḥeyyûma] for */ḥiyyûma/ from earlier */ḥayyûma/ ‘life’ (cf. BH ḥayyûm).

Most long vowels, as the examples above illustrate, are indicated with a macron: */ā/, */ī/, */ū/. Long vowels that are the result of the contraction of a diphthong or of two vowels, however, are marked with a circumflex: */â/, */ê/, */î/, */ô/, */û/, as in *šd */šadô/ ‘field’, from earlier */šadawu/ (syllabic ša‑du‑û; cf. BH šāˊde); *mṭb */môṯabu/ ‘dwelling’, from earlier */mawθabu/ (syllabic mu‑ša‑bu; BH môšāb). To denote a vowel of unspecified quality, the symbol “v” is used (and “v̄” for an unspecified inherited long vowel, “v̂” for an unspecified vowel long by contraction).

4. Historical and Comparative Linguistics, Ugaritic, and Biblical Hebrew

Since the majority of students come to Ugaritic from the field of biblical and Hebrew studies, a knowledge of Biblical Hebrew has been assumed, and related Biblical Hebrew words and grammatical features are frequently provided for reference. As already noted, Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew are closely related languages, quite similar in their grammar and their vocabulary; and since both are incompletely attested languages, that is, attested in relatively small corpora, it is natural to compare features of the two languages in the hope that they may elucidate one another (see Hackett 2002b). A few words on the methodology of linguistic comparison are therefore in order.

Languages that exhibit similar grammatical structure and vocabulary, for example, Spanish and French, usually do so because they descend from a common ancestor, such as Latin. In the case of Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew, that common ancestor is an unwritten language, Proto-Northwest Semitic, which linguists reconstruct on the basis of its descendants.
Proto-Northwest Semitic in turn derives from the still earlier Proto-Semitic, the ancestor of all of the Semitic languages (see §1.A., pp. 1–2 above). Languages that descend from a common ancestor, such as Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew, differ from one another because they have undergone different changes since they broke away from that ancestor. For example, the Proto-Semitic and Proto-Northwest Semitic consonant *θ merged with š in Hebrew, but remained a distinct consonant, ṣ, in Ugaritic; conversely, the Proto-Semitic and Proto-Northwest Semitic consonant *š remained distinct in Hebrew, but merged with ı in Ugaritic. Sound changes such as these are said to be regular, that is, they take place in all forms in which they occur: if a Hebrew root or word with ı has a cognate in Ugaritic, that Ugaritic root or word will have ı; if a Ugaritic root or word with ṣ has a cognate in Hebrew, that Hebrew root or word will have ı. For more on comparative and historical Semitic linguistics, see Huehnergard 2002.

The vocalization of Ugaritic, as was noted above, is based on the three alephs, on syllabic transcriptions, and on comparative Semitic evidence. The last of these sources requires some clarification. Consider the Ugaritic word ḫbl ‘cord’; this noun has the same form throughout most of the Semitic languages: Arabic ḫabl, Ethiopic ḫabl, Aramaic ḫabl-ā (-ā is the definite article), and BH ḫabl-ō (‘his cord’, with suffix -ō; without a suffix, of course, the form in BH is ḫébel, because of changes to the vowel pattern in BH; see below). These forms allow a reconstruction of the Proto-Semitic word for ‘cord’ as *ḥabl-. (The * in *ḥabl- indicates a reconstructed form in a proto-language, such as Proto-Semitic or Proto-Northwest Semitic. The dash at the end of *ḥabl- denotes any of several case-endings that are also reconstructed for Proto-Semitic and Proto-Northwest Semitic, but that are not relevant to the discussion here.) The latter form, *ḥabl-, will also have been the form of ‘cord’ inherited into Ugaritic, but it would not be known, a priori, whether the form had undergone any phonetic changes in Ugaritic proper. But consider another Ugaritic word, ksp ‘silver’, and its cognates in other Semitic languages: Akkadian kasp-um; Aramaic kasp-ā, BH kasp-î ‘my silver’; these indicate a Proto-Semitic form *kasp- that would have been inherited into Ugaritic. In the case of this word, there are also syllabic transcriptions, ka-as-p[u] and kês-pu, that show that the form underwent no obvious phonetic changes in Ugaritic, that is, that it continued to have the form /kasp-u/ (with case-ending /-u/). Since ‘silver’ has the same Proto-Semitic pattern as ‘cord’, that is, C₁aC₂C₃ (where C = consonant), it may be assumed, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, that ‘cord’ likewise underwent no phonetic changes in Ugaritic; in other words, it may be assumed, on the basis of the comparative Semitic evidence, that the Ugaritic form of ‘cord’ was /ḥabl-u/, even though there is no hard textual evidence to support this assumption.

Similarly the syllabic writing of a Ugaritic word, la-ba-nu, for /labanu/ ‘white’, shows that the Proto-Semitic form *laban- underwent no significant
changes in Ugaritic, and, therefore, given no evidence to the contrary, it is likely that Ugaritic ḥdṯ ‘new’ had the form /ḥadaṯu/ on the basis of the reconstructed Proto-Semitic *ḥadaθ-. Other Ugaritic forms may likewise be vocalized when the comparative evidence is consistent enough to permit a reconstruction of a Proto-Semitic form and when it seems likely, on the basis of the alephs and of the syllabic transcriptions, that the Ugaritic form did not undergo any significant sound changes. In other instances, however, the alephs or the syllabic transcriptions do indicate phonetic changes, such as the vowel harmony indicated by the alphabetic writing Ῠlp ‘leader’, presumably for /legalArgumentException/ where BH has *[?allâp < *allûp, and by the syllabic writing ḫu-ul-lu-ru ‘chickpea’, presumably for /lluminate/ where Akkadian has ḫallûru. In such instances, the principles of historical linguistics permit the assumption of a general rule that applied to all words that exhibited the same Proto-Semitic pattern (see §III.B.4., pp. 29–30, below).

In still other instances, however, the comparative Semitic evidence is not consistent, and it is therefore more difficult to posit a vocalization for a Ugaritic form if there is no other evidence for its vocalization. An example is Ug. bkr ‘first-born’: BH has bêtōr < *bukur-, Syriac has bukr-ā < *bukr- or *bukur-, Akkadian has bugrum < *bukr- or *bukur-, Arabic has bikr < *bikr-, and Ethiopic has baґar < *bukur- (Fox 1998a: 27); with no direct evidence for its vocalization, it is not clear which, if any, of these patterns the Ugaritic word had; in this textbook, a vocalization corresponding to the proto-form of the BH cognate has generally been selected in such cases, and provided with a question mark, as in /bukuru/? . In a small number of instances, inconsistency in the comparative data is indicated in the Ugaritic vocalization with a parenthesis, as in /hum(ū)/ for hm ‘they’ (masc.), for which some Semitic languages indicate a form /hum/ and others indicate a form /humū/. For a few Ugaritic words no clear Semitic cognates are known; when there is no other evidence for their vocalization, none is provided, as in tr /?/ ‘(steering) pole’.

Finally, it should be noted that some vocalizations proposed on the basis of comparative evidence will be incorrect. For example, the noun ‘sacrifice’ is ḏîbḥ in Arabic, ḏîbḥ-ā in Aramaic, zîb-ḥ-ā with suffix in BH, zaḥî in Ethiopic, and zîb-um in Akkadian, all of which derive from earlier Semitic *ḏîbḥ-, so that the expected pronunciation of Ugaritic dbḥ ‘sacrifice’ is /dibḥu/ (with Proto-Semitic *ḏ > Ug. d); but the syllabic transcription da-ab-ḥu shows that the Ugaritic form was in fact /dabḥu/, unlike in the other Semitic languages (although in Arabic dabḥ also occurs as a verbal noun, ‘sacrificing’). But, as noted above, it is preferable to vocalize Ugaritic forms and texts, so that they may be seen as parts of the real, spoken language that was Ugaritic, rather than as pieces of a decipherment puzzle, and an occasional vocalization that may be false does little harm.

Biblical Hebrew cognates accompany Ugaritic words throughout this book. Thus, a brief review of the history of the Hebrew vowels is in order,
to elucidate the relationships between the Ugaritic and Hebrew forms. As several of the examples already given illustrate, Hebrew underwent a large number of changes in its vowel system. Proto-Northwest Semitic *ḥabl- ‘cord’, as already noted above, appears in BH as ḡébel, while the original base is preserved before pronominal suffixes, as in ḡabl-ō. One of the most far-reaching developments in Hebrew was the loss of short vowels at the ends of words. In nouns and adjectives, this had the effect of eliminating the inherited case system that is still in use in Ugaritic: nominative *yamīnu, genitive *yamīni, accusative *yamīna all became simple *yamin, and, eventually, yāmūn ‘right (hand)’. In verbs, the loss of final short vowels caused originally distinct prefix-conjugation forms, also still distinct in Ugaritic, to merge into a single form in most sound verbs: *yilmadu ‘he will learn’ and *yilmad ‘he learned’ in Hebrew merged in form as yilmad. In Ugaritic, because short final vowels were not lost, these distinctions still obtain. The following additional broad observations may be made about the development of the Hebrew vowels:

- Proto-(Northwest) Semitic long *ī and long ū remained unchanged in BH: *dīn- > dīn ‘judgment’; *rūm- > rūm ‘height’.
- Proto-(Northwest) Semitic long *ā became ō in BH: *ˀadān- > ˀādōn ‘lord’.
- The Proto-(Northwest) Semitic short vowels—*a, *i, *u—as already noted, were lost at the ends of words. Otherwise, they were sometimes preserved (as a = pataḥ, i = hīreq, u = qibbūṣ), sometimes lengthened or lowered (*a to ā = qāmeṣ, *i to ē = šērē, *u to ō = hōlem), sometimes reduced to shewa (ə) or lost entirely, and sometimes altered to other vowel qualities. As an example, note the various BH forms of Proto-Northwest Semitic *kabid- ‘heavy’: singular non-construct kābēd, construct kēbad, plural non-construct kōbēd-īm, construct kibd-ē.

A detailed review of the vowel changes that characterize Hebrew is beyond the scope of the present textbook; the reader is referred to the following for further information: Bauer and Leander 1922, Blau 2010, Hackett 2002a, Joüion and Muraoka 2007, McCarter 2004, Rendsburg 1997, Steiner 1997.

5. Basic Vocabulary and Practice Exercises

Following the presentation of the main features of the grammar are three short “lessons” that introduce some basic Ugaritic vocabulary and present a few exercises. The phrases and sentences in these practice exercises are not taken directly from any actual texts; they are intended solely to provide
practice with the vocabulary and with certain elements of the grammar that may be new to students of Biblical Hebrew, such as the case system, the forms and use of the dual, the various forms of the prefix-conjugation of the verb, and the formation of certain weak verb types.

A key to the practice exercises is given in Appendix B, pp. 189–192.

6. Selection of Texts

The selection of sample texts introduces the student to several of the main genres of texts. The readings begin with prose texts (letters, legal documents, and administrative texts), since these are both shorter and—usually—easier than the poetic literary texts. Parts of two of the great mytho-epic texts, Kirta and Baal, are also included among the readings. Photographs of many of these text samples will give the student practice with reading the cuneiform signs.

The photographs also illustrate the damage that many tablets have suffered. Sometimes pieces of the tablet are broken away, so that several lines or parts of lines must be restored. Sometimes the surface of the tablet has been worn or abraded, so that it is difficult to identify some letters with certainty. Another feature of the tablets shown in the photographs is that letter shapes are not always uniform; like modern handwriting, they frequently show some variation. Letters at the edges of tablets may occasionally be somewhat deformed, or at least appear so in a photograph. Appendix A, by John L. Ellison, provides a description of the way the individual letters were made.

Most tablets are inscribed on both faces. The first side inscribed is called the obverse (or recto); when the obverse was filled, the scribe would often write a line or two on the lower edge of the tablet, and then continue on the reverse (or verso), turning the tablet over along its horizontal axis (contrary to the way a modern page is turned). On a multi-column tablet, the scribe wrote the first column on the left of the obverse—Ugaritic is written from left to right, unlike other Semitic alphabetic scripts—and then moved up to a second column to the right of the first, and, sometimes, to a third such column on the obverse. When the last column on the right of the obverse was filled, the scribe turned the tablet over along its horizontal axis, so that the bottom of the obverse was now under the top of the reverse, and continued to write the first column of the reverse on the right side; thus, the columns on the reverse are read from right to left (even though the lines themselves are read from left to right).

I have not personally seen the tablets of these texts, and so it has been necessary to rely on photographs and on the reports of scholars who have made a personal inspection of the tablets. When those scholars disagree about a particular reading, it has sometimes been necessary to opt for one reading in preference to another, on the basis of my understanding of the
text at hand and of the grammar in general. For the letters, I have normally
relied on the readings of Dennis Pardee, who has made a long and careful
study of those tablets.

Vocalized transcriptions of the sample texts, and translations of the
prose texts, are given in Appendix B, pp. 192–205.

7. Glossary

The glossary includes all Ugaritic words that occur in the presentation of
the grammar, in the vocabularies of the exercises, and in the readings.
Syllabic transcriptions and BH cognates are cited when extant.

8. Appendices

Appendix A, pp. 179–88, by John L. Ellison, provides a description of
the way the Ugaritic scribes made each of the letters, and the variation
in the forms of the letters.

Appendix B, pp. 189–205, is a key to the practice exercises and the
readings.

Appendix C, pp. 207–17, presents the main paradigms of Ugaritic
forms in summary.