A GRAMMAR OF UGARITIC

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A GRAMMAR OF UGARITIC

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with Vladimir Olivero

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For Walter

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John Screnock
Kidlington, UK
20 April 2021

Abbreviations

Grammatical Number

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
d	dual
p/pl	plural
s/sg	singular

Grammatical Case

acc	accusative
gen	genitive
nom	nominative
obl	oblique
voc	vocative

Grammatical Gender

c/com	common
f/fem	feminine
m/masc	masculine

Stems

D	*Doppelungsstamm* (doubled stem)
Dp	passive of D-stem
G	*Grundstamm* (basic stem)
Gp	passive of G-stem
Gt	G-stem with infixed t

L   lengthened stem
N   stem with affixed n, passive of G-stem
R   reduplicated stem
Rt   R-stem with infixed t
Š   stem with affixed š, causative of G-stem
Šp   passive of Š-stem
Št   Š-stem with infixed t
tD   D-stem with infixed t

Additional Grammatical Abbreviations

TAM   tense, aspect, mood

Other Abbreviations

AfO   *Archiv für Orientforschung*
AOAT   Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ANEM   Ancient Near East Monographs
BibOr   *Bibliotheca Orientalis*
HdO   Handbuch der Orientalistik
HSS   Harvard Semitic Studies
JSNL   *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
KTU   Dietrich, Manfried, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín,
                eds. *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*. Münster:
                Ugarit-Verlag, 2013. 3rd enl. ed. of *KTU: The Cuneiform
                Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other
                Places*. Edited by Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and
                Joaquín Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995.
LSAWS   Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
Or   *Orientalia*
RS   Ras Shamra
SAOC   Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
UF   *Ugarit-Forschungen*
WAWSup   Writings from the Ancient World Supplement series

Introduction

This textbook grew out of our experience teaching Ugaritic at the University of Oxford. When I (John Screnock) learned Ugaritic during my PhD, as part of a minor in Northwest Semitic languages at the University of Toronto, I had a number of years of Hebrew and Aramaic under my belt. I was not, however, a comparative Semiticist. Nor did I have extensive knowledge of Akkadian and Arabic like some of my classmates, for whom the existing textbooks on Ugaritic seemed to be designed. The learning curve felt steep at times.

When I began to teach at Oxford in 2015, I used an approach commonly employed in Ugaritic classes: we started reading texts from the first day, learning the grammar inductively. Only the seasoned Hebraists and Assyriologists survived to the end of the first eight-week term. I realized early on during that first term that my students needed a better resource for their first engagement with the language—a first-year grammar of Ugaritic suitable for a wider audience. Over the following years, I developed the present grammar, with the aim of retaining all of the students at Oxford who wanted to learn Ugaritic—graduates and undergraduates, Egyptologists, classicists, archaeologists, linguists, Arabists, Hebraists, Assyriologists, theologians, and even students studying subjects like philosophy and economics. Vladimir Olivero was a student in the class where I trialed the initial chapters; he soon became a trusted coteacher and collaborator, who helped hone the lessons and exercises.

To be clear, our grammar is not meant to be easy. It is intended for students who are serious about studying language in the context of university education. However, the grammar is accessible. We make every effort not to assume background knowledge and concepts from northwest Semitic, Hebrew, Akkadian, or Arabic—none of which should be assumed in an elementary grammar. In our experience of teaching Ugaritic, we have seen massive improvements as a result of using this grammar. Students finish

the course and learn the grammar well. After eight lessons, students are able to read tablets and texts in cuneiform. Many of them go on to learn Ugaritic in greater depth—including questioning the reconstruction of Ugaritic presented here.

In short, if you are a student or are teaching students who do not already know Akkadian, Hebrew, or Arabic, then this is the right place to start. Even if you already have one of these languages, you will learn Ugaritic better by going through our full grammar. In our experience, only students with a strong understanding of comparative Semitics will be better off starting with a grammatical précis and moving straight into texts.

The goal of the textbook is to lead students through the grammar of Ugaritic at a steady pace, giving grammatical information in digestible blocks rather than a single outline. All parts of speech, syntax, and vocabulary are taught gradually from the first lesson. Cuneiform is introduced in lesson 3 and used for exercises throughout the remainder of the lessons. Exercises focus equally on translation from Ugaritic and composition into Ugaritic—using vocalized Ugaritic, unvocalized transcription, and cuneiform. Short stories provide further exposure to the Ugaritic language in narrative contexts, providing repetition of common forms and vocabulary. The range of delivery helps students to fully develop their language skills and provides a good basis for classroom teaching, which can also involve listening and speaking in Ugaritic.

Instructors should, of course, be flexible in the speed at which they move through the textbook, depending on the linguistic experience and time commitments of their students. We cover the eight lessons and five short stories in eight–nine weeks, with one two-hour session per week. The material could be covered more rapidly with multiple sessions per week, or, conversely, instructors can stretch a single lesson over multiple sessions or weeks. Finally, the exercises at the end of each lesson are evenly distributed in terms of difficulty and the grammar and vocabulary that are covered; as a result, instructors can choose to assign only the odd numbered exercises if desired.

Students will learn a reconstruction of Ugaritic that they can use to read texts with fluency. This is not a new reconstruction of Ugaritic, but rather follows current scholarship—in particular, Dennis Pardee and John Huehnergard, whose reconstructions of Ugaritic are similar to one another. This grammar prepares students to use intermediate-level resources such as Pierre Bordreuil and Dennis Pardee's *A Manual of Ugaritic* and John

Huehnergard's *An Introduction to Ugaritic*.[1] Because the *Manual of Ugaritic* in particular contains an excellent collection of texts—including images, line drawings, transcriptions, and vocalizations—this grammar makes an effort to prepare students to read from that corpus. As a result, we tend to follow Pardee's version of Ugaritic the most, and where there is indeterminate evidence about vocalization, we opt for vocalization that aligns with the *Manual of Ugaritic*.

Ugarit

The ancient city-state of Ugarit was located near the coast of the Mediterranean in present-day Syria, near Latakia.[2] The site was inhabited as far back as the eighth millennium, though most of our textual knowledge of Ugarit—thanks to the discovery of thousands of clay tablets, mainly in Akkadian and Ugaritic—comes from the end of the Bronze Age (fourteenth–twelfth centuries BCE). During the Bronze Age, Ugarit was strategically located at the crossroads of ancient Near Eastern civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Levant, and Asia Minor. The territory of Ugarit extended from Mount Ṣaphon in the north to as far south as Siyannu, bounded on the east by the Jabal al-Ansariyeh mountain range and on the west by the Mediterranean Sea. Ugarit also controlled an important port and kept close relations with communities on the island of Cyprus, just across the Mediterranean from Ugarit. Cyprus was a significant source of copper, the main ingredient (with tin) for the valuable metal bronze. Ugarit's location made it an important economic hub. It thrived at the end of the Bronze Age, occupying a pivotal role between the great powers of the time—the Egyptian and the Hittite kingdoms—and functioning as a major link in trade between the Eastern Mediterranean, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and Egypt.

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1. Pierre Bordreuil and Dennis Pardee, *A Manual of Ugaritic*, LSAWS 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009); John Huehnergard, *An Introduction to Ugaritic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012).

2. See the overviews of the city and its history in Itamar Singer, *The Calm before the Storm: Selected Writings of Itamar Singer on the Late Bronze Age in Anatolia and the Levant*, WAWSup 1 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 19–146; and Marguerite Yon, *The City of Ugarit at Tell Ras Shamra* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 7–26.
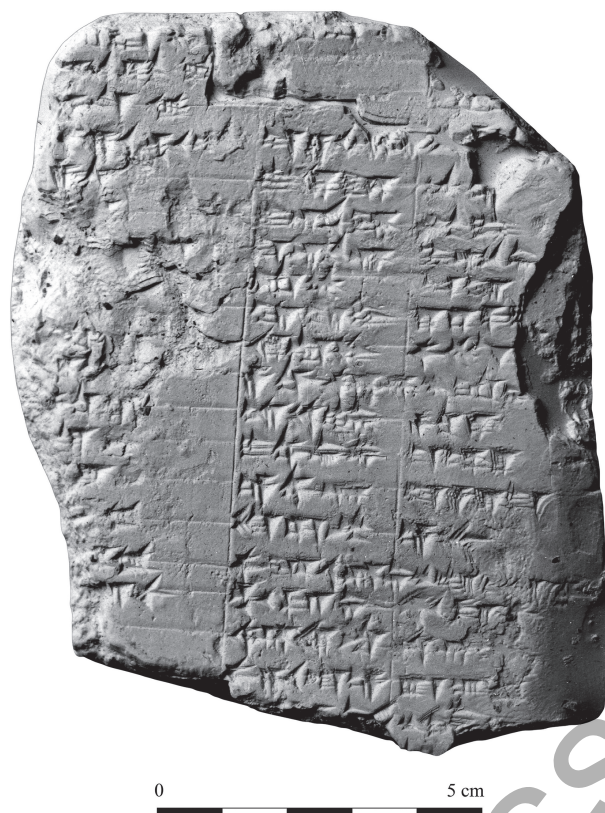
Fig. 1. Quadrilingual vocabulary written in Sumerian, Akkadian, Hurrian, and Ugaritic (RS 20.149; the column with the Sumerian lexical entry is broken off). Image courtesy of Mission archéologique syro-française de Ras Shamra-Ougarit.

Evidence of Ugarit's international status can be seen in the range of languages attested at Ugarit. Textual artifacts written in nine languages have been unearthed at Ugarit: Ugaritic, Akkadian, Hurrian, Sumerian, Hittite, Egyptian, Cypro-Minoan, Phoenician, and Luwian.[3] Texts in Akkadian outnumber texts in any other language, including Ugaritic. Polyglot vocabularies were part of the Ugaritic scribal curriculum based on Mesopotamian education, and today they give scholars a helpful tool for understanding Ugaritic and Hurrian. There are eight copies of a quadrilingual

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3. For a good discussion of the social and linguistic situation to which these artifacts point, see Philip J. Boyes, *Script and Society: The Social Context of Writing Practices in Late Bronze Age Ugarit* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2021), 197–224.

vocabulary written in Sumerian, Akkadian, Hurrian, and Ugaritic. All the columns are written in syllabic cuneiform, which means that the Ugaritic words appearing in the right column are fully vocalized. Figure 1 shows a fragment of one of these quadrilingual vocabularies.

Interestingly, there is a series of Akkadian and Hurrian texts written in the Ugaritic consonantal alphabet rather than in syllabic cuneiform. Hurrian tablets include eleven texts written only in Hurrian and five texts written both in Ugaritic and Hurrian. The genre of the texts of both categories belongs to the religious sphere. Cypro-Minoan, which remains undeciphered, is attested on seven items (four clay tablets, two clay labels, and one silver bowl), whereas Hieroglyphic Luwian occurs in impressions of digraphic seals (Akkadian and Luwian). Hieroglyphic Egyptian is also attested on various items, such as the scarab belonging to Amenophis III or the vase celebrating the wedding of King Niqmaddu. See figure 2 for examples of tablets in Cypro-Minoan, Luwian, and Hieroglyphic Egyptian.

To reconstruct the history of the city, we only have sources found in situ from the second half of the fourteenth century BCE onward (from the reign of Niqmaddu II). The following eight kings have been identified in the texts and in the impressions of seals (as presented by Yon[4]):

> Ammistamru I (?–ca. 1370)
> Niqmaddu II (ca. 1370–1340/35)
> Arhalbu (ca. 1340/35–1332)
> Niqmepa (ca. 1332–1260)
> Ammistamru II (ca. 1260–1230)
> Ibiranu (ca. 1230–1210)
> Niqmaddu III (ca. 1210–1200)
> Ammurapi (ca. 1200–1190/85)

Ammistamru I was probably in a subordinate position to Amenophis III of Egypt. Around 1360, Ugarit moved from the Egyptian to the Hittite sphere of control, after Suppiluliuma attacked Mitanni and expanded his dominion in the area; around the same time, the royal palace of Ugarit was destroyed by a fire.

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4. Yon, *City of Ugarit*, 24.
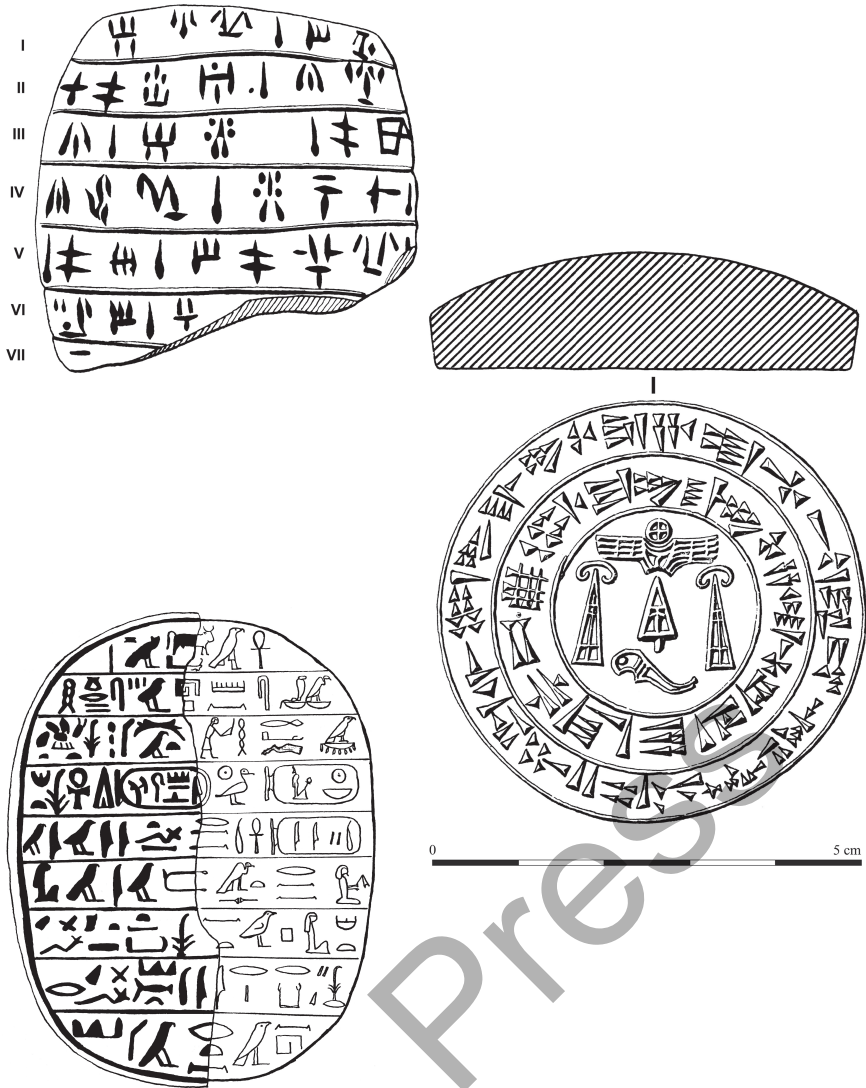
Fig. 2, from top to bottom: (1) Cypro-Minoan tablet (RS 17.006). Source: Olivier Masson in Claude F. A. Schaeffer, *Ugaritica III: Sceaux et cylindres hittites, épée gravée du cartouche de Mineptah, tablettes chypro-minoennes et autres découvertes nouvelles de Ras Shamra* (Paris: Geuthner, 1956), pl. IX b. (2) Seal of Muršili II in Luwian and Akkadian (RS 14.202). Source: Wolfgang Forrer in Schaeffer, *Ugaritica III*, 89, fig. 109. (3) Scarab of Amenophis III (RS 16.094). Source: Paule Krieger in Schaeffer, *Ugaritica III*, 223, fig. 204. Images courtesy of Mission archéologique syro-française de Ras Shamra-Ougarit.

The city of Ugarit was seized and destroyed around 1190–1185 BCE during the Bronze Age collapse.[5] Most ancient sources blame the Bronze Age collapse on invasion by the Sea Peoples, and Ugaritic tablets themselves allude to an impending threat from the sea. The last king of Ugarit, Ammurapi, was unable to stand his ground against these invasions.

The Discovery of Ugarit

The Ugaritic civilization was discovered by accident, when a farmer found that his plow did not penetrate the soil properly in a certain location.[6] Upon further investigation, he found the top stone of a tomb. He had discovered the city's cemetery, near modern day Al-Beida, the bay to the northwest of Ugarit.

The area was under French control at the time, under a mandate of the League of Nations. Soon after the farmer's discovery, news of the find reached the local governor, who contacted the Antiquities Department for Lebanon and Syria. Soon enough, the Louvre museum in Paris became involved and sent an excavation team led by Claude Schaeffer. René Dussaud, curator of the Department of Near Eastern Antiquities at the Louvre, suggested to Shaeffer that he move his attention from the initial site to a hill to the east—Ras Shamra. It was a well-informed suggestion: Ras Shamra is where the ancient city itself was discovered and along with it the majority of texts and other artifacts.

Excavations of Ugarit started in 1929 and have carried on almost uninterrupted since then. Besides Ugarit itself, other important archaeological sites have enhanced our knowledge of the history and social life of the Levantine city. These include Minet el-Beida (ancient Mahadu)—the seaport of Ugarit which was excavated between 1929 and 1935—and Ras Ibn Ḥani, founded by the king of Ugarit in the thirteenth century BCE and situated on a promontory southwest of Ugarit.

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5. On the Bronze Age collapse—the history, events, and cause(s) of which are heavily debated—see, e.g., Eric H. Cline, *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

6. On the discovery of Ugarit, see the summary of Bordreuil and Pardee, *Manual of Ugaritic*, 1–6.

Ugaritic Cuneiform and Language

Ugaritic literature is somewhat unique in the ancient Near East, insofar as it is written using an alphabetic cuneiform system. In the late Bronze Age, the lingua franca, Akkadian, was written using Mesopotamian writing technology: cuneiform on clay tablets and stone. The Egyptian and Hittite Empires, as well as city-states in the Levant, used Akkadian for administration and foreign relations. In the Iron Age, writing technology changed as Aramaic became the lingua franca: the Phoenician alphabet—a linear script whose characters were inspired by Egyptian hieroglyphs, and suitable for writing with ink on material such as papyrus (writing technology from Egypt)—became the preferred writing system.

Ugaritic stands somewhere in between these two eras with their respective linguae franca and writing technologies.[7] Ugaritic uses cuneiform writing technology together with an alphabet. Their scribal curriculum was Mesopotamian,[8] but the influence of the Phoenician alphabet can also be perceived (e.g., in the character for *ŝ*). The testimony of the textual artifacts through time shows that, for a long time, Ugarit primarily used Akkadian; toward the end of the Bronze Age, however, they began to use a unique cuneiform system to represent their own language.[9] The writing system and writing technology of Ugarit, then, exemplify its geographic, economic, and political position: at the crossroads of different cultures, dependent on other civilizations yet powerful in its own way. Just as Ugarit was at the hinge of several empires geopolitically, Ugaritic was at the hinge of Late Bronze and Early Iron Age writing systems.

When modern scholars first encountered Ugaritic tablets, they did not know how to read Ugaritic cuneiform. The system, though technologically the same as Akkadian cuneiform, apparently did not derive its characters from Akkadian or Sumerian cuneiform. At the time, no one had unearthed multilingual texts that could help in deciphering Ugaritic cuneiform and understanding the language itself, like the Rosetta Stone had done for the decipherment of hieroglyphs. One thing, however, was clear

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7. For a nuanced overview of the developments in writing technologies during this period and the emergence of alphabetic cuneiform, see Boyes, *Script and Society*, 43–84.

8. See above on the many word lists that use Akkadian and Ugaritic.

9. See Robert Hawley, Dennis Pardee, and Carole Roche-Hawley, "The Scribal Culture of Ugarit," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 2 (2015): 229–67.

enough: the writing system had around thirty total characters, which must make up an alphabet. Charles Virolleaud, the team member responsible for texts and language, identified one of these characters (a small, vertical wedge) as a word divider, rather than a letter (see §3.8). This suspicion turned out to be correct and crucial in the decipherment of Ugaritic. As more scholars attempted to decipher the script and the language, various theories emerged. Hans Bauer, a Semiticist, approached the task on the assumption that the language was Semitic. Using Virolleaud's idea that the small wedge was a word divider, Bauer started to identify characters that most commonly occur in Semitic languages at the beginnings and ends of words (e.g., *t*, often used in verbal prefixes and suffixes). Other scholars, including Virroleaud, joined in this promising approach. When an economic text containing words for numerals was discovered, Virolleaud was able to work out many more letters based on the widely attested common stock of words for numbers in Semitic languages. By 1931, the alphabet had essentially been deciphered. When multilingual vocabulary lists (see above) were later discovered, they confirmed the initial decipherment.

The thirty-letter cuneiform alphabet is attested in numerous abecedaries (cf. *KTU* 5.4; 5.5; 5.6; 5.8; 5.9 i.17–18; 5.12; 5.13; 5.14; 5.16; 5.17; 5.20; 5.21; 5.28; 5.32).[10] In one of these witnesses, *KTU* 5.14, the alphabet is preserved along with the syllabic transcription of each letter (A, BE, GA, ḪA, etc.). Unfortunately, the two columns are fragmentary, and only the first ten and the last ten letters are preserved (i.e, two-thirds of the alphabet). The tablet, discovered in 1955, was a further confirmation of the correct decipherment of the Ugaritic language. Besides the abecedaries containing the so-called long alphabet, two more abecedaries have been discovered. These tablets, *KTU* 5.24 and 5.27, both preserve a cuneiform alphabet in a different order (*ḥ l h m q w ṯ r* etc.), corresponding in many ways to southern Semitic order. The former was discovered in Beth Shemesh in 1987 and contains twenty-three signs, whereas the latter, found in Ugarit in 1988, has twenty-seven signs. They constitute the earliest witnesses of an order later attested for Old South Arabian.[11]

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10. Text references are given according to the standard edition, abbreviated *KTU*: Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín, eds., *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013), 3rd enl. ed. of *KTU: The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places*, ed. Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995).

11. Cf. A. G. Loundine, "L'abécédaire de Beth Shemesh," *Le Muséon* 100 (1987):

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                              Semitic
                    ┌────────────────────────┐
              West Semitic               East Semitic
          ┌────────────┴──────┐          ┌──────┴──────┐
     Ethiopian        Central Semitic              Akkadian
                    ┌────────┴──────┐
            Northwest Semitic      Arabic
        ┌──────────┼──────────┐
    Aramaic     Canaanite    Ugaritic
              ┌──────┴──────┐
          Hebrew         Phoenician
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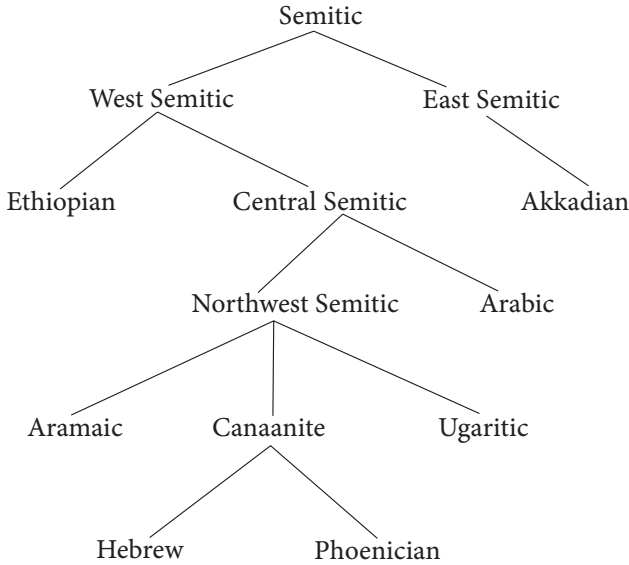
Fig. 3. Ugaritic in the Semitic Language Family

There are also ten tablets that make use of a short alphabet of twenty-two letters. Often, these texts run from right to left, as in Phoenician, and are likely to represent a cuneiform version of the linear alphabet. No short-alphabet abecedary has been preserved. The tablets come from Ugarit (*KTU* 4.31; 4.710), Minet el-Beida (*KTU* 1.77), Tell Taʿanakh (*KTU* 4.767), Tabor (*KTU* 6.1), Kamid el-Loz (*KTU* 6.2; 6.67), Hala Sultan Tekke (*KTU* 6.68), Sarepta (*KTU* 6.70), and Tell Nebi Mend (*KTU* 6.71).[12]

Ugaritic is a Northwest Semitic language, similar to Phoenician, Hebrew, and Aramaic (see fig. 3). Though it shares many features with both Phoenician and Hebrew, it does not belong to the Canaanite sub-branch of Northwest Semitic (*contra* some scholars). There is a set of distinctive characteristics that keeps Ugaritic apart from the Canaanite subgroup, such as the absence of the Canaanite shift ($\bar{a} > \bar{o}$), the (near?)

243–50; Pierre Bordreuil and Dennis Pardee, "Un abécédaire du type sud-sémitique découvert en 1988 dans les fouilles archéologiques françaises de Ras Shamra-Ougarit," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 139 (1995): 855–60.

12. For a thorough discussion, see Josef Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik*, 2nd ed., AOAT 273 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), 73–80.

absence of a determinative article (which may nonetheless be due to the early attestation of the language); the occurrence of the relative pronoun *d* instead of *š-*, *ʾš*, or *ʾašer*; the prefix *ša* in the causative stem (compare *ha* in Hebrew and *ya* [< *ha*] in Phoenician); and the presence of independent pronouns for the accusative and genitive case.[13]

What is known about Ugaritic reflects the very final stages of the documentation in this language and hails from the last century in the life of the city (ca. 1300–1190 BCE). The texts in which Ugaritic has been preserved belong to different genres and speak to the thriving intellectual and economic environment that the community of the city enjoyed. Besides the most famous poetic and religious texts, there are also letters, legal texts, economic and administrative texts, and scribal exercises.

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13. Though outdated, see Daniel Sivan, *A Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 3. Several occurrences of *h* before a noun can be understood as an article, e.g., *habbêta* (*KTU* 2.70), "the house," and *hayyêna* (RS 94.2284), "the wine." It is also possible to analyze these cases as a previous phase in the grammaticalization of *hanna*, where *han-* is cliticized to the beginning of a noun but has a more deictic function, i.e., *habbêtu*, "this house," and *hayyênu*, "this wine." See Aaron D. Rubin, *Studies in Semitic Grammaticalization* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 76; Bordreuil and Pardee, *Manual of Ugaritic*, 57. Note also the phonological change from (proto-Semitic) *ḏ* to *d*, not uncommon in Ugaritic, rather than *ḏ* > *z* as in Phoenician and Hebrew.