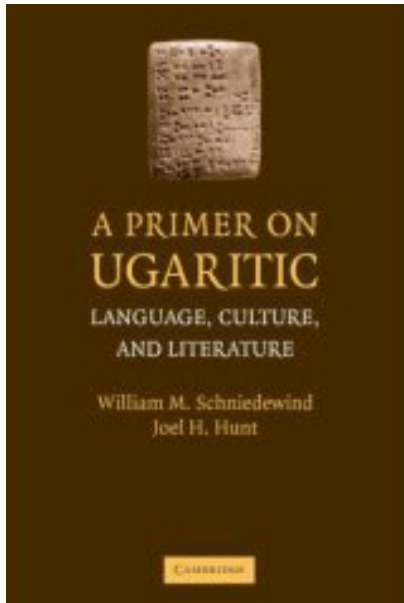


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Schniedewind, William M.. and Joel H. Hunt

A Primer on Ugaritic Language, Culture, and Literature

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xv + 226. Paper. \$39.99. ISBN 9780521704939.

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This primer by Schniedewind and Hunt is the first of its kind and as such highlights the lamentable, if understandable, contrast between learning Ugaritic and learning Biblical Hebrew. While facility in both languages is necessary for understanding the cultural artifacts—language, history, and literature—of Late Bronze and Iron Age Syria-Palestine, Hebrew has a distinct advantage in the broad academic marketplace: it is the gateway to the academic study of the Hebrew Bible. Thus, introductions to Biblical Hebrew language and texts abound, but Schniedewind and Hunt's volume is the first pedagogically thoughtful, introductory textbook to the Ugaritic language.

The first chapter of the primer is an eminently readable orientation to Ugaritic and its eponymous city. The subsections introduce the student to the location of the site (1.1), the history of excavations and the discovery of the texts (1.2), a brief history of the ancient city (1.3), a few highlights of what we can reconstruct about life in Ugarit (1.4), the basics of Ugaritic religion (1.5), an overview of the genres into which the Ugaritic texts are typically divided (1.6), and, finally, a number of quick illustrations highlighting the importance of Ugaritic studies for the study of the Hebrew Bible (1.7).

Chapters 2–6 are a chrestomathy of texts arranged by genre. Schniedewind and Hunt use each chapter to present texts (most in Ugaritic script) with commentary (at least on the initial texts of each chapter), to present grammar inductively, and to illustrate how we might reconstruct vocalization or draw literary parallels with Akkadian texts, biblical texts, and so forth. The progression of texts begins with school texts (2), which the authors use to highlight the presence of scribal schools at Ugaritic, to discuss the various classifications of Ugaritic within West Semitic, and, of course, to introduce the Ugaritic “alphabet” (on this, see below). After this, Schniedewind and Hunt move students through letters (3), administrative texts (4), legal texts (5), and, finally, literary texts (6). In chapter 7 Schniedewind and Hunt present a grammatical sketch of Ugaritic, followed by a glossary (8) and an annotated list of resources for further study (9).

Schniedewind and Hunt’s primer is an excellent first step in the serious writing of Ugaritic textbooks. The dearth of teaching-oriented introductions to Ugaritic, with graded exercises and some textual commentary, is simply inexcusable. We have such textbooks for Akkadian, Egyptian, Arabic, and Hebrew, among many other Semitic languages, so why do we expect students, even at the graduate level, simply to absorb Ugaritic by reading primary texts and poring over reference grammars and lexica? Admittedly, some proficiency can be and has been achieved by such methods, but the vast majority of students will acquire a language, whether ancient or modern, more quickly, with fewer grammatical gaps, and with more empathy for the foreign language texts if the acquisition process is founded on a modicum of language pedagogy. From the introduction to the *Primer*, it is clear that Schniedewind and Hunt are concerned about how students who come to Ugaritic will best learn the language. Thus, the *Primer* is neither a reference grammar nor a medium-length grammatical sketch followed by text examples. Instead, Schniedewind and Hunt start with texts, because they believe that grammar “is acquired in the course of reading texts” (3). In the same vein, they do not throw the student into the grammatical deep end by presenting epic poetry first; instead, they deem nonpoetic texts, that is, letters, administrative texts, legal texts, to be a pedagogically more suitable starting point (3). Indeed, the chapter on letters is the largest in the chrestomathy, consisting of fifty-one pages (by comparison, the chapter on literary/poetic texts consists of only forty-one pages).

The book is not without its problems, though. First, it needs further editing. It is not just the typos or occasional ungrammatical statement that prompts this criticism,¹ but the

1. The following examples caught my eye: “*précis*” is spelled with an incorrect accent (“*precís*”) numerous times; the maps on 5–6 and the photographs on 35 and 37 are of poor quality (in my paperback copy, at least); “*Figures*” should not be capitalized on 19; the sentence starting on line 19 of 33 is ungrammatical; 𐎗 must certainly be meant for 𐎗𐎖 in line 2 on 66; “*UBD*” is a mistake for “*UDB*” (abbr. *Ugaritic Databank*) on

numerous redundancies in content. For instance, chapter 1 often reads as if the subsections had been written separately and stitched together with minimal editing. Moreover, I see no reason why grammatical items are presented both in the chrestomathy and in the grammatical précis (e.g., nominal morphology on 48–49 and in §7.4). Simple cross-references between the textual chapters and chapter 7 would provide sufficient clarity and allow Schniedewind and Hunt more space to comment on interesting linguistic or literary features of the texts.

Equally questionable is why Schniedewind and Hunt chose not to vocalize each item in the vocabulary, particularly given that they do not avoid reconstructed vocalization in the notes to the individual texts or in the grammatical précis. Moreover, from a teaching perspective, to have the entire glossary vocalized would serve multiple purposes. For instance, it would allow typical beginning students to learning the basics of Ugaritic without spending 90 percent of their time on the complex process of reconstructing vocalization. In other words, including vocalization in an introductory textbook treats Ugaritic as a real and thus learnable language. Additionally, when (or if) the student is required to start vocalizing, Schniedewind and Hunt's vocalizations would provide a gradual entry into the process. I can imagine using a fully vocalized glossary as a foil for the students as they engage the various steps in identifying plausible vocalizations. Even if it is concluded that Schniedewind and Hunt's reconstruction is less preferable, determining a more preferable vocalization and the reasons for such would be an excellent learning activity.

Finally, it is a quibble, but one worth noting for students: Ugaritic does not have an "alphabet." The term "alphabet" is used to describe writing systems that represent both consonants and vowels as single graphemes. Instead, Ugaritic scribes used a modified *abjad* (a term coined by Peter Daniels), a system in which only the consonants are represented (the Ugaritic *abjad* is modified by the addition of the *alef-i* and *alef-u* graphemes to the original *alef-a* grapheme).

In conclusion, Schniedewind and Hunt's primer is a very welcome addition to the limited teaching resources for the Ugaritic classroom. It is affordable, well-organized, and enjoyable to work through. When I received Schniedewind and Hunt's primer for review, I

93; the contracted diphthong *ô* is mistakenly written as *ô* at the top of 150; the word "strong" is misspelled in the subsection title 7.4.8.3 on 161; Hebrew קִרְיָן is a better cognate than קִרְיָן for the *qutl*-pattern *urk* on 161; the first vowel in the words *marî u* and *marî atu* is mistakenly given as *â* on 162; no vocalization is provided for *qdqd* "head" on 163; the noun *adn* "father, lord" is listed under two different noun patterns (*qatâl* and "suffixed -n") on 162–63; the G stem is incorrectly listed as one of the derived stems at the bottom of 165; Zürich is misspelled in n. 8 on 166; and the *n* in **yabniy* is missing on 177.

had not yet decided what books I was going to require for my graduate Ugaritic course next year. I will certainly require students to choose one of the reference grammars on the market, depending on their long-term interests and language abilities (e.g., D. Sivan's *A Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* [Leiden, 1997], J. Tropper's massive *Ugaritische Grammatik* [Münster, 2000], or P. Bordreuil and D. Pardee's recent *Manuel d'Ougaritique* [Paris, 2004], an English version of which is forthcoming from Eisenbrauns). Now, however, I am also considering using Schniedewind and Hunt's *Primer* as the gateway text (I am hoping, however, that they produce a revised edition in the near future). Schniedewind and Hunt's book may be only a first step in the writing of Ugaritic textbooks, but it is a good first step.