Times have never been better for students seeking an introduction to the Ugaritic language. The book under review is the third introductory textbook in English to appear in seven years,¹ and with the abundance of additional grammatical and lexical reference works now available, used together with comprehensive bibliographies,² text editions, commentaries, and periodical literature, a serious student can advance from beginner to researcher in less time than might have been possible at an earlier stage of the field.³

Huenergard dedicates this manual to Frank Moore Cross, whose name recalls both the “Albrightian” heritage of Northwest Semitic studies at Harvard and the abundant intellectual progress and scholarly productivity that flowed from Cambridge to the world academy. The work stands as a tribute to greatness in teachers and colleagues: examples

3. Robert D. Holmstedt’s review of Schniedewind and Hunt’s Primer (RBL 04/2008) lamented the unavailability of introductory texts and learning aids. Much has changed in seven years.
of unflinching commitment, attainment by diligence, and intelligent humility are emulated throughout. The book is also a model of economy in design and organization.


The remainder of the book is devoted to practice, revealing the pedagogical orientation of the entire manual. Basic vocabulary and practice exercises (89–98) prepare the student to work through a selection of texts (99–138) that leads from prose (letters, legal, and administrative/economic texts) to verse (Kirta, tablet 1, and a segment of Baal and Yam). The glossary (139–61) is concise yet complete, and vocalization of most entries critically aids the beginner. The bibliography (166–77) is judiciously selected. There are three appendixes: “The Ugaritic Alphabetic Script,” by John L. Ellison (179–88), with diagrams to aid students in drawing Ugaritic letters; keys to practice exercises and selected texts (189–205); and paradigms (207–17). After an index of texts (219–22), fifty-one color plates—all but ten of which are images of texts—give the student immediate access to the primary epigraphic record.

It goes without saying that this book is also a record of practice in the classroom (acknowledged on xiii), and it bears the marks of a process of discovering the suitable limits, minimal and maximal, to the information both necessary and sufficient for instruction.

An illustration demonstrates one type of variation among the current trio of introductory textbooks. Schniedewind and Hunt’s Primer fully vocalizes segments of sample exercise texts as part of the commentary and also presents each sample in printed Ugaritic script as well as roman transliteration. Bordreuil and Pardee’s Manual fully vocalizes each practice text in a section immediately following the transliterated consonantal text with English translation and provides a hand copy in a preceding section. Huehnergard vocalizes explanatory examples but groups fully vocalized exercise texts in an appendix (188–205; the texts are not presented in Ugaritic script). Such an arrangement is traditional in primers and is intended to inhibit the tendency to parrot the text in vocalizing instead of doing the necessary learning first.

Each of these strategies serves diverse pedagogical purposes and will appeal to the various possible motives students might have for learning the language. Mutually they support a
range of learning styles and strengths. No student of the language is compelled to choose among these textbooks for the “best” one. The books have different goals, and the student can benefit at different stages of learning from each of them.

Vocabulary and dictional choices within the books can also serve different ends. The Primer, for example, is highly accommodating to beginners, avoiding technical linguistic terminology except where necessary. Bordreuil and Pardee are more demanding in this regard, both in vocabulary choices, most often selecting the precise linguistic term, and in diction, which is concise. Huehnergard has found a middle ground that, together with the book’s organization of topics in small segments with (vocalized) examples, is likely to appeal to beginning students with some competence in another Semitic language but limited exposure to linguistics.

A small but noteworthy distinction is evident in the presentation of the phonological history of the sibilants by the three introductory texts.

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<th>Ugaritic grapheme</th>
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Huehnergard’s Introduction (25) accounts for the distinction between the Proto-Semitic affricate consonants ʾs and ʾṯ and the emphatic lateral fricative ʾṣ. In an introductory text, such precision will escape most students, but the instructor can be confident of the current and complete knowledge base on which the entire book rests.

This book has great potential to expand and increase functional knowledge of the Ugaritic language among students of linguistics, biblical studies, ancient history, and comparative literature. At a time when access to primary sources in this field has never been better, and secondary sources are abundant, interest in the language waits for a revival. My hope is that, with this book and the others mentioned, English-speaking students will continue to learn and study Ugaritic, expanding understanding of each type
of text represented and building upon the significant foundation of textual studies already established.