

Visual Poetry in the Ugaritic Tablet KTU 1.4

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Shortly after the Ugaritic texts that were found in Ras Shamra began to be interpreted, it was discovered that many were written in a poetic style.¹ Ugaritic poetry is rich in literary devices such as repetition, word-pairs, parallels, similes, alliteration, and so on. This poetry and its resemblance to Biblical poetry has been the subject of many studies over the past eighty years.² This article deals with a specific epigraphic method that an Ugaritic scribe used in order to highlight anaphoric poetic structures.

*KTU 1.4 (CTA 4; UT 51; RS 2.[008], 3.341, 3.347)*³

The tablet KTU 1.4 was found during the first excavations in the "Great Priest's House" at Ras Shamra. Its measurements are 26 cm. by 22 cm. It consists of several fragments and over 400 complete or partial rows of text. The text was first translated by Virolleaud,⁴ and it has been translated

¹ This mainly refers to tablets: KTU 1.1 -1.12; KTU 1.14 -1.16; KTU 1.17 -1.19; KTU 1.20 -1.23 and more.

² For further reading see K. T. Aitken, "Word Pairs and Tradition in an Ugaritic Tale," *UF* 21 (1989), 17-38; A. Berlin, "Parallel Word Pairs: A Linguistic Explanation," *UF* 15 (1983), 7-16; eadem, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); M. Dahood, "Ugaritic – Hebrew Syntax and Style," *UF* 1 (1969), 20-36; L. R. Fisher, *Ras Shamra Parallels I: The Texts from Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1972); O. Loretz and I. Kottsieper, *Colometry in Ugaritic and Biblical Poetry: Introduction, Illustrations, and Topical Bibliography* (Altenbeeege: Akademische Bibliothek, 1987); S. B. Parker, "The Use of Similes in Ugaritic Literature," *UF* 36 (2004), 357-69; idem (ed.), *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); S. Segert, "Parallelism in Ugaritic Poetry," *JAOS* 103 (1983; S. N. Kramer Festschrift), 295-306; W. G. E. Watson, "Internal Parallelism in Ugaritic Verse," *SEL* 1 (1984), 53-67; idem, "Number Parallelism Again," *UF* 25 (1993), 435-40; et al.

³ KTU (CAT) = M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, J. Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras ibn Hani and Other Places* (AOAT 3601/1; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013), 18-24; CTA = A. Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939* (Paris : P. Guethner, 1963), 20-31; UT = C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), 169-74.

⁴ Ch. Virolleaud, "Un nouveau chant du poème d'Aleïn-Baal," *Syria* 13 (1932), 113-63.

several times over the past 80 years. It is universally agreed that the text is one of the main parts of the Baal Cycle.⁵ A partial colophon written on the left side of this tablet survived: [...]*y . nqmd . mlk . ugrt*. This colophon is similar to the one at the end of KTU 1.6: *spr. Ilmlk šbny... t'y . nqmd . mlk ugr[t]* (VI, 54-57). This suggests that KTU 1.4 and KTU 1.6 were written by the same master-scribe, Ilu-milku, who was probably one of the king's scribes.⁶

Poetry writing in KTU 1.4

In general, it seems that the scribe wished to utilize fully every space available and to cram as many words as possible on the tablet's surface. This is manifested in several ways. (a) The scribe exceeded the limits of the columns by often writing on the dividing lines between the columns.⁷ (b) On occasion the scribe chose to run a word over two lines. This method saved a considerable amount of space, in spite of its causing problems of interpretation. According to Segert, the scribe spread 19 words over two rows in KTU 1.4.⁸ (c) The scribe spread poetic structures over two rows and

⁵ For various opinions on the continuity of the "Baal Cycle," see G. del Olmo Lete, *Mitos y Leyendas de Canaan* (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1981), 83. For some important translations of KTU 1.4 as a part of the "Baal Cycle," see U. Cassuto, *The Goddess Anath* (trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1971); J. C. de-Moor, *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 1-101; del Olmo Lete, *Mitos y Leyendas*, 79-235; T. H. Gaster, *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East* (New-York: Harper, 1966), 11-129; J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (2nd ed.; Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1978), 37-81; J. Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan: the Ras Shamra Texts and their Relevance to the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1957), 18-72; B. Margalit, *A Matter of "Life" and "Death": A Study of the Baal-Mot Epic (CTA 4-5-6)* (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker / Neukirchen-Vlun: Neukirchner-Verlag, 1980); M. S. Smith, "Baal," in Parker (ed.), *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, 81-180; M. S. Smith and W. T. Pitard, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle; Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.3-1.4* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

⁶ His name also appears at the end of tablet KTU 1.16 (the Kirta epic). For more on Ilu-milku, see D. F. Freilich, "Ili-Malku the t'y," *SEL* 9 (1992), 21-26; G. Mazzini, "Baal and Niqmaddu – A Suggestion to Ugaritic KTU 1.2 I, 36-38," *SEL* 21 (2004), 65-69; N. Wyatt, "Ilimilku's Ideological Programme: Ugaritic Royal Propaganda and a Biblical Postscript," *UF* 29 (1997), 775-96.

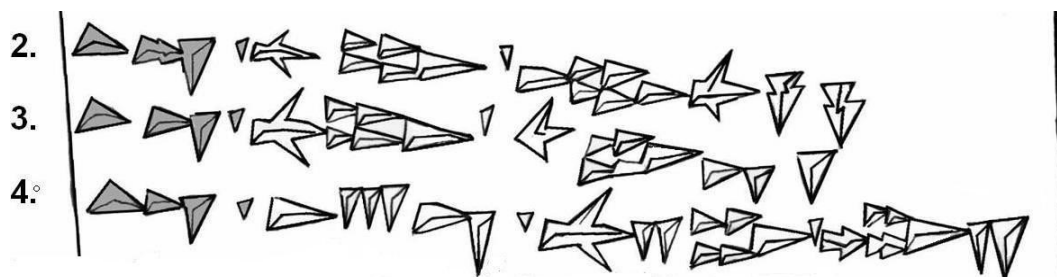
⁷ Examples: KTU 1.4, I, rows 16; 17; 18; 20; 21; 29. In column III, rows 25; 27; 31. In column VI, row 33 and more. The scribe also wrote on the edges of the tablet and on its bottom in order to save writing space. For more on the peculiarities of this tablet, see W. T. Pitard, "Watch that Margin! Understanding the Scribal Peculiarities of CAT 1.4 Obverse," *Maarav* 15 (2009): 27-37.

⁸ See S. Segert, "Words Spread over Two Lines," *UF* 19 (1987), 283-88; see further J. Yogev, "How Wide Should a Column Be?" *UF* 42 (2011), 847-52.

more;⁹ therefore, it is almost impossible to determine the limits of parallels in this tablet by visual appearance alone. Yet, on some occasions the scribe chose to represent certain units in an visually aesthetic manner, highlighting the poetic structures.

Ugaritic poetry is rich in repetitive patterns. One of these is anaphora, a rhetorical device of emphasis that occurs when a scribe repeats one or more words at the beginning of successive sentences or clauses.¹⁰ In order to highlight this phenomenon, the scribe chose to give each hemistich a row of its own. This leads to a vertical sequence of signs at the beginning of a column, which is very noticeable. There follow three examples of this method of writing from KTU 1.4.¹¹

Example A: KTU 1.4, VIII, 2-4 – A triple appearance



⁹ Although this is a matter of interpretation, one can compare this tablet with KTU 1.10, in which the scribe dedicated every row for the writing of a discrete hemistich. See further F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Space, Line and the Written Biblical Poem in Texts from the Judean Desert," in W. T. Pitard, S. Fine, and M. J. Lundberg (eds.), *Puzzling Out the Past: Studies in Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures in Honor of Bruce Zuckerman* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 19-62; H. Wansbrough, "Metra Ugaritica: Pro et Contra," *BSOAS* 46 (1983), 221-34; N. Wyatt and W. G. E. Watson (eds.), *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 166; W. G. E. Watson, "Lineation (Stichometry) in Ugaritic Verse," *UF* 14 (1982), 311-12; J. Yegorov and Sh. Yona, "Visual Poetry in KTU 1.2," *UF* 46 (2016), 447-53.

¹⁰ See K. Ehlich, "Anaphora and Deixis: Same, Similar, or Different," in R. J. Jarvella and W. Klein (eds.), *Speech, Place and Action* (Chichester: Wiley, 1982), 315-38; W. Farnsworth, *Farnsworth's Classical English Rhetoric* (Boston: Godine, 2010), 16; J. P. Fokkerman, *Reading Biblical Poetry* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 255; B. T. Hall, "Key Concepts in ELT: Anaphora," *ELT Journal* 51 (1997), 406-7; J. Hankamer and I. Sag, "Deep and Surface Anaphora," *Linguistic Inquiry* 7 (1976), 391-428; W. G. E. Watson, *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 89. For examples of anaphora in biblical prose and poetry, see, e.g., Isa. 11:2; Hos. 2:21-22; Ps. 148:2-4; Neh. 5:2-4.

¹¹ All of the facsimiles were made according to high-resolution images from the Inscriptifacit databank of West Semitic Research. We are grateful to all of those who help produce this wonderful project.

The appearance of a triple anaphora is common in the Ugaritic texts.¹² Here is a transcription and translation of this unit:

2. ^ʿm . ḡr . trḡzz To mount Trḡzz
3. ^ʿm . ḡr . ṭrmg To mount Ṭrmg
4. ^ʿm . tlm . ḡṣr . arṣ To the hills at world's end

After the glorious banquet that marks the completion of Baal's palace,¹³ Baal changes his mind about installing a window in his house.¹⁴ Then Baal gives a speech to his messengers, Ugaru and Gapnu,¹⁵ before sending them to Mot, the god of the underworld. The word ^ʿm is repeated three times in rows 2-4. It is a preposition that refers to a certain place.¹⁶ It is the anaphoric emphasis of this unit, which highlights the first moment in which Baal wishes to contact Mot. The third extended hemistich of this tricolon breaks the anaphoric pattern and highlights the end of the cluster.¹⁷ It is quite clear that there was plenty of space at the end of rows 2-3 to write the word ^ʿm, which begins rows 3-4. The scribe chose to give each hemistich a row of its own,

¹² See KTU 1.3, III, 41-45; 1.5, V, 8-11; 1.12, II, 58-60; 1.19, II, 8-10; 1.100, 70-7.

¹³ The description of the banquet begins at KTU 1.4, VI, 38, and continues until approximately the end of the column.

¹⁴ See KTU 1.4, VI, 14-29.

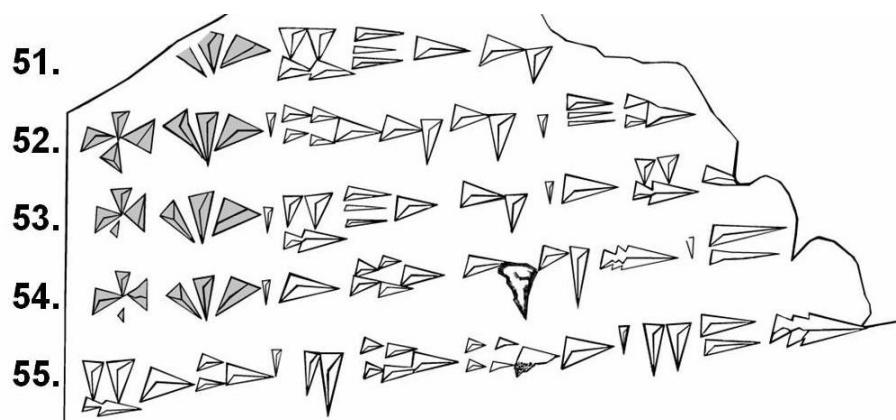
¹⁵ See H. L. Ginsberg, "Baal's Two messengers," *BASOR* 95 (1944), 25-30.

¹⁶ See D. Sivan, *A Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (corrected ed.; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 199-200. Cf the word 'm as a preposition with respect to a certain place in biblical literature; e.g., Gen. 25:11; 35:4; Judg. 9:6.

¹⁷ For more on the rhetorical closure of poetic structures in Biblical Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, and Rabbinic literature, see Y. Avishur, *Phoenician Inscriptions and the Bible*, Vol A. (Jerusalem: Rubenstein, 1979), 22-23 [Hebrew]; D. N. Freedman, "Deliberate Deviation from an Established Pattern of Repetition in Hebrew Poetry as a Rhetorical Device," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 45; R. Gordis, "On the Structure of Ancient Hebrew Poetry," *Sefer Ha-Shana Li-Yhude Amerika* (New-York, 1944), 136-159 [Hebrew]; E. L. Greenstein, "How Does Parallelism Mean?" in *A Sense of Text* (JQRSup. 1982; 1983), 41-70. B. Herrnstein-Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 53; A. Richards, "How Does a Poem Know When It Is Finished," in D. Lerner (ed.), *Parts and Wholes* (New York-London: Glencoe Free Press, 1963), 163-76; A. Mirsky, *Ha-Pisuk shel Ha-Signon Ha-Ivri* (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook, 1978), 37 [Hebrew]; W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry, A Guide to its Techniques* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 179, n. 43; Sh. Yona, "Rhetorical Features in Talmudic Literature," *HUCA* 77 (2006), 95-98; idem, "Shared Stylistic Patterns in the Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar and Hebrew Wisdom," *ANES* 44 (2007), 31-49. The phenomenon of highlighting closure in ancient Near Eastern poetry, biblical poetry, the book of Ben Sira and rabbinic literature, is thoroughly discussed in a forthcoming monograph by Sh. Yona.

leading to a triple visual appearance that is distinguished from the other rows of the text. We suggest that this unit is a turning-point or a climax in the story-line. The scribe intended that it be noticeable to the reader.

Example B: KTU 1.4, V, 51-55 – A quadruple appearance



The appearance of a highlighted quadruple anaphoric structure appears twice in tablet KTU 1.4. Unfortunately, only this example is well preserved.¹⁸

51. [ḥ]šbhtm [ktr]	Quickly, a house, Kotharu ¹⁹
52. ḥš . rmm . hk[lm]	Quickly, set up a palace
53. ḥš . bhtm . tbn[n]	Quickly, a house you shall build
54. ḥš . trmmn . h[klm]	Quickly, set up a palace
55. btk . šrrt . špn	Within the peaks of Šapan

Most of the text in columns IV and V deals with the divine council's decision to authorize a palace for Baal. Baal receives the good news from the goddess Anath.²⁰ Immediately he calls for the god Kotharu wa-Ḥasisu to

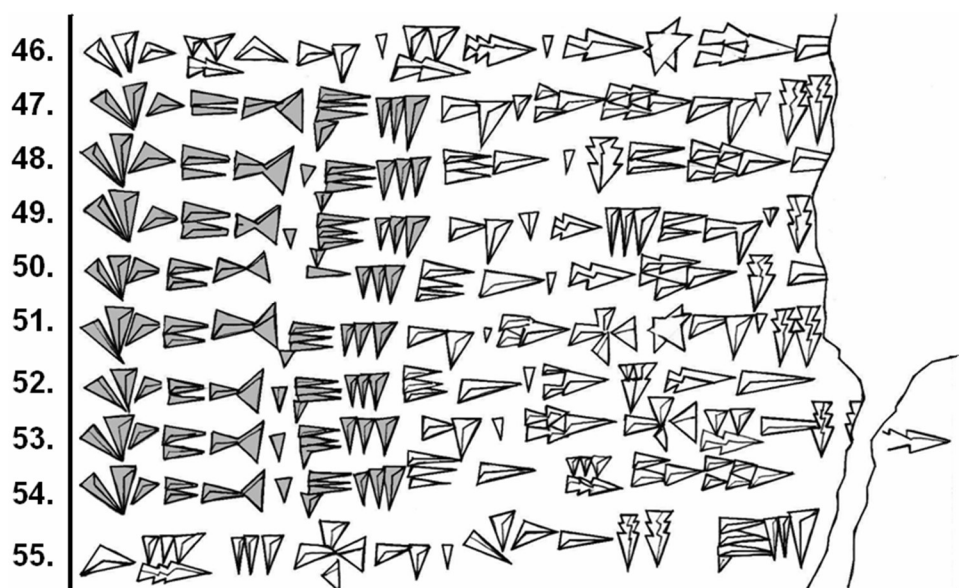
¹⁸ The other example appears in KTU 1.4, IV, 52-55. The word *mtb* is repeated at the beginning of all four rows.

¹⁹ It is also possible to restore row 51 according to row 53; see C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature: A Comprehensive Translation of the Poetic and Prose Texts* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1949), 34.

²⁰ KTU 1.4, V, 20-29.

begin the construction of the palace.²¹ The word *ḥš* (Quickly) is the anaphoric emphasis of this pattern that is repeated four times. As in the preceding example, the fifth hemistich also breaks the pattern and highlights this anaphoric structure. Baal longs for a palace, and he cannot wait for it to be finished. The scribe made sure this emphasis would be visually noticeable.

Example C: KTU 1.4, VI, 46-55 – An octuple appearance



Although the end of the column is partially damaged, it is possible to translate most of this unit.

46. <i>šb'm . bn . aṭrt</i>	Seventy sons of Asherah
47. <i>špq ilm . krm . y[n]</i>	He provided the gods with rams ²² and wine
48. <i>špq . ilht . ḥprt</i>	He provided the goddesses with ewes ²³
49. <i>špq . ilm . alpm . y[n]</i>	He provided the gods with bulls and wine

²¹ KTU 1.4, V, 35-41.

²² Or a different type of farm animal; cf., e.g., Deut. 32:14; 1 Sam. 15:9; 1 Kgs. 3:4.

²³ According to CTA, KTU and UT, the word *yn* (wine) should be restored at the end of rows 48, 50, 52 and 54. A close examination by means of high-resolution images shows that there is not enough visual evidence to support this restoration. We suggest that the word *yn* should be restored only at the end of rows 47, 49, 51, 53.

50. <i>špq . ilht²⁴ . arḥt</i>	He provided the goddesses with cows ²⁵
51. <i>špq . ilm . kḥṭm . y[n]</i>	He provided the gods with thrones ²⁶ and wine
52. <i>špq . ilht . ksat</i>	He provided the goddesses with chairs
53. <i>špq . ilm . rḥbt yn</i>	He provided the gods with jugs of wine
54. <i>špq . ilht . dkr[t]</i>	He provided the goddesses with casks
55. <i>ʿd . lḥm . šty il[m]</i>	As the gods dine and drink

After the construction of the palace is finished, Baal invites all of the gods to a glorious banquet. This is his moment of triumph. This climax in the story-line is emphasized eight times by the repetition of the words *špq . ilm/ilht²⁷* which mean “he provided for the gods/goddesses.” This repetition also represents the abundance of food, wine, and gifts which Baal gives to the gods, characterizing his generosity. Not only did the scribe choose to write the same words at the beginning of the eight rows, he also chose to begin nine rows (46-54) with the letter š (𐎍), which has a very special appearance. The scribe gave each hemistich a row of its own, thus visually highlighting the climax of the story-line on the tablet’s surface.²⁸

Conclusions

Visual poetry is meant to be pleasing to the eye as well as to the ear. The visual aspect of the poetry is highly important. This can be found in almost every modern poetry book, when poets carefully choose how to organize their text in order to convey a certain message or to lay a particular

²⁴ The scribe probably forgot three wedges when he inscribed the letter *i*.

²⁵ Cf. KTU 1.6, II, 6; KTU 1.10, II, 28.

²⁶ Cf. KTU 1.2, IV, 12-14. For more on the Egyptian origin of this word, see W. G. E. Watson, “Non-Semitic Words in the Ugaritic Lexicon (6),” *UF* 38 (2006), 717-28.

²⁷ For more on gender-matched parallelism, see W. G. E. Watson, “Gender-Matched Synonymous Parallelism in Ugaritic Poetry,” *UF* 13 (1981), 182-87.

²⁸ According to Smith, this clause is characterized by QTL // YQTL parallels. This means that the letter *y* at the end of rows 47, 49 and 51, belongs to the word *špq* in the following rows. However, the letter *y* is too far from the end of the column for this to be so, and it is clear that at least one more letter can be written at the end of these rows. See Smith, “Baal,” 134-35. See further M. Held, “The YQTL-QTL (QTL-YQTL) Sequence of Identical Verbs in Biblical Hebrew and Ugaritic,” in M. Ben-Horin (ed.), *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 281-90.

emphasis. Tablet KTU 1.4 was chosen as a subject for this epigraphic study by virtue of the unique aspect of the writing. The entire text is written in poetry, yet only these examples are visually set apart. Compared with the remains of the other tablets of the Baal cycle (KTU 1.1-1.6), it seems that the visual representation of anaphoric structure is unique to tablet KTU 1.4.²⁹ It is our suggestion that the scribe chose to highlight certain aspects of the story-line, in order to draw the reader's attention to them.

²⁹ The tablets KTU 1.1-1.6 are all partially damaged, so it is possible that this method elsewhere in the "Baal cycle" and also in other works of Ilu-milku. There is also another nice example of a highlighted anaphoric structure in tablet KTU 1.15, III, 7-12 (Kirta), which has a sextuple appearance of the word *tld*. As we mentioned before (n. 6 above), the Baal cycle and the Kirta epic were both apparently written by Ilu-milku.