

“An Unpublished Poetic Tablet from Ugarit”

James R Getz Jr
Brandeis University

Introduction:

The current study provides transcription, translation and discussion on an unpublished tablet from Ras Shamra Ugarit. The text was purchased through an antiquities trader over Ebay.

There is always a danger of forgery when using unprovenanced materials. Rigorous tests must be performed to insure the reliability of the artifact in question. While the tablet here presented is complete, easily readable, and contains a uniformity of script that borders on typographic consistency, the author is certain that the current text is authentic. The reasons for this assertion are 1) the text answers no academic disputes in either Ugaritic or biblical studies and 2) the text makes no reference to any biblical figure (e.g. David, Jesus, etc.). As such, the text’s genuineness should not be doubted.

The table is small, 6.2cm width, 6.3 cm length, and 2 cm thick. It is written on the obverse, the bottom edge and the reverse. The fifteen lines of continuous text are followed by a horizontal line that most likely indicates an end to the text but might also have served some ceremonial or ritual function.

Text and Translation:

(1)my.km̄tt.(2)ḥry.
my. (3) bḡlmtm. (4) n’mt.
d(!)’qk. (5) ib.iqni.
(6) š’rk yrq. (7)ḥrṣ.
tnk. (8) sp.trml.
(9) šptk.km. (10) ššnm.
yqran.(11)qlk.mrhqtm.
(12)l.šbi,yrḥp.
(13)att.ḥlmy.(14)at.
ḡlmt.(15)drty.mnil

(1)Who is like you, Lady (2) Ḥurraya?
Who (3) among the damsels, (4) Fair One?
Your eyes are (5) lapis lazuli;
(6)Your hair yellow (7) gold;
Your teeth, (8)gleaming alabaster;²
(9)Your lips like (10) lilies.³
Your voice calls (11) to me from afar
(12) Over the host it hovers.
(13) The woman of my dreams are (14) you,
The damsel of (15) my vision from ’ilu.

Discussion:

This brief love poem would appear to be from Kirtu to his bride Ḥurraya. The use of the term “damsels” in lines 3 and 14 and mention of an army (šbi) in line 12 both indicate

¹ The scribe here is apparently copying from *CAT* 1.14 iii 43 (//vi 29) which has *d’qh.ib.iqni* “whose eyes are like lapis lazuli.” The scribe appears to understand enough to change pronominal suffix but fails to recognize the awkwardness of the relative pronoun *d* in the current line.

² The phrase *sp.trml* is used of Ḥurraya in the tale of Kirtu as well. However, in the later text Ḥurraya’s eyeballs are described with the phrase (see *CAT* 1.14 iii 44 //vi 30).

³ The term *ššnm* appears to be cognate a loanword from Egyptian *sšn*, cognate with שושנה found in, later biblical Hebrew (e.g. SoS 2:1, 16; cf. HALOT 1454-5).

that the poem would likely fit into the tale of Kirtu at some point before the two are wed.

The poem follows the form of later Arabic *wasf's* by noting parts of the beloved's body in a vertical order. The text begins with the eyes, moves to the hair (seen apparently from under some head covering, perhaps of a ceremonial nature) before the teeth and lips. At this point, in line 10, the poet moves from the lips as an object to be contemplated to the voice of Ḥurraya, who apparently calls to Kirtu from across the battle field and the riotous sound of his army. The poem ends by making reference to the oneiric revelation of 'ilu to Kirtu concerning his future bride.

Clearly the author of this text had knowledge of the Kirtu traditions. However, there are no breaks in the attested copy of the story of Kirtu (CAT 1.14-16) where this brief poem would fit. The tablet exhibits signs of having been a secondary composition, dependent on the larger story. It is apparent from the misplaced relative pronoun *d-* in line 2 and the use of the phrase *sp.trml* in line 8 that the scribe here knew of a form of the tale of Kirtu commensurate with the text we now have.

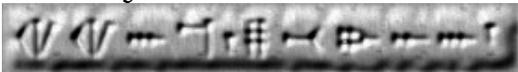
The purpose of the tablet must ultimately be dependent on further study. However, given the erotic nature of the tablet, the mention of the Kirtu's future wife, as well as the horizontal line at the end (also found in the *dbh ḫlm* "sacrificial festival for the shade" of CAT 1.161) it seems quite probably that this text accompanied a fertility ritual performed in the presence of the ancestral spirits known collectively as the *Rapi'ūma*. Conversely, it could have been composed in an attempt to win books.

In light of the importance of this find to the study of Ugaritic religion and culture, it is hoped that it will be included in the next edition of CAT. The author here would recommend assigning it the siglum CAT 1.214. Happy Valentine's Day.

Obverse:



Bottom Edge:



Reverse:

