

Reading Ugaritic Narrative-Poetry: The Epic Description of Kirta's Expedition to Udm in KTU 1.14

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Reading Ugaritic narrative poetry requires sensitivity to the text's poetic structures as well as recognition of the way it is shaped by the art of narration and its poetics. By taking a close look at the first part of the Epic of Kirta this article will present and illustrate the conventions for reading that afford us the ability to appropriately understand the message of Ugaritic narrative poetry.

The Epic of Kirta sets the stage for the epic with a detailed description of the loss of Kirta's family (KTU 1.14 i 1–25). The audience is told that Kirta's rightful wife and all his progeny have been destroyed in various circumstances. Recognizing that all his heirs have been destroyed, Kirta cries himself to sleep. In his dream, El, his patron god, appears and instructs him to gather a large host and march towards the city of Udm, besiege it and demand from its King the hand of the fair princess Ḫuraya who is just the right match for him (KTU 1.14 ii 27–iii 49; cf. the parallel passage KTU 1.14 iv 9 – vi 41). Unfortunately, after Kirta and Ḫuraya's marriage troubles do not cease from Kirta's house.

Divine-human relations and the desire for an heir are illustrated extensively in the narrative. Throughout the epic Kirta is called "The son of El," "El's devotee" and "The Servant of El." As the story unfolds, the audience discovers that the gods El and Asherah determine humans' fate, a human's lot and a human's ability to produce a proper offspring. El gives the human kings kingship (KTU 1.14 i 41–43, iii 31–32 and parallels). To Kirta he gives a proper wife who would produce multiple children (KTU 1.14 iii 46–49 and parallels; cf. El's blessing in Kirta's feast for the gods to honor the occasion of

bringing Ḥuraya into his house KTU 1.15 ii 16–iii 21).¹ On his way to Udum, Kirta makes a vow to Asherah (KTU 1.14 iv 36–43). Later, when Kirta is ill, near death, Kirta wishes to make a second vow to a certain unidentified divinity (KTU 1.16 i 41–45). El heals Kirta from the illness Asherah inflicts on him (KTU 1.15 iii 25–30; KTU 1.16 v 9–vi 2). But then, when all seems well again, his firstborn and heir Yaššib rebels (KTU 1.16 vi 25–54; although it is not stated explicitly, the reader may assume that this sequence of events is the embodiment of divine retribution by Asherah).² The story ends with Kirta cursing his heir (lines 54–58). The end of the story is missing, but we may suppose that Thitmanit, the youngest daughter of Kirta, took the place of her elder brother as heir, since in El’s birth blessing for Kirta he says: “The youngest of them I name firstborn!” (KTU 1.15 iii 16). Thus we may conclude that the opening section of the epic, where we are told of the death of Kirta’s initial wife and heirs, provides the background for the plot’s onset and simultaneously introduces the main themes of this literary work: Divine-human relations and the desire for an heir, i.e. the circumstances of human action and human existence.³

¹ In antiquity, the importance of offspring was great. See for example Laurel W. Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die: Children and Communal Survival in Biblical Literature*, Emerging Scholars Series (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013), 93–124; Kristine H. Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel: Children in Material Culture and Biblical Texts*, ABS 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 267–270; Shawn W. Flynn, *Children in Ancient Israel: The Hebrew Bible and Mesopotamia in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1–23. Cf. also Julie F. Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable: Children in the Hebrew Bible, Especially the Elisha Cycle*, BJS 355 (Providence: Brown University, 2013), 41–44; Naomi Steinberg, *The World of the Child in the Hebrew Bible*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 51 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013); Kristine H. Garroway, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household*, Explorations in Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations 3 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014). It is, therefore, not surprising to find incantations, magical protection for a child, birth omens, rituals of fertility, and, of course, the desire to have children are a recurring theme in the Bible and in ancient Near Eastern literature. The epic of Aqhat expresses the same concern for heirs as the narrative of the Patriarchs in Genesis does.

² See Yaššib’s false accusation against the recovered King (KTU 1.16 vi 35–38, 50–54). Cf. Gary N. Knoppers, “Dissonance and Disaster in the Legend of Kirta,” *JAOS* 114 (1994):577, 580; Nicolas Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilmilku and His Colleagues* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 238–239, n. 286.

³ Cf. for example Harold L. Ginsberg, *The Legend of King Keret*, BASORSup 2–3 (New Haven: American School of Oriental Research, 1946), 7–9; Samuel E. Loewenstamm, “On the Theology of the Keret-Epic,” in *From Babylon to Canaan: Studies in the Bible and its Oriental Background* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992), 185–200; Knoppers, “Dissonance and

Our discussion focuses on the section that describes King Kirta's army (KTU 1.14 ii 43 – iii 1; iv 21–31), the expedition to Udum, and siege of the city (KTU 1.14 iii 2–21; cf. KTU 1.14 iv 31 – v 17).⁴ This text contains a few peculiarities. The description of the army is spread out over nine verses (20 lines) – or eleven, if we include the preparation for the expedition (25 lines in total). Not only is the description of Kirta's host long but it is also formulated as repetition (the command-fulfillment pattern). Further puzzling is the role of the army in the general plotline and its relatively marginal contribution to the plot's progress. Why did the poet-narrator⁵ devote such a lengthy passage to a matter that is not germane to the plot? This lack of correlation is surprising and it invites an explanation. In other words, the exceptional length of description, highlighted by various techniques (as I shall illustrate below), and the pains the poet-narrator takes to repeat the portrayal twice in accordance to his epic style, urge us to seek an answer to the question of its meaning in its narrative context. A second question, already asked by

Disaster," 573–574, 577, and passim. Wyatt claims that the work is an expression of royal ideology. See, e.g., Nicolas Wyatt, "Ilmilku's Ideological Programme: Ugaritic Royal Propaganda, and a Biblical Postscript," *UF* 29 (1997):775–796. Greenstein has pointed to some wisdom ideas in Kirta. See Edward L. Greenstein, "The Ugaritic Epic of Kirta in a Wisdom Perspective," *Te'uda* 16–17 (2001):1–13 (Hebrew).

⁴ This passage has already been discussed by Joshua Finkel, "The Expedition of the Ugaritan King Keret in Light of Jewish and Kindred Traditions," *PAAJR* 23 (1954):1–28; Gregorio Del Olmo Lete, "La conquista de Jerico y la leyenda ugaritica de Krt," *Sefarad* XXV (1965):3–15; Wilfred G. E. Watson, "An Unrecognized Hyperbole in Krt," *Or* 48 (1979):112–117; Gina Hens-Piazza, "Repetition and Rhetoric in Canaanite Epic: A Close Reading of KTU 1.14 III 20–49," *UF* 24 (1992):103–112; Knoppers, "Dissonance and Disaster," 572–582; Daniel E. Fleming, "The Seven-Day Siege of Jericho in Holy War," in *Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine*, ed. Robert Chazan, et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 211–228; Edward L. Greenstein, "Biblical Prose Narrative and Early Canaanite Narrative," in *Essays on Hebrew Literature in Honor of Avraham Holtz*, ed. Zvia Ben-Yosef Ginor (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2003), 3–15, 22 (Hebrew); Marieke den Braber and Jan-Wim Wesselius, "The Unity of Joshua 1–8, its Relation to the Story of King Keret, and the Literary Background to the Exodus and Conquest Stories," *SJOT* 22 (2008):253–274, and others.

⁵ Throughout this article I use the terms "performer", "poet" and "narrator" to signify the person who both narrates the story and performs it orally. See Minna S. Jensen, "Performance," in *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World, Literature and Culture, ed. John M. Foley (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 45–54. Cf. also Bendt Alster, "Interaction of Oral and Written Poetry in Early Mesopotamian Literature," in *Mesopotamian Epic Literature: Oral or Aural?* ed. Marianna E. Vogelzang and Herman L. J. Vanstiphout (Lewiston: Mellen Press, 1992), 23–69.

several scholars, relates to the text's cataloguing of those who are normally exempt from military service.⁶ In the epic of Kirta they join the army. What is the meaning of this list? Greenstein has rightly argued that the newlywed groom represents Kirta's loss.⁷ Yet we still ought to explain the inclusion of the only son, the widow, the blind, and the ill in the same list of types.

The twice-narrated episode also draws our attention to the prolonged description of the journey and siege (twenty lines, and surpassing twenty in the fulfillment account). Aside from giving the audience a sense of the passage of time, this exceptional feature merits greater attention from the listener (and in our case – the reader). If we are to achieve an understanding of the text, as close as we possibly can to the way an ancient audience understood it, we must become attuned to peculiarities such as the silent siege and the deviation from El's instructions by Kirta on the third day of the journey. As scholars we are required ask – why does the poet-narrator choose to describe El's instructions for the expedition in such detail? Why is the siege a silent one?

"A reader of Ugaritic literature," writes Greenstein, "like a reader of biblical literature, can and indeed must perform *interpretive acts of various sorts in order to make sense of the text.*"⁸ Likewise, Stanley Fish and others have argued that the reader is responsible for creating the meaning in the text.⁹ In fact the meaning of a text is evoked through the process of

⁶ For example: Finkel, "The Expedition of the Ugaritan King Keret," 1–28.

⁷ Greenstein, "Biblical Prose Narrative," 14. This interpretation credits the audience with associating related matters within the literary work. This is one way meaning is created, while the work is read, recited, sung or declaimed.

⁸ Edward L. Greenstein, "The Role of the Reader in Ugaritic Narrative," in *A Wise and Discerning Mind: Essays in Honor of Burke Long*, ed. Robert C. Culley and Saul M. Olyan (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2000), 140 (my emphasis). Cf. Greenstein, "Biblical Prose Narrative," 22–23. Culler presents an excellent discussion of the system of operative conventions used by the readers of literature. Using the analogy of linguistic competence, Culler writes: "To read a text as literature [...] one must bring to it an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for." See Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 113–114.

⁹ Stanley E. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 303–337; cf. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, 113–130.

understanding the meaning of literary norms which are also the knowledge shared by the creator of a work and his intended audience or readers. Put another way, “every linguistic expression depends on a communicative context” of a certain interpretative community, as Greenstein concludes.¹⁰ This reader-response approach helps us better understand the intelligibility gap between the ancients and modern readers of ancient texts: The ancient listening audience of Ugaritic epic received and understood these texts “naturally” without much effort. The audience interpreted the text according to the interpretative norms of the community to which it belonged.¹¹ We, living thousands of years later, need to re-establish our literary competence¹² through scholarly investigation and literary “operations,” since the “natural” or unconscious communication between composer and audience no longer exists, and we are required to make it explicit as a theoretical method for approaching these texts.¹³ Thus, although reader-response approaches take

¹⁰ Edward L. Greenstein, Introduction: “Stanley Fish: Always Thinking Again” to *Is there a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, by Stanley E. Fish, ed. Edward L. Greenstein, trans. Ayelet Oettinger and Ohad Zehavi (Tel-Aviv: Resling, 2012), 19 (Hebrew).

¹¹ Cf. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 319–321, 331–332, and 335–336. Culler (*Structuralist Poetics*, 116) writes: “They [the interpretations of a literary work] are public and can be discussed and justified with respect to the conventions of reading poetry – or, as English allows us to say, of making sense.” The conventions for reading a literary text are the implicit knowledge shared by author and readers. Both act intuitively as sense-makers (*ibid.*).

¹² As Culler explains it, “literary competence” is the “grammar” of literature, i.e. the essential knowledge (tacit knowledge) a person needs in order to fully understand the meaning of a literary work. A text has a sense because its words are embedded within a certain institutional structure (a certain genre), which activates the reader’s tacit knowledge (a normative system of intelligibility). See Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, 129; Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 322–337, especially 326–327; Cf. David Bleich, *Subjective Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 162–167.

¹³ Though we may accept the idea that the ancient audience possesses a body of “tacit knowledge” or a (general and literary) “normative system of intelligibility” (see Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, 123; cf. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 309 and 329–331), in our case, we cannot accept the idea of literary knowledge embedded in a certain genre. Instead we should regard Ugaritic Narrative-poetry as a set of conventional literary forms, techniques and literary strategies used by ancient authors, outside a strict generic system (on this problem see Shirly Natan-Yulzary, “Reading Ugaritic Narrative Poetry: The Use of Sound repetition, Leitwörter and Semantic Structures in the West-Semitic Tradition,” in *The Shamir, the Letters, the Writing, and the Tablets (Mishnah Avot 5:6): Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East, Post-Biblical Literature, Ancient Languages and Ancient Cultures in Honor of Professor Shamir Yona*, ed. Eliyahu Assis, Mayer I. Gruber, Daniel Sivan, Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Jonathan Yogev; Ostracon Press, Jerusalem, forthcoming).

written (and read) literature as their object, they can nevertheless contribute to an understanding of how oral-performed texts engaged listeners in ancient Near Eastern societies based on their evocations of shared literary and traditional knowledge.¹⁴

What “theoretical knowledge” and which “literary operations” should be implemented in regard to Ugaritic narrative poetry? To phrase this more generally: how ought we read and understand Ugaritic narrative poetry if we seek to “grasp” its message and purpose for its ancient implied audience? What conventions for reading do we have at our disposal for understanding this text, which we know in its written form, but also know to have been orally performed? In the following section I articulate three conventions for reading Ugaritic epics: the close reading method, contextual reading and the comparison to similar or parallel passages.

1. Conventions for reading Ugaritic narrative poetry

The first convention for reading we should avail ourselves of is the “close reading” method. Indeed, the results of the “close reading” are not arbitrary or merely subjective interpretations, because the interpretive process must be limited by the knowledge of the conventional literary forms and literary traditions of the ancient culture that produced these texts.¹⁵

In his article “Biblical Prose Narrative and Early Canaanite Narrative,” Greenstein demonstrates how we can read and understand Ugaritic epic by

¹⁴ Accordingly, the term “reader” can easily be replaced by “audience” and, likewise, “composer” by “narrator,” “author” or “performer.” For the different approaches within reader theory and related bibliography see Greenstein, “The Role of the Reader,” 140–141. In this article Greenstein illustrates the role of the reader in Ugaritic epic. This article highlights the audience's action (be it a reader or listener) in creating meaning, but the creation of meaning of the Ugaritic works depends on a more complex system which includes the linguistic, literary, and oral aspects of patterns, formulae and other literary conventions shared by the poet-performer and his audience.

¹⁵ Cf. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, 119–120. He writes: “...certain expectations about poetry and ways of reading guide the interpretive process and impose severe limitations on the set of acceptable or plausible readings” (Ibid., 127; Cf. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 320–321).

the same method we use to read biblical prose narrative.¹⁶ The method contributes to the understanding of ancient literature and it can help solve the riddles described above, through its attention to detail and to ancient literary and linguistic forms of expression.¹⁷ Despite Ugaritic epic presenting a different object of inquiry – a form that was undoubtedly performed orally in front of an audience even though it has reached us in written form, versus the biblical prose narrative texts – ¹⁸ still, as a narrative form it shares many common features of the text’s design with biblical narrative.¹⁹ The more knowledge we gain of such traditional expressions (e.g. images, themes, language, formulae, motifs, patterns and techniques) the greater will be our understanding of the text, its sense (i.e. legitimate interpretations), and purpose. Ugaritic epic texts also share a remarkable formal similarity to biblical poetry, and this too should be taken into account in the interpretive process.²⁰ Possession of established knowledge about the general characteristics of poetic forms and of the narrative – including narration techniques, thematic tropes, conventional imagery and metaphors, fixed formulae and epithets, word-pairs, numerical patterns, techniques of emphasis such as repetitions of various kinds, parallelism, *leitwörter*, semantic fields, sound patterning, etc. – enables us to apply a combined “close reading” method confidently and reliably.²¹

¹⁶ Greenstein, “Biblical Prose Narrative,” 9–29.

¹⁷ “Close reading” is implemented in Hens-Piazza, “Repetition and Rhetoric,” 103–112. Cf. also Greenstein, “The Role of the Reader,” 139–151; Greenstein, “Biblical Prose Narrative,” 9–29.

¹⁸ Greenstein, “The Role of the Reader,” 142, and n. 17; Shirly Natan-Yulzary, “Suspense in the Epic of Aqhat: A Reexamination of Two Passages of CAT 1.19,” *BiOr* 75 (2018):481–494.

¹⁹ In addition to the above-mentioned essays see Shirly Natan-Yulzary, “Characterization and Text Texture in Ancient West-Semitic Literature from Ugarit,” *Shnaton* 17 (2007):161–197 (Hebrew); and Shirly Natan-Yulzary, “Divine Justice or Poetic Justice? The Transgression and Punishment of the Goddess Anath in ‘the Aqhat Story’ – A Literary Perspective,” *UF* 41 (2010):581–599.

²⁰ See Natan-Yulzary, “Reading Ugaritic Narrative Poetry.”

²¹ We must bear in mind that such a use of conventions is also exploited to “surprise” the audience. The poet-narrator of Ugaritic epic masters these conventions as does his audience, and he could artistically create variations of a conventional expression to convey meaningful nuances. Cf. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, 117–118.

In addition to examining the internal textual and poetic features of a certain passage, consideration of context is the second reading convention that should be implemented in the process of re-creating its meaning (as an optional legitimate interpretation). This means taking into account the context of narration and making informed speculations regarding the ideas, feelings, or associations the passage might evoke in the audience of the epic in the process of reception.

Finally, the third convention for reading is comparison. It is an indispensable aid to interpretation, by which similar or variant passages from diverse ancient texts can be read against each other. The examination of similarities and particularly of differences in parallel passages enhances our literary competence, and presents opportunities to discern nuances and avoid the imposition of a fixed or automatic understanding of a pattern. To state this in concrete terms: modern scholars stand at a temporal remove of some three millennia from the culture that created the Kirta epic. If we wish to develop literary competence and apply it, for the sake of illustration, to understanding the passage describing Kirta's army and the subsequent siege on Udum, we must of necessity closely examine any literary parallels we can find, i.e. passages that display some formal and thematic similarities, and are closer in time and tradition to the Kirta epic.²² In the following discussion I shall employ the triad of reading conventions just outlined to examine the passage from Kirta and in so doing will attempt to answer the literary-interpretive questions raised above.

2. Application of the three conventions for reading the epic description of Kirta's expedition to Udum

In this section of the article I will first discuss Kirta's host and the preparation for the military campaign (KTU 1.14 ii 27 – iii 1). I will then

²² Cf. Culler writes: "... it is clear that study of one poem or novel facilitates the study of the next: one gains not only points of comparison but a sense of how to read. [...] one acquires a sense of the possibilities of literature and how these possibilities may be distinguished." Ibid, 121.

proceed to discuss the march to Udum and the siege on Pabuli's city (KTU 1.14 iii 2–21). While I suggest my own interpretation of the passages from the Ugaritic epic, I do so while implementing the three conventions for reading.

I use the close reading strategy to highlight the structure and flow of the text, and to illustrate its poetic beauty. I dwell on the significance of literary conventions embedded in the text, on the way they are combined, as well as on the implicit message indicated by a deviation from the standard form of a pattern or literary convention, e.g. the use of quantitative and hyperbolic expressions, the seven-day pattern, the sound and word repetitions. I will compare KTU 1.14 ii 43–50 to Joel 2:16 and to *Erra and Ishum* IV 1–15. I will also compare the list of animals and their sounds in KTU 1.14 iii 16–19 to a similar passage in Joel 1:18, and the siege in KTU 1.14 iii 2–21 to the conquest of Jericho (Josh 6). I illustrate how comparison of close or parallel passages clarifies the purpose of the Ugaritic sections and improves our understanding of them. Comparison also illustrates the literary conventional form of a “short list,” a favored form of elaboration that expresses inclusiveness, totality or extremes. Reading the text contextually, I will examine the interrelations of the fulfillment account to the instruction-prediction section that preceded it and the relations between the list of people joining Kirta's army and the epic's prologue. This convention for reading the epic illustrates how words, phrases, verses, and even complete sections are linked to the rest of the narrative-poem, thus evoking additional layers of meaning. It further demonstrates the importance for interpretation of examining the of the specific “narrative texture” in which the story unfolds.²³

²³ Frank H. Polak, *Biblical Narrative: Aspects of Art and Design*, 2nd ed, The Biblical Encyclopedia Library 11 (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1994), 5–9.

2.1 Kirta's host and its preparation for the military campaign: a close reading

The preparation for the journey and the description of the army within the command-fulfillment pattern (KTU 1.14 ii 27 – iii 1; iv 9–31) comprises several parts: The description begins with an emphasis on the vastness of the host and the impressive marching formation that shall progress towards Udum (ii 32–42; iv 13–20). It goes on to describe categories of military exemptions (or non-combatants) who join the military campaign (ii 43–50; iv 21–28), and concludes with a simile of the locust swarm (ii 50 – iii 1; iv 29–31). The entire passage is preceded by El's instructions to prepare rations for the campaign (ii 27–31; iv 9–12). Let us now take a close look at the passage where El delivers his command-prediction to Kirta in a dream.²⁴

27–29	^ʿ <i>db / ak.l l qryt /</i> <i>ḥṭt.l bt.ḥbr /</i>	Ready rations for the city, Wheat for the whole house of Ḥubur.
30–31	<i>yip.lḥm.d ḥmš /</i> <i>mḡd.ṭḏṭ.yrḥm /</i> ²⁵	Have bread for five months baked, Provisions for as many as six.
32–34	^ʿ <i>dn.ngb.w yši /</i> <i>šbu.šbi.ngb /</i> <i>w yši. ʿdn.m ʿ /</i>	Then let the whole army go forth, ²⁶ The host of hosts in its totality. ²⁷ Then let the host go forth as one. ²⁸

²⁴ The transliteration is based on KTU³, 39–40. The translation is based on “Kirta” trans. Greenstein (*UNP*, 14–15; cf. 18–19), with modifications. The parallel account is a verbatim repetition with no significant difference between the command and fulfillment, except the omission of lines 37–38, which describe two different groups in Kirta's army. This omission could be an unintentional change.

²⁵ Greenstein: *mḡd[.]<d>ṭḏṭ.yrḥm* (*UNP*, 14).

²⁶ ^ʿ*dn* – a noun meaning “party”, “troop” or “store”, “silo.” See “^ʿ*dn* (II)” and “^ʿ*dn* (III),” in Gregorio Del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, eds., *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, 3rd edition, 2 vols., Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section I, The Near and Middle East 112, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1:147; “^ʿ*dn*₁,” “^ʿ*dn*₂” and “^ʿ*dn*₃,” in Josef Tropper, *Kleines Wörterbuch des Ugaritischen*, Elementa Linguarum Orientis 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), 16; “^ʿ*dn*,” *WUS*, 299. Cf. also Oswald Loretz, “Akkadisch *šiditam nagib* und Ugaritisch ^ʿ*dn ngb* in der Beschreibung der Armee Kerets (ARM 2, 69, 6; KTU 1.14 II 32–34, IV 13–15),” *UF* 40 (2009):513 who regards ^ʿ*dn* – “best provisions” – as a special metonymic phrase for “delight” as in Gen 49:20, Ps 36:9 and KTU 1.4 v 6–9.

²⁷ Akk. *nagbu* means “totality,” “all” in poetic texts (“*nagbu* B,” *CAD* N₁, 111), but also “provisions” (“*nagābu*,” *ibid.* 105: *šābušu šiditam na-gi-ib* in ARM II 69:6); “*ngb*,” in Del Olmo

35–36	<i>šbuk.ul.mad /</i> <i>ṭlt.mat.rbt /</i>	Let your host be a very large force, ²⁹ As many as three hundred myriads!
37–38	<i>ḥpt.d bl.spr /</i> <i>ṭnn.d bl.hg /</i>	Free men, beyond number, ³⁰ Archers beyond count! ³¹
39–40	<i>hkl.l alp.m.ḥdd /</i> <i>w l rbt.kmyr /</i>	They'll march by the thousand, in rows, In myriads, by rank arrayed. ³²
41–42	<i>aṭr.ṭn.ṭn.hlk /</i> <i>aṭr.ṭlt.klhm /</i>	After two, two will march; After three, all of them.
43–45	<i>yḥd.bth.sgr /</i> <i>almnt.škr / tškr.</i>	The only son will shut his house. The widow'll hire on for a fee. ³³
45–47	<i>zbl.ṣršm / yšu.</i> <i>ṣwr.mzl / ymzl.</i>	The ill will be carried in bed. ³⁴ The blind will blink his way. ³⁵

Lete and Sanmartín, *Dictionary* 1:613–614: a noun meaning “victualling”; “*ngb*,” in Tropper, *Kleines Wörterbuch*, 86: a verb meaning “ausgerüstet werden (Heer)”; similarly Loretz, “Akkadisch *šiditam nagib*,” 514; For a recent detailed discussion of *ngb* in various sources and the suggestion to interpret Ug. *ngb* as “be assembled”, “conscripted” see Wilfred G. E. Watson, “Ugarit and Mari: rations or recruits?,” *NABU* 2021 (2), §39, pp. 95-99. Watson (“Hyperbole,” 113, n. 8 and 9) rightly notes that the theme of provisions (encapsulated in the words *akl* || *ḥtt* and *lhm* || *mḡd*; KTU 1.14 ii 27–31) ends in line 31.

²⁸ “*m*^ᶜ (II),” in Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, *Dictionary* 2:514: “as one”, “together”; cf. *m*^ᶜ₁,” in Tropper, *Kleines Wörterbuch*, 68: “Stärke,” “Große.”

²⁹ As Akk. *mādu šābūka* in EA 38:5 (*CAD* S, 50).

³⁰ “*ḥbt*,” *WUS*, 116: “gemeiner Soldat”; “*ḥbt*,” in Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, *Dictionary* 1:381: “emancipated, unattached”; “*ḥb/pt*₁,” *KWU*:50: “einer niedrigen sozialen Klasse.”

³¹ “*ṭnn*,” in Tropper, *Kleines Wörterbuch*, 134: “Streitwagen-Bogenschütze”; “*ṭnn* (I),” in Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, *Dictionary* 2:909: “archer;” “*ṭnn*,” *WUS*, 340: “Lanzenträger.” Ginsberg translated *ḥbt* and *ṭnn* as “serfs” and “peasants” (*Legend of King Keret*, 16).

³² Following Ginsberg, *Legend of King Keret*, 37; Greenstein, *UNP*, 15; cf. also Greenstein, “Biblical Prose Narrative,” 25, n. 32; Others interpret *ḥdd* – “thunder” (like Heb. הורר) or “downpour” and *yr* in the next line as “rain.” See Wilfred G. E. Watson, “Ugarit and the OT: Further Parallels,” *Or* 45 (1976):440–441; Watson, “Hyperbole,” 113; “*ḥd(d)*,” in Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, *Dictionary* 1:382; “*ḥdd*,” in Tropper, *Kleines Wörterbuch*, 50.

³³ Cf. Mal 3:5.

³⁴ *ṣršm* ends with an adverbial *-m* suffix, therefore *yšu* is a passive *qal*. Watson (“Hyperbole,” 114) comments on the double meaning embedded in *zbl* – “to carry, transport” and “to linger” (said of sick person).

³⁵ See Greenstein, “Biblical Prose Narrative,” 26, n. 38; cf. Ginsberg (*Legend of King Keret*, 38) who suggested that *ṣwr* is a “one-eyed” man who is squinting (he considers Ug. *mzl* a cognate of Talmudic Heb. *pzl*). Differently, Watson (“Hyperbole,” 115–116), suggests translating the line as “(Let) the blind man overtake the runner” on the basis of a parallel in *Erra and Ishum* IV 11 (see below), and a proverbial saying in RS 25.130 (see n. 76 below).

47–50	<i>w yši.trḥ / ḥdṭ.</i> <i>yb^ṣr.l tn / atth.</i> <i>lm.nkr / mddth.</i>	The newlywed groom will go forth; ³⁶ To another man he'll drive his wife; ³⁷ To a stranger, his own beloved.
ii 50–iii 1	<i>k irby / tškn.šd</i> / ³⁸ <i>km.ḥsn.pat.mdb</i> /	Like a locust swarm, they'll inhabit the steppe; Like crickets, the desert's edge.

It is clear from first glance that the poet-narrator intends to stress the size of the army.³⁹ But let us examine the description in detail. Repetition of words and sounds, the use of semantic fields and paronomasia, similes, and other means are used to draw the audience's attention, and intensify the message already inherent on the text.

- (1) The use of quantitative expressions. Numbers feature prominently in the passage: “five” and “six” months (lines 30–31); “three hundred myriads” join the army (line 36); the rows of Kirta's army are described numerically as “thousand”, “myriads”, “two” and “three”; other quantifying expressions are “beyond number”, “beyond count” (*bl.spr* and *bl.hg* lines 37–38), “a very large force” (*ul.mad* line 35), “all of them” (*klhm* line 42) and the superlative “the host of hosts” (*šbu šbi* line 33). These all convey the message that the people making up Kirta's army cannot be counted.⁴⁰
- (2) Lines 27–29 clearly equate the host with “the city” and “the house of Ḥubur,” i.e. the common people, each and every one of King Kirta's

³⁶ The parallel passage reads *w ybl.trḥ / ḥdṭ.* (KTU 1.14 iv 26), which is a variation in word choice. Murray H. Lichtenstein, “A Note on the Text of 1 Keret,” *JANES* 2 (1969–1970):94–100. Lichtenstein takes *ybl* to be a *qal* passive form. *Ibid.*, 97–98.

³⁷ Finkel (“The Expedition of the Ugaritan King Keret,” 21) interprets *yb^ṣr* to mean: “The bridegroom simply cedes his marital rights to another individual, but only temporarily.”

³⁸ The parallel passage reads *km irby.tškn / šd* (KTU 1.14 iv 29).

³⁹ I agree with Wyatt's argument that the poet was familiar with the organization, maintenance, and procedures of the military in Ugarit, but intentionally avoided such a realistic description in his portrayal of Kirta's army, as part of his hyperbolic rhetoric. See Nicolas Wyatt, “All the King's Horses and All The King's Men: Reflections on Kirta,” in *A Study of Violence in the Ancient Near East and its Neighbors*, ed. Alessandro Di Ludovico and Vanessa Bigot-Juloux (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). For essays on the historical-anthropological aspects of the Ugaritic army and ancient warfare, see *Ibid.* notes 54–47. I am grateful to the author for allowing me to read a draft of his paper prior to publication.

⁴⁰ Cf. Judg 7:12 and Jer 46:23 and also compare Gen 15:5; 41:49.

subjects. This idea is also implied by the phrase “all of them” (*klhm*) and the catalogue of people in lines 43–50. These details give the impression that the entire population of the city has set out on a military expedition to fulfill the king’s need. The rations Kirta is ordered to prepare are for the people who go forth, i.e. for “the city” and “the house of Ḫubur” – two unusual terms for describing a military force. This untypical language is used to emphasize that “the city” is the army: not a single person remains at home.⁴¹

- (3) The numbers “five” and “six” (months) are hyperbolic, since the journey and siege predicted by El are of short-term scope: a seven day march and another seven-day period for the siege (KTU 1.14 iii 2–4, 10–15).⁴² This exaggeration also employs an unusual numerical pattern, different from the standard formulas of three and four or six and seven. The uncommon use of “five” and “six” in parallelism is an effect of estrangement, by which the poet-narrator draws the attention of the audience.⁴³
- (4) Several repetitions of words and sounds occur in the passage: lines 32–35 include repetition of the sounds /š/, /b/ and /ʔ/, drawing attention to the word *šb*², thus stressing the idea of the army and its vastness. The verb *yš*² intensifies this effect. The repetition of the words *ʿdn*, *nḡb* and *šbi* creates stress on this tricolon, drawing the audience’s attention to

⁴¹ Loretz argued for a clear contrast between Kirta’s army and Pabuli’s army. “Das militär Kerets mit seiner Beschränkung auf Fußtruppen bildet einen auffallenden Kontrast zum Heer des Königs von Udum, das modernst ausgerüstet ist” (Loretz, “Akkadisch *šiditam nagib*,” 518). He then explains the dramatic epic effect of the contrast: while Kirta’s army was characterized by the large number of its soldiers – infantry, archers and non-combatants, the opponent’s army consisted of chariots and horses and used bronze (i.e. *tl̄t* according to his interpretation) in warfare (ibid. 518–519). This explanation goes against the main function of the army’s description as argued in this article.

⁴² Pardee writes, “One may surmise that the formulation is hyperbolic for a long campaign” (COS 1.102:333, n. 20).

⁴³ Most of the numerical pairs that occur in the Bible and Ugarit are “six” and “seven,” “three” and “four,” and sometimes “two” and “three.” Statistically, the “five”-“six” pair is rare (Yitzchak Avishur, “Number Parallelism in the Bible and in the Ancient Near Eastern Literature,” in *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies. Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981], 4 [Hebrew]), and so it attracts the audience’s attention. Compare also the special form in Isa 17:6 “Only gleanings shall be left of him, As when one beats an olive tree: Two berries or three on the topmost branch, Four or five on the boughs of the crown...”

words and meaning. It is conceivable that *ʿdn* and *ngb* are repeated here because they evoke more than one meaning in the audience’s mind.⁴⁴ They might also refer back to lines 27ff. Further repetition of sounds occur in the army’s description. Assonance is created by the words *mad* and *mat* (lines 35–36); repeated instances of *tl̄t̄* and *tn* (lines 41–42) together with *atr*, *hlk* and *klhm* create consonance effect;⁴⁵ similarly, dental consonants are repeated in lines 47–50.

- (5) “The host of hosts” (*šbu šbi*), “hire on for a fee” (*škr tškr*), “will carry his bed” (*ʿršm yšu*) and “blink his way” (*mzl ymzl*) are instances of paronomasia. This phrasing highlights the list of non-combatants. We can imagine the pleasing oral effect that was utilized to attract the audience’s attention and to reinforce the message already inherent in the description of the army.
- (6) The concrete description of the rows of the army draws a vivid picture of an endless array of soldiers.⁴⁶ Lines 37–38 provide further detail – the *hpt̄* (free men) and *tnn* (archers) represent two types of military units, or two categories of Kirta’s army – the unskilled soldiers and the trained archers.⁴⁷ Lines 43–50 describe yet others who join the army. The clear message is that the entire population, representing all parts of society

⁴⁴ See notes 26 and 27 above.

⁴⁵ Watson, “Hyperbole,” 113, n. 5.

⁴⁶ Other texts that devote a lengthy description to military preparation or a military campaign are: *The Curse of Agade*, lines 149–175 (Jerrold S. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983], 56–57; Jeremy Black, et al., *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 121–122); The Tukulti-Ninurta inscription (see the new edition in Yigal Bloch and Laura A. Peri, “I Placed My Name There: The Great Inscription of Tukulti-Ninurta I, King of Assyria, from the Collection of David and Cindy Sofer, London,” *Israel Museum Studies in Archaeology* 8 [2016–2017]:2–55); The War Scroll (1QM, see Donald W. Parry and Emanuel Tov, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*, vol. 1 [Leiden: Brill, 2004], 208–241). A detailed comparison with these texts is beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, regarding the blind and the lame, see note 52 below.

⁴⁷ *COS* 1.102:334, n. 22. In antiquity armies might be composed of ordinary non-enslaved subjects of a kingdom, who join the king in his battles. Cf. Saul’s army (1 Sam 11:7) and the tribal armies in the period of the judges. Cf. n. 30 above.

have gone forth with its king (see no. 2 above), and this includes non-combatants or those who are normally exempt from military service.⁴⁸

(7) The simile of the locust (KTU ii 50 – iii 1) concludes the long and emphatic (i.e. epic) description of the marching force. This imagery is familiar from biblical passages and other texts from the Ancient Near East as a conventional expression of the size of the military force and its destructive power (for example Judg 6:5; 7:12; Jer 46:23; Jdt 2:20. cf. also Joel 1:6–7; 2:25).⁴⁹

(8) Verbs of movement (*yšʔ* and *hlk*) are repeated to emphasize the advance of the army.

Each part of this description embellishes the idea that everyone has joined the king's army. This idea could have been communicated in a single bicolon, but here it is developed over 25 lines. Not only is the section unusual for its length, the totality and inclusiveness are stressed in a myriad of ways.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the catalogue of classes (lines 43–50) must be read and understood in context.

2.2 The catalogue of those who join Kirta's army – read contextually

The catalogue of participants in the army's advance – the sole surviving son (*yḥd*) who leaves his house; the sick (*zbl*) who carries his bed; the blind (*ʿwr*)

⁴⁸ Greenstein, "Biblical Prose Narrative," 14. Cf. Mishnah Soṭah 8:7: "in an obligatory war [i.e. commanded by the Torah] all go out, even a bridegroom from his chamber and a bride from her canopy." The same expression for complete participation of all segments of the people is used in Joel 2:16 (see discussion below).

⁴⁹ For more examples see John A. Thompson, "Joel's Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels," *JNES* 14 (1955):52–55; Simon B. Parker, *The Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition: Essays on the Ugaritic Poems Keret and Aqhat*, SBLRBS 24 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 152; and Greenstein, "Biblical Prose Narrative," 13–14. In Joel 2:2 the "dark day" actually turns out to be a metaphorical expression for "a great force." The enemy's army is so large that it covers the horizon and darkens the day, as the locust appears in huge bands, looking like a cloud covering and hiding the sun (compare Ex 10:5 and 15). The description of this hostile force is pervasive and extends over vv. 2–11. Cf. also v. 11: "And the Lord roared aloud / At the head of His army; / For vast indeed is His host, / Numberless are those that do His bidding." This mighty invading army eventually is named as swarms, hoppers, grubs and locusts, "the great army I let loose against you" (v. 25).

⁵⁰ Compare Fleming ("The Seven-Day Siege," 221) who argues that the mustering of every person to Kirta's army is meant to create the effect of a multitude descending like a locust plague, thus considered an act of God.

who searches his way; the widow (*almnt*) who hires herself although she's a woman; and the newlywed groom (*trḥ ḥdt*) who deserts his new wife – function to evoke the notion that the entire populace joins Kirta in his task of obtaining wife and heirs, thus emphasizing a main theme in the narrative.⁵¹ Do all these characters undertake their action willingly in order to be conscripts in Kirta's army?⁵² It is not stated whether these people join the military expedition voluntarily or whether they are possessed by El's will.⁵³ The list concludes with the absurd image of a newlywed groom who drives his wife to a stranger.⁵⁴ The new bridegroom appears in the Bible in the list

⁵¹ Ginsberg, *Legend of King Keret*, 38; Greenstein, "Biblical Prose Narrative," 14. Watson ("Hyperbole," 117) writes: "...it is expressing the fantastic in terms of the mundane which makes hyperbole so effective". The son, the sick, the blind and the widow represent marginal members of society, whether because of their disability or their social status. The groom who would have established a new family (i.e. a new social support unit) now loses this option and joins his king's army.

⁵² Cf. a similar list of people in three documents from Qumran: The War Scroll (1QM) includes an injunction: "No one crippled, blind or lame, nor a man who has a permanent blemish on his skin, or a man affected with ritual uncleanness of his flesh; none of these shall go with them to battle." (Parry and Tov, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*, 220–221; Elisha Qimron, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: The Hebrew Writings*, vol 1 [Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2010, Hebrew], 117). These people cannot join the military force of the "Sons of Light" in the final war at the End of Days. The reason is an impurity issue: "All of them shall be volunteers for battle, pure of spirit and flesh, and prepared for the day of vengeance" (ibid.). Other texts from Qumran include a similar list of people who cannot be part of the community. i.e. The Halakhic Letter (4QMMT fragments a, c and d lines 49–54 [=4Q394 8 III–IV], Parry and Tov, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*, 330–331), The Damascus Document (CD-A col. XV, 15–17 and 4QD^a fragment 8 col. I, 6–9; Parry and Tov, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*, 100–101; Qimron, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 38), The Community Rule (1QS^a II, 3–9 [cf. 4Q249^g frags. 3–7, lines 4–8]; Jacob Licht, *The Rule Scroll: A Scroll from the Wilderness of Judaea 1QS, 1QSa, 1QSB: Text, Introduction and Commentary* [Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1965], 264–265 [Hebrew]; Parry and Tov, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*, 196–197, 204–205; Qimron, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 237). Cf. Lev. 21:16–23. The segregative tendency, to exclude these types from an activity of a "pure" or "holy" group is opposite to the inclusive tendency in the Kirta texts and a few other biblical texts. I would like to thank Shira Golani for pointing out the War Scroll to me, which led to these further parallels.

⁵³ I tend to prefer the first option, since I find the idea of the marginal figures of society forced to go on a military campaign by the will of El unfitting to the general character of this deity in Kirta and other texts. It actually contradicts his benevolent features.

⁵⁴ Finkel discusses the custom to dismiss the newlywed groom from military service, mentioned in different traditions (Finkel, "The Expedition of the Ugaritan King Keret," 16–28). According to him the background for this behavior is found in Assyrian, biblical and Talmudic traditions: the warrior does this in order to obviate a situation in which a woman is left married to him while he is captive or when his death cannot be ascertained. This action also allows the woman to seek a means of subsistence, if burdened with starvation during wartime (ibid.). He views the figure of the newlywed groom as climactic. "[...] the action of the bridegroom is considered even more valorous than that of the other draftees"

of people released from military service (Deut 20:5–7; cf. 24:5).⁵⁵ Greenstein has noted the symbolic meaning this figure acquires when the audience associates it with another passage. The words *trḥ* and *atth* echo Kirta's establishment of his first marriage as described in the prologue – “He wed a wife (*att.trḥ*), she ‘departed’” (KTU 1.14 i 14). This association results in irony, since there the poet had spoken of the loss of Kirta's wife, and in our passage the groom leaves his wife in order to set forth on the king's quest to obtain a new spouse.⁵⁶ The newlywed groom may also evoke the image of Kirta as a potential new groom. The case of the groom ends the list of those who join Kirta's army. Might a closer look at the previous categories reveal that each of them perhaps conveys a symbolic meaning within the Kirta narrative? In other words, might the audience have understood the meaning of this list by associating them with other parts of the work. These five classes of people join Kirta's campaign to Udum – by coercion or voluntarily – to support the mission of reestablishing a “house” for the kingdom of Ḫubur. The *yḥd* represents a family's only son or perhaps the solitary man,⁵⁷ who by

(*ibid.*, 17). He also describes this as “highly satirical,” “gross exaggeration,” “caricatures *esprit de corps*” (*ibid.*, 22) and “a bizarre extreme” (*ibid.*, 28) because the groom provides his wife with another man before he leaves for war.

⁵⁵ Cf. Wyatt, (“All the King's Horses,” 10): This list of conscripts stands in contrast to a standing army and mercenaries, as known from military practices in the Ancient Near East. He concludes that Kirta's army is of heroic proportions in order to stress the idea that it was summoned by the gods. *Ibid.* 11.

⁵⁶ Greenstein, “Biblical Prose Narrative,” 14. Cf. Finkel, “The Expedition of the Ugaritan King Keret,” 22–23. Here too he cites the “war-divorce” custom mentioned in several traditions to explain the Ugaritic description of the groom.

⁵⁷ Cf. Heb. יחיד. Ug. *yḥd* or *aḥd* (KTU 1.14 iv 21) can be interpreted in different ways: (a) *yḥd* may be interpreted as the only son of a family. Cf. *וְרַק הָיָא יְחִידָה אִין לֹוּ כְּמִנְנֹו בֶן אֹו בַת* “She was an only child; he had no other son or daughter” (Judg 11:34); “the sole survivor,” (Greenstein, *UNP* 43, n.18; Greenstein, “Biblical Prose Narrative,” 14); see also Akk. cognate “*ēdu*,” *CAD E*, 37, meaning a2'. (b) in Gen 22:2; Zech 12:10 יחיד may refer to the preferred or loved son, as if he is firstborn. (c) Ug. *yḥd* may denote a disadvantaged member of society, who has no family or home (cf. Ps 25:16; 68:7). By leaving his house he risks becoming an individual who has no house to return to. Cf. “*ēdu*,” *CAD E* 36, meaning a1': “unattached or lone person”, who has no family. In a ritual-prayer of “Hand-lifting” (Akkadian Šuilla no. 40, Erich Ebeling, *Die akkadische Gebetsserie “Handerhebung”: Von neuem gesammelt und herausgegeben Veröffentlichung*, [Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953], 48-49), the poet praises the gods. In lines 105-108 he says: *iṭlu edu tap-pa-a tu-šar-ši ana la i-šá-ri ta-nam-din ap-lu* (“to the solitary man you provide a companion, to the impotent you provide an heir”). In *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi* I:79 the poet says *a-na rap-ši ki-ma-ti e-te-me e-da-niš* (“From [a man of] a large family, I became [someone] alone” (Takayoshi Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers: Ludlul*

joining Kirta's army cannot take a wife, thus risking his family's continuity. This would allude to Kirta's fate and name – a person whose lineage is “cut-off” (KTU 1.14 i 10–11, 21–25).⁵⁸ The widow may evoke Kirta's widowhood (KTU 1.14 i 14–15). She is as grief-stricken as Kirta is, but nonetheless enlists on this campaign.⁵⁹ The sick may evoke Kirta's dead children (note *zblnm* in KTU 1.14 i 17), and the blind perhaps functions to evoke Kirta's blindness to his own error.⁶⁰

Reading this list contextually yields the conclusion that this is not a standard catalogue of people who set out on a military campaign. The catalogue of classes is construed, rather, by associating it hyperbolically with a certain type of behavior, and it is associatively linked to the work's prologue. This claim can possibly be validated by comparison with two similar lists found in ancient literature: the first in Joel 2:16 and the second in the Epic of *Erra and Ishum*. Could these passages be parallel in form and function?

2.3 The list of people who join Kirta's army compared to the list of people in Joel 2:16

Joel's prophecy warns the people about the coming calamity of Yahweh's day. The prophet first describes the Lord's day and the terrible events that it will

Bēl Nēmeqi and the Babylonian Theodicy, *Orientalische Religionen in der Antike* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014], 82–83; see also Wilfred G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996], 34–35). Cf. also “*ēdēnu*”, *CAD E 27*, meaning 1: “isolated”, “unattached”, “lone person”. In Nuzi documents *ēdēnu* designate a personnel released from military service to return home (ibid. meaning 1b; Watson, “Hyperbole,” 114). In light of the context the suggestion that Ug. *yhd* here is “an old campaigner who was granted a house in return for his war service” (ibid.) should be rejected.

⁵⁸ See the discussion of Kirta's name in the context of the epic work, in Natan-Yulzary, “Reading Ugaritic Narrative Poetry.”

⁵⁹ Finkel cites diverse sources to explain the background of this hyperbolic description of the widow. He describes the battlefield-damsel institution (cf. Deut 21:11–13) and explains “The widow has no place on the battlefield [...] for the presence of the widow would suggest to the warrior that his wife too might become a widow. The widow is psychologically taboo on the battlefield” (Finkel, “The Expedition of the Ugaritan King Keret,” 16). If this suggestion is correct, it can only support the hyperbolic character of this list of conscripts.

⁶⁰ Cf. KTU 1.16 vi 29–58. Yaššib blames Kirta of ignoring his people, cowardness in wartime, and more. Compare the story of Isaac, who is physically and mentally blind to Jacob's deception in Gen 27. Also comparable is the expression כַּעֲוֹרִים וְכַמְגִּשִׁים דָּרַךְ “...and they were as the blind and as those who grope for a way...” in 4QD^a fragment 2 col. i, line 16 and 4QD^c fragment i, line 13 (Parry and Tov, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*, 82–83, 130–131).

bring (vv. 1–11). In face of this danger, and in the hope that God will restrain his wrath and forgo the punishment, the prophet calls to assemble the people in Israel for a rite of total repentance (vv. 12–17). “Gather the people, [...] Bring together the old, / Gather the babes / And the sucklings at the breast; / Let the bridegroom come out of his chamber, / The bride from her canopied couch.” (NJPS, v. 16).⁶¹ No person is exempt from attending the prayer rally. From old to young and even those celebrating their wedding day. The groom should come out of his room – i.e. he will not meet his new bride where she awaits him (Judg 15:1). The same is expected from the bride. Interestingly this list evokes the idea that the entire community must assemble for communal lamentation by addressing representative figures from different generations. The list is hyperbolic – the community should gather all its members, even the youngest who do not speak yet, the old who may be ill or disabled and the bride and groom must cease from their usual behavior in establishing a new “house”.⁶² In this respect the roster of penitents resembles the hyperbolic list of people setting forth on Kirta’s expedition to Udum.

2.4 The list of people who join Kirta’s army compared to the catalogue of people in Erra’s Army (*Erra and Ishum* IV 1–15)

The classes of people who join Kirta’s expedition has been compared to a list of non-combatants that appears in the epic of *Erra and Ishum* (tablet iv 7–11).⁶³ The similarities invite a careful comparison. *Erra and Ishum* is an Akkadian narrative poem, probably from the eighth century BCE. Its author, Kabti-ilani-Marduk, describes violence as the most powerful force. Erra

⁶¹ Cf. Mishnah Soṭah 8:7: “in an obligatory war all go out, even a bridegroom from his chamber and a bride from her canopy.”

⁶² Cf. the peculiar list of repentants in Jonah 3:7–8. Amos 9:1b–4 also has a list of hypothetical “places” where people might try escape before God (the Sheol, the heavens, The Carmel mountain top, the sea ground), but of course, none can escape him. All lines share a similar syntactic pattern. This list is hyperbolic, and it ends with a climactic phrase: “I will fix My eye on them for evil and not for good”. The purpose of this list is to emphasize totality. There is no place to hide from Yahweh. We can consider the use of hyperbolic and anaphoric lists as characteristic of poetic texts and an aspect of the expressive nature of poetry.

⁶³ Watson, “Hyperbole,” 114–116.

strives to fight. He tricks Marduk into abandoning his dwelling so that he can enter Babylon and wreak punishment on humankind for not respecting the gods sufficiently.⁶⁴ But when Marduk returns, and Erra still had not carried out a campaign, Erra becomes enraged and resolves to fight his war anyway. Ishum then narrates Erra's violent actions in the second person.⁶⁵ Ishum's speech continues into the fourth tablet in which he narrates the horror and destruction of civil war in Babylon:⁶⁶

- 1 *qu-ra-du dèr-ra šá rubê dMarduk zi-kir-šú la taš-ḥu-ut*
- 2 *šá dim-kur-kur-ra^{ki} āl šàr ilāni^{meš} ri-kiš mātāti tap-ta-ṭar ri-kis-su*
- 3 *i-lu-ut-ka tu-šá-an-ni-ma tam-ta-šak a-me-liš*
- 4 *giš^škakkē^{meš}-ka ta-an-né-di-iq-ma te-te-ru-ub qé-reb-šú*
- 5 *ina qé-reb Bābili^{ki} ki-i šá ša-bat āli taq-ta-bi ḥa-bi-in-niš*
- 6 *māru^{meš} ba-bi-li^{ki} šá ki-ma qa-né-e a-pi pa-qí-da lā i-šu-ú*
nap-ḥar-šú-nu elī-ka ip-taḥ-ru
- 7 *ša kak-ku lā i-du-ú šá-lip pa-tar-šú*
- 8 *šá til-pa-nu la i-du-ú ma-lat giš^šqašat-su*
- 9 *šá šal-ta la i-du-ú ip-pu-šá ta-ḥa-za*

⁶⁴ It is worth noting Dalley's remark: "War threatens Babylonia because of Marduk's impotence and Erra's aggression, but [...] There is no real enemy, no rivalry, no dangers faced and overcome, no failure. An element of ridicule and satire spices the characterization of both Erra and Marduk" (Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], 283).

⁶⁵ On the epic of *Erra and Ishum* see "Erra and Ishum," trans. Stephanie Dalley (*COS* 1:404–405); "Erra and Ishum" (Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 3rd ed. [Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005], 880–881); Andrew R. George, "The Poem of Erra and Ishum: A Babylonian Poet's View of War," in *Warfare and Poetry in the Near East*, ed. Hugh Kennedy (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 47–48. The work is viewed as a reference to the past events in Babylon, narrated in a didactic manner. Certain passages were used in amulets to ward off danger and illness (Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 283).

⁶⁶ The transliteration is based on Luigi Cagni, *L'epopea di Erra*, *Studi semitici* 34 (Rome: Università di Roma, 1969), 104–107 and the English translation is based on "Erra and Ishum" (Foster, *Before the Muses*, 901–902) with slight variations. Cf. also Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1976), 227–228 and *COS* 1:404–416.

- 10 *šá a-^rba^{l?}-ra la i-du-ú iṣ-ṣu-riš i-šu-'u-ú*
a-ku-ú bēl e-mu-qí i-kàt-tam⁶⁷
- 11 *ḥaš-ḥa-šú pe-tan bir-ki i-ba-'a-a*
- 12 *ana šak-ka-nak-ki za-nin ma-ḥa-zi-šú-nu qa-bu-ú šil-la-tú ra-bi-tú*
- 13 *abul Bābili^{ki} nār ḥé-gál-li-šú-nu is-ki-ra qa-ta-šú-un*
- 14 *ana eš-ret Bābili^{ki} ki-i šá-lil māti it-ta-du-ú i-šá-tú*
- 15 *at-ta a-lik maḥ-^rrim^l-ma pa-nu-uš-šú-nu ṣab-ta-ta*

- 1 “O warrior Erra, you are the one who feared not noble Marduk’s name!
- 2 You have undone Dinkurkurra, ‘The bond of the world,’⁶⁸ the city of the king of the gods.
- 3 You changed your divine nature, and made yourself like a mortal,⁶⁹
- 4 You girded on your weaponry and entered Babylon.
- 5 Inside Babylon you spoke like a rabble-rouser,⁷⁰ as if to take over the city.
- 6 The citizenry of Babylon, like reeds in a thicket, had no one to care for them,⁷¹ so they rallied around you:
- 7 He who knew nothing of weapons – his sword was drawn,
- 8 He who knew nothing of archery – he filled his bow.⁷²
- 9 He who knew nothing of fighting – set to the fray,
- 10 He who knew nothing of wings – flew off like a bird.⁷³

⁶⁷ *a-ku-ú bēl e-mu-qí i-kàt-tam* (line 10) is translated by Cagni as part of line 11 (*L’epopea di Erra*, 105). Watson and Foster locate these words after line 11 (Watson, “Hyperbole,” 115, n. 19; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 902).

⁶⁸ “The bond of the world” is Babylon.

⁶⁹ Foster suggests that “to make oneself like a mortal” refers to the act of ravaging sanctuaries (*Before the Muses*, 901, n. 3).

⁷⁰ Foster (*Before the Muses*, 901) and Dalley (*COS* 1:412) express some uncertainty about the translation of the word. But Akkadian *ḥābilu(m)* according to CAD is “criminal”, “evildoer” (*ḥābilu* A, H, 16). Since Erra is portrayed as a leader, the translation makes sense in the context.

⁷¹ CAD “*pāqidu*,” meaning b: caretaker of living persons (P,138).

⁷² Foster, *Before the Muses*, 901: “his bow was taut,” and Foster notes: “Literally: ‘He who knew nothing of the *tilpānu*-bow, his bow was nocked’” (n. 4). Cf. the biblical phrase מלא ידו בקשת (2 Kgs 9:24).

⁷³ A description of flight in the face of danger (Foster, *Before the Muses*, 902, n. 1). Cf. Tsevat’s translation for lines 7–10: “He who knew nothing of weapons, his sword is drawn; he who

- 11 The cripple could surpass the fleet of foot, the weakling could overpower
the strong.
- 12 They give voice to gross insolence against the governor who provides for
their holy places,
- 13 With their own hands they blockaded the gate of Babylon, their lifeline,
- 14 They have torched the sanctuaries of Babylon like marauders of the land,
- 15 You, the vanguard, took their lead!"

Ishum refers to atrocities committed in Babylon by an invading army. Lines 7–11 recite a list of people. The first four verses (lines 7–10) form two couplets. All four follow the same syntactic pattern and describe different behaviors: Each line starts with the phrase *šá* + noun + *lā idû* and continues with a noun + verb / verb + noun. The phrase *lā idû* may mean “unexperienced” or “unfamiliar with” or “unused to” something.⁷⁴ It also function as an adverbial phrase meaning “unconsciously” or “unwittingly.”⁷⁵ I view the latter option as more fitting to the context, since the description does not refer to ignorant persons who have not acquired knowledge or of people who lack battle skills. These characters act as if they are enchanted. Each line is less reasonable and more fantastic. The list culminates in a proverbial saying “The cripple could surpass the fleet of foot, the weakling

knew nothing of shafts, his bow has plenty of them; he who knew nothing of fighting, does battle; he who knew nothing of wings, flies off like a bird.” (Matitiahu Tsevat, et al., “Notes brèves,” *RA* 81 [1987]:184).

⁷⁴ CAD *idû* (*edû*), meaning 2 (I, 20; 27–28). Foster, following Tsevat translates: “He who knew nothing of...” (*Before the Muses*, 901; Tsevat, “Notes brèves,” 184), and Dalley “He who is ignorant of...” (*COS* 1:412). This interpretation would yield a fantastical scenario: “He who knew nothing of wings – flew off like a bird.” But it doesn’t make sense to use such an image to describe a peaceful people either without knowledge or skills of war or physically limited, who are suddenly willing to fight or run fast.

⁷⁵ CAD *idû* (*edû*), meaning 3b (in adverbial expressions, with negation; I, 20; 29–30); cf. *edû(m)* II, Jeremy Black, Andrew George and Nicholas Postgate eds., *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), 66: G stem *ina lā idê*: “unwittingly;” and “*edû(m)* III,” meaning B, “*ina lā idu-ú*, “unbewußt” (*AHw* 1:187–188). Of course, an adverbial use assumes a different grammatical construction than in IV 7–11, but this is an interpretive option that should be considered.

could overpower the strong” (line 11).⁷⁶ These characters are neither supporters of Erra nor do they fulfill the role of conscripts. They act magically against their own nature, in defiance of their physical limitations and probably unconsciously against their own will when they engage in battle. In context, this list describes a reversed world order, caused by the divine power.⁷⁷ When Erra speaks, his voice acts like a spell. At the sound of his voice, the madness penetrates the hearts of the people and seizes them. Lines 7–11 are constructed in ascending order of improbability – from the possible to the impossible, culminating with the height of absurdity articulated by the proverb.

The passage bears similarities to the catalogue of persons in the Kirta epic in (1) literary form; (2) theme – non-combatants participate in a military activity; and (3) hyperbolic style and climactic progression. Watson indeed claims that both passages imply that every available person irrespective of age, sex, or physical fitness is conscripted, and “in both passages specific mention is made of persons with a physical disability behaving like (or even better than) able-bodied people.”⁷⁸

But there is a big difference between the two lists. In the Poem of *Erra and Ishum*, Erra’s speech influences the people to act violently: their nature is transformed and they are seized by a violent frenzy, without a prior stage of organizing for battle. This catalogue of people illustrates the theme of uncontrolled violence. Peaceful citizens of Babylon turn into violent ones. The articulation of types of people underscores Erra’s malevolent, chaotic

⁷⁶ Cf. “Le fils de l’infirmes passe devant le fils du coureur. Le fils du riche tend la main au fils du pauvre” (RS 25.130:34’–35’, in Jean Nougayrol, “Textes Suméro-accadiens des archives et bibliothèques privées d’Ugarit,” in *Ugaritica* 5, MRS 16, eds. Jean Nougayrol, et al. [Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1968] 294–295) and “Then the lame shall leap like a deer” (Is 35:6). These parallels were suggested by Nougayrol, *ibid.*, 296–297 and Watson, “Hyperbole,” 115, n. 21. See also William W. Hallo, “Proverbs Quoted in Epic,” in *Lingering Over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran*, ed. Tzvi Abusch, John Huehnergard and Piotr Steinkeller, HSS 37 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 207–208.

⁷⁷ It seems that the hyperbolic expression in Is 35:5–7 more closely resembles lines 7–11 in *Erra and Ishum* in this respect than RS 25.130:34’–35’. Both describe a reversal of the nature of things in the presence of god.

⁷⁸ Watson, “Hyperbole,” 115–116.

influence. The purpose of this list is to emphasize that the people's combative actions were not volitional, but occurred under Erra's spell (lines 5–6). Hence the fantastic and even mythical nature of the action. Moreover, the list in the Akkadian passage includes more wondrous or mythic elements than those in Kirta. In Kirta the list clearly indicates that the entire population of Ĥubur has joined the King's quest. Skilled and unskilled alike (KTU 1.14 ii 37–38) set out on the king's expedition. The mention of the unqualified for combat intensifies this idea of total participation. Although they are not meant to go forth with the army, they do so, just like the rest of the population. Furthermore, I propose that the list in the Kirta epic contains another implicit layer of meaning which is enacted through associations. In sum, the formal similarity (a catalogue list) notwithstanding, the *Erra and Ishum* passage is not a true parallel to the Kirta passage.

Our comparison allows us to conclude that Joel 2:16 is a closer parallel with respect to meaning and purpose than the list in the Poem of Erra. This comparison also provides an additional insight: a catalogue list is a typical form used by poets to create hyperbole or emphasize a certain point in the text.⁷⁹

2.5 The march to Udum and the siege on Pabuli's city – a close reading

Like the long description of the army and the preparation for the march, the journey and siege are also described at length (KTU 1.14 iii 2–21; cf. KTU 1.14 iv 31–v 17).⁸⁰

2–3	<i>lk.y_m.w t_n.</i>	March a day, and a second,
	<i>t_lt.r^šy_m /</i>	A third day, and a fourth;
	<i>h_mš.t_dt.y_m.</i>	A fifth day, and a sixth.
3–4	<i>mk.špš_m / b šb^š.</i>	Then, at sunrise, on the seventh:

⁷⁹ Cf. note 62 above and see further below.

⁸⁰ The transliteration is based on KTU³, 39–41. The translation is based on Greenstein's translation in *UNP*, 15–16; cf. 19–21. There are some typographical changes in the parallel command-fulfillment account resulting from errors in copying. See suggested correction in KTU³, 40–41. Cf. Ginsberg, *The Legend of King Keret*, 38; Greenstein (*UNP*, 43, n. 20–26, 28).

4–5	<i>w tmgy.l udm / rbt.</i>	When you arrive at Udum the great,
	<i>w l.udm.trrt /</i>	Arrive at Udum majestic,
6–7	<i>w gr{.}nn.ʿrm.</i>	Attack its outlying towns,
	<i>šrn / pdrn.</i>	Assault the surrounding villages!
7–8	<i>sʿt.b šdm / ḥṭbh.</i>	Sweep from the fields the men cutting wood,
	<i>b grnt.ḥpšt /</i>	From the threshing-floors the women picking straw!
9–10	<i>sʿt.b n<p>k.šibt.</i>	Sweep from the well the women drawing water,
	<i>b mqr / mmlat.</i>	From the spring, the women filling jars!
10–12	<i>dm.ym.w ṭn /</i>	Then halt, a day and a second,
	<i>ṭlṭ.rbʿym.</i>	A third day, and a fourth,
	<i>ḥmš / ṭṭym.</i>	A fifth day, and a sixth.
12–14	<i>ḥzk.al.tšʿl / qrth.</i>	Fire none of your arrows into the city,
	<i>abn.ydk / mšdpt.</i>	None of your hand-flung stones.
14–16	<i>w hn.špšm / b šbʿ.</i>	Then, at sunrise, on the seventh,
	<i>w l.yšn.pbl / mlk.</i>	King Pabuli will sleep no more,
16–17	<i>l qr.tigt.ibrh /</i>	For the noise of his stallion’s neighing,
	<i>l ql.nhqṭ.ḥmrh /</i>	For the sound of his ass’s braying,
18–19	<i>l gʿt.alp.ḥrṭ.</i>	For the lowing of the plow-ox,
	<i>zḡt / klb.spr.</i>	The barking of the watch-dog.
19–21	<i>w ylak / mlakm.lk.</i>	Then he’ll send two messengers,
	<i>ʿm.krt / mswnh.</i>	To Kirta in his night-camp(?)

Kirta is instructed to march towards Udum. As he approaches the outskirts of Udum, Kirta must assault the nearby villages but is instructed by El to hold back his attack on the city. He must conduct a “quiet”, rather than a violent siege, since Udum is given to Pabuli by the grace of El (KTU 1.14 iii 31–32; cf. v 42–43, vi 12–13). Thus, his all-inclusive (and bizarre) army also conducts a strange siege (KTU 1.14 iii 10–19; v 3–12). The army threatens to attack Udum, but in fact Kirta only needs to wait. The army obviously does not

perform the typical military actions in order to conquer Udum, and what disturbs the besieged King Pabuli are the animal voices instead of the uproar of war (KTU 1.14 iii 16–19; v 8–12).⁸¹

This segment of the narrative is built on a double use of the seven-day pattern.⁸² The six-day march culminates in an attack on the surroundings of Udum on the seventh day. Next, Kirta is instructed to wait for another seven-day period, which ends with the noise of the animals, which disturbs Pabuli. As a result King Pabuli communicates with Kirta through messengers. The events of the siege's seventh day are elaborated over many lines (KTU 1.14 iii 14–49; cf. KTU 1.14 v 6 – KTU 1.15 i 8). The typological number within the numerical pattern is meaningful: if Kirta marches with his army for seven consecutive days and if he conducts a silent siege for seven days, as El instructed, his expedition will succeed.

The passage's rhythm pairs well with the description of a military campaign. Numbers repeat due to the counting formula of the seven-day pattern. The text is designed in couplets, and it includes two catalogue lists: (1) people that Kirta should attack upon arriving at the vicinity of Udum; (2) the animals inside Udum during the siege, and the noise they make. The whole account is, of course, repeated in the fulfillment part of the narrative. First, let us examine the lists and their poetic design, and then propose an explanation of their literary function; we shall then compare the narration of the instruction-fulfillment accounts.

Lines 6–7 precede the first list and deliver the general instruction to attack. This is stressed by the repetition of consonants: /r/ and the close phonetic pair /m/ and /n/. After this opening come two couplets, built on the same syntactic structure. The first colon of each couplet starts with $s^{\zeta}t$ – a

⁸¹ In the fulfillment account there is no report of Kirta holding back the attack on the city of Udum. Pardee completes the missing bicolon (*COS* 1:336).

⁸² On the development and variation in this pattern in Ugaritic epic literature and the Bible, see Samuel E. Loewenstamm, "The Seven-Day-Unit in Ugaritic Epic Literature," *IEJ* 15 (1965):121–133. For further investigation of this scheme, see David R. Freedman, "Counting Formulae in the Akkadian Epics," *JANES* 3 (1970–1971):65–81; Kenneth T. Aitken, "Formulaic Patterns for the Passing of Time in Ugaritic Narrative," *UF* 19 (1987):1–10.

feminine plural passive participle of the root *sw/y^ʿ* (“sweep”, “remove”),⁸³ followed by an object and subject, while the second has only the object-subject without the verb. In the second couplet only the verb is repeated verbatim. The rest of the couplet is construed by parallel words. The subject in all four cases is a participle. The objects are prefixed by *b*. The sounds */p/* and */b/* are repeated in this description, enhancing the rhythm. All four lines describe people going about daily activities, whose lives are suddenly interrupted by the military’s attack.⁸⁴ This echoes the previous list of the people who join Kirta’s army. They too stopped their individual actions. The elaboration of types of activities and their settings convey the message that life everywhere came to a standstill. The interruption in the people’s lives and the violent action stand in contrast with the non-violent siege. The list also places emphasis on the seventh day.

Similarly, the second list of animals and the noise they make highlights the events on the seventh day of the siege. This list (lines 16–19) is the cause of Pabuli’s restlessness (lines 14–16). Each line in this list mentions an animal and its sound, opening with the preposition *l* (in the command account – there are only three) in a rhythmic pattern. The close consonants */g/*, */q/* and */k/* are repeated, as is */r/*, possibly intensifying the impression of an animal cacophony.

2.6 The list of animals and their sounds compared to other short lists

A similar passage in Joel 1:18 can provide a key to the image’s meaning: “How the beasts groan! / The herd of cattle are bewildered / Because they have no pasture, / And flocks of sheep are dazed.” In this biblical passage the beasts are noisy because their food source has been devastated by a drought and famine (vv. 16–17).

⁸³ Cf. Ps. 55:9. Jonas C. Greenfield, “Some Glosses on the Keret Epic,” *EI* 9 (1969):63; Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín view *s^ʿt* as a passive participle (plural form) of *s^ʿ* (“/s-^ʿ/,” *Dictionary* 2:740; cf. “s^ʿy,” in Tropper, *Kleines Wörterbuch*, 109).

⁸⁴ Greenfield takes this as a description of abandoned environs, since the women “have stopped looking after the essentials needed for minimal survival: water and fuel.” Greenfield, “Some Glosses,” 63.

But this passage is not a true parallel. A “short list” is a formal convention poets use for emphasis. Sometimes the list is arranged in couplets, and sometimes it progresses toward a climax. In addition to the list of raucous animals in KTU 1.14 iii 16–19 (cf. col. v 8–12) this convention is employed in the list of people who join Kirta’s army and the list of people Kirta’s army attack (KTU 1.14 ii 43–47 and iii 7–10; cf. iv 21–28 and iv 49 – v 2). Compare also KTU 1.16 iii 13–16: instead of a summary statement about the famine, the poet-narrator elaborates the types of basic food that has run out, *lhm*, *yn* and *šmn* (bread, wine and oil). The example from *Erra and Ishum* IV discussed above is another example of this formal-poetic convention. We can consider also Is 24:19–20; Is 35:5–7; Is 40:12; Jer 2:8; Jer 51:20–23; and Am 9:2–4 as displaying a similar use of this conventional form. All these samples include a structural repetition, the series invariably expressing an “extreme” example, thus conveying by means of concrete elaboration an idea which an abstract generalization could not have as felicitously expressed.

2.7 The army’s journey and the siege – contextual reading

With the above observations in mind, we now turn to compare the prediction–fulfillment narration. The fulfillment account deviates from its counterpart prediction in two crucial points. The most poignant is Kirta’s stop at Asherah’s temple on the third day of his march to Udum (KTU 1.14 iv 31–48). This breaking of the seven-day pattern is crucial for understanding the narrative and for the building of suspense. Kirta’s fate in the remainder of the narrative is foreshadowed, giving the audience a sense of what is to come. The stop at Asherah’s temple is the root of Kirta’s fall and it motivates the plot; the real question is “How did Kirta’s ill-fate befall him?”⁸⁵

A second important deviation is in the fulfillment account where the poet-narrator pictures Pabuli’s response to the siege. Pabuli simply initiates a conversation with his wife on the seventh day (KTU 1.14 v 12–17):

⁸⁵ Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 107–108.

12-14	<i>ap]nk / [p]bl.[mlk. g]m.l att / [h.k]yṣ[h.]</i> ⁸⁶	Thereupon K[ing Pa]buli Loudly ca[lls out] to his wife:
14-17	<i>šm^c.m^c / [l n]^cmt.atty / []l thm / [.k]rt tk</i>	“Hear now, [...], my wife! ⁸⁷ [...] messege [to Kir[ta [...]]”

Unfortunately, the conversation itself is illegible, but these lines are sufficient for us to notice the interruption of the deviation, as probably the ancient audience did. Pabuli’s speech is obviously important since the poet dedicates thirteen lines to Pabuli’s conversation with his wife. The text of the fulfillment account continues only after this deviation, with Pabuli’s messengers being sent to Kirta (cf. El’s prediction to Kirta in his dream KTU 1.14 iii). Pabuli, the married king, represents a contrasting situation to that of Kirta, the widower. Namely, the deviation from El’s predictions suggests to the audience the contrast between Kirta’s childless condition and that of Pabuli, who has a wife and offspring.⁸⁸ Note also the suspense that is created by its climactic appearance – on the seventh day of the siege.

Thus, both cases in which the fulfillment account deviates from El’s predictive-instructions are reminders that re-emphasize Kirta’s distress, and can be viewed as a manipulation by the poet-narrator intended to affect his audience.

2.8 Kirta’s expedition to Udum compared to the conquest of Jericho (Josh 6)

Kirta’s somewhat fantastical siege has been recognized as a parallel to the Jericho conquest (Josh 6),⁸⁹ especially because of the divine instructions and

⁸⁶ The text is damaged here and there are some differences in transliteration between the different editions.

⁸⁷ See *UNP*, 44 n. 48-49.

⁸⁸ The importance of these differences for the audience’s meaning-making has already been discussed by Greenstein (“The Role of the Reader,” 145-146).

⁸⁹ For example: Del Olmo Lete, “La conquista de Jerico,” 3-15; Fleming, “The Seven-Day Siege,” 221-223; Braber and Wesselius, “The Unity of Joshua 1-8,” 253-274, with additional bibliography (263, n. 17) and a list of similarities (263-266). Braber and Wesselius take pains to expand the list of similarities, suggesting that there is a relationship between the two literary works (265, 266, 267 and *passim*). But this is highly speculative and cannot be

the extraordinary element of conducting a “silent siege,” which ends on the seventh day with a loud clamor. The importance of comparing the two narratives is not the discovery of similar elements and literary links, but rather the examination of the differences that help us understand the central theme that is particular to each story.⁹⁰ We shall briefly review these differences, in order to sharpen our understanding of the meaning of Kirta’s expedition and siege against Udu.

Both protagonists receive divine instructions about how to carry out the siege: Kirta’s are received in a private dream-theophany (KTU 1.14 i 36 – iii 49), whereas Joshua meets the commander of the army of Yahweh (Josh 5:13–15) and later receives a direct divine speech (6:2–5). Joshua is the mediator between God and his people, Israel. He has no personal motivation for the conquest, whereas the epic of Kirta concentrates on the King’s personal distress (KTU 1.14 i 1–32) and how he gained personal divine favor and support (KTU i 36–43; 1.15 ii 1–16; KTU 1.16 iv 1 – vi 2). The people of Ḫubur, who function as a secondary character, join Kirta’s expedition in his goal to procreate offspring who will establish his dynasty. El is depicted as the king’s patron god, and not as a national god who is concerned with the people of Ḫubur or their future.

In the biblical story, the narrative preceding the siege centers on the visit of the two spies in Raḥab’s house (Josh 2). They have been sent to scout

proven. In addition, some of these alleged parallel elements should be rejected. For example, Rahab and Ḫuraya (the woman involved in the story; p. 265) is an unacceptable correlation. At the same time, I would not rule out the possibility that the epic of Kirta was known in Israel, and was a literary source from which motifs, plot-sequence and phrases could be drawn, as the *Aqhat* epic was known to and used by scribes in Israel (2 Sam 1:21; Ezek 14:14; 28:3; Judith chapters 8–13). Until further support for the claim of a direct link between the narratives is presented, it is better to confine the list of parallel elements to more clear-cut instance (cf. Fleming, “The Seven-Day Siege,” 223). Such a list suggests that the parallels probably result from a shared pool of motifs, patterns and modes of expression common to biblical and Ugaritic literature.

⁹⁰ The focus on similarities is a major obstacle in Fleming’s thesis, in the attempt to suggest a literary convention of seven-day siege representing a Holy war. He also compares other samples of siege reports from the Mari letters as well as biblical examples of a seven-day period in war narratives (“The Seven-Day Siege,” 223–228). Unfortunately, this data does not support his thesis. On the contrary, the Mari evidence shows diverse periods of siege and the seven-day pattern in biblical contexts represents diverse military and non-military uses.

the land and Jericho – the first city targeted in the conquest of the entire land of Canaan. This mission appears absurd and unnecessary in light of the divine assurance of victory in chapter 1, but the episode serves to depict Joshua as a second Moses (as part of a whole range of parallel actions ascribed to the two characters). Rahab's character plays a literary and a theological role: (1) Rahab saves the spies and requests to be saved (2:8–14). The episode arouses curiosity – how she will act: will she betray her own people? And will the spies fulfill their promise to her? ; (2) As she and her family are the sole survivors from Jericho, they serve as the exception that proves the rule, i.e. the outcome of a total annihilation of the city's population (6:21; cf. chapter 9); (3) As an outsider declaring faith in Yahweh and his power (2:9–11) she intensifies the message of the entire conquest as narrated in Josh 1–12.⁹¹ In the epic of Kirta no such preceding narrative exists and there is no need for a particular theology that requires emphasis. Instead, the poet-narrator dedicates large sections of the text to the army, its preparations, its march etc. as we have shown above. The woman is a princess who is promised by a divinity to the protagonist, in order to procreate and establish a dynasty (KTU 1.14 iii 38–49).

While the Kirta epic includes two periods of seven days, the Joshua narrative has only one. But other elements in the Jericho narrative appear in sevens: seven priests carry seven horns, and on the seventh day the people and priests should circumambulate Jericho seven times. The number seven is likewise prominent in the Kirta epic: at the beginning of Kirta's story the totality of Kirta's children perish, and the description ends with the words "A seventh part –" (of his heirs;⁹² KTU 1.14 i 20); the march to Udum lasts seven days; after Kirta takes the Udumian princess as wife seven/eight new children are born to him, and this takes place after a mere seven/eight years; seventy/eighty captains are invited to Kirta's court; and when Kirta is

⁹¹ Cf. Fleming, "The Seven-Day Siege," 216–217.

⁹² Greenstein translates the numbers in the prologue as fractions: one-third, one-quarter, etc., amounting to slightly more than one whole (*UNP*, 12, 42, n. 6). It ends with the number "seventh" since it designates totality. Cf. ll. 24–25 *wbklhn*.

approaching death El asks seven times which of the gods will remove his illness. The number seven is a prominent formulaic number – it expresses a sense of quantitative perfection, totality, or inclusiveness.⁹³ In the Bible, the number seven is used specifically to express hyperbole or to stress the importance of an action or an event. It is most common in matters related to the deity.⁹⁴ What is the sense of the number “seven” in both siege stories? In the Kirta Epic the seven-day pattern is probably used to express the passage of time, and the climactic number seven expresses importance and completeness. But in the Jericho narrative it is probably linked to the ritual procession and the divine involvement in the event.⁹⁵

In both narratives that recount a seven-day siege, there is no real assault on the city. The siege in the Kirta epic is not fully elaborated and lacks direct divine action. The description may be regarded as more “realistic”: the king terrorizes the surroundings and starts to negotiate with the ruling monarch while his army waits in silence.⁹⁶ On the seventh day Kirta doesn’t undertake any new action. The besieged king hears the noise of animals in the city.⁹⁷ The noise is illustrative of a besieged party. In the Book of Joshua, the military force (Josh 6:3) circles the city every day with the Ark of the Covenant, the priests and people. The instruction to observe a background

⁹³ Cf. Gen 4:15 and 24; Judg 15:7, 13, 19. Sometimes it is used in climactic structures. Cf. the creation story in Gen 1:1–2:3. Gad Ben-Ami Zarfati, “Mispar (number),” *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 5:185–186 [Hebrew]; Freedman, “Counting Formulae;” Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Topped Triad in the Hebrew Bible and the Ascending Numerical Pattern,” in *Literary Motifs and Patterns in the Hebrew Bible: Collected Studies* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 77–123. See further reading there.

⁹⁴ Ben-Ami Zarfati, “Mispar (number),” 5:181–185 (especially 183–185).

⁹⁵ Ibid. 183; Shmuel Ahituv, *Joshua*, Miqra Leyisra’el (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995), 112–113 [Hebrew].

⁹⁶ I maintain that the description in Kirta tends toward a more “mundane” mode of representation. See above the comparison with the more mythic description in *Erra and Ishum*. Fleming takes the opposite view (“The Seven-Day Siege,” 222): “By operating in a seven-day intervals, Keret moves in synchronicity with El in heaven, and success is guaranteed when the driving force comes from above”.

⁹⁷ During war time in antiquity, people living in the countryside took as many of their precious belongings that they could and took refuge within the city walls. The animals are making noise because they are hungry (Job 6:5; Cf. Parker, *The Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition*, 152). Fleming (“The Seven-Day Siege,” 221) interprets this motif otherwise: “sleeplessness is a common biblical expression of anxiety...”.

silence to be punctuated by noise only on command is part of the planned ritual intended to inspire fear in the besieged population.⁹⁸ The silent siege is part of a ritual procession and is related to the wondrous capture of the city.⁹⁹ On the seventh day the priests blow the horns, the people cheer aloud, and the walls collapse.

The siege itself and its purpose are very different in each narrative. Kirta is clearly warned not to assault Udum during the seven-day siege. Udum is a gift of El. El's predictive instructions specify the purpose of the siege – it will catalyze Pabuli's openness to negotiations. No ritual action takes place during the seven-day siege. Before the seven-day period Kirta is expected to attack the villages surrounding Udum, probably in a demonstrative gesture dramatizing the threat he poses. In Joshua, the annihilation of the entire population is a central theme, derived from the divine command (Josh 6:17–19, 21–24). It is a holy war against the inhabitants of Canaan – negotiation is out of the question (Deut 20:16–18). Thus, Yahweh is an active player in the siege of Jericho: in Josh 5:13–15 the commander of Yahweh's army speaks with Joshua; the priests and Ark of the Covenant circles the city for seven days of the siege; and the city walls collapse miraculously by divine power without an actual (human) assault (Josh 6:20).¹⁰⁰ The purpose of the "miracle story" in Joshua is ideological: to magnify Yahweh's fame and the belief in his power. In Kirta, divine intervention is limited to delivering instructions in a private dream. The idea that animates the action is that of divine concern for (or a patronage relationship with) the royal family, or for human life in general, and that the relationship between El and Kirta is a personal one. In sum, the two narratives differ in regard to detail, theme and purpose. While the Joshua narrative is ideological and meant to be read as a canonical national story of the conquest, the Kirta epic is a legend concerning human existence and royal human affairs.

⁹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 211–212, 218–219.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, "The Seven-Day Siege," 218 and see also n. 22.

¹⁰⁰ Fleming, "The Seven-Day Siege," 214.

3. Conclusion

As the foregoing analysis illustrates, we should recognize that the work's meaning emerges through the use of traditional literary conventions and the poet's unique variations on these conventions. But this forms only one part of the body of knowledge we must apply in order to fully understand Ugaritic narrative poetry. A literary text is understood through the knowledge (or: the poetic "language") held by the audience. The poetics of Ugaritic narrative poetry are a complex and intertwined constellation of (1) literary conventions – their formulation and meaning as well as their variations; (a) literary conventions that mark the text as poetry: parallelism, repetitions, sound repetitions, emphasis, patterns, expressiveness, imagery etc.; and (b) literary conventions that advance the narrative by means of patterns and fixed structures, including epic formulae; (c) narrative design: various motifs, contrasts within the work, characterization, narrative structure; (d) the way the above components are combined with each other within a single composition; (2) the knowledge of a contemporaneous and preceding corpus of stories, poems and other literary texts which display similarities or parallels; to these we should add (3) ideas, beliefs, customs; and even what is no longer accessible to modern readers – (4) the performance, i.e. the setting, the purpose the work fulfilled in people's life, and the manner in which the epic was performed; and (5) the social-historical background that the audience may associate with the work. An audience that listens to an epic performance expects this "language" to be deployed and is competent to understand it. The idea of "epic" is the communicative frame which is essential for the work to operate on the audience as it should.¹⁰¹ Today only part of this frame is accessible to us, and we must imagine the rest.

¹⁰¹ On the purpose and role of ancient epic poetry, see Jack M. Sasson, "Literary Criticism, Folklore Scholarship, and Ugaritic Literature," in *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic*, ed. Gordon D. Young (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 96–98; Lauri Honko, "Epic and Identity: National, Regional, Communal, Individual," *Oral Tradition* 11 (1996):18–36; Richard. P. Martin, "Epic as Genre," in John M. Foley, ed. *A Companion to Ancient Epic*,

Although we have the epic of Kirta at our disposal in written form, it was no doubt performed orally. We have therefore examined the excerpted section both as narrative and as poetry, while considering certain oral aspects to the extent that we are able from such a temporal remove to extract them from the written text. This point of view affects our reading “operations,” i.e. it affects which conventions for reading are used to analyze the Ugaritic passage from Kirta. These reading conventions – the close reading, contextual reading and comparison – constitute our “literary competence” as readers. The ancient audience possessed a more “natural” – conscious and unconscious – literary competence; this knowledge was a shared possession of both the Ugaritic poet-narrator and his intended audience.¹⁰²

Since we are remote in time and culture from the ancient circumstances in which this literature (that relies on the above mentioned system) was composed and performed, our analysis was aided by comparing between parts of our specimen to passages that are similar in language, structure or theme. The purpose of the comparison, which is justified due to the similarity between texts, is mainly to clarify and highlight what is different. Thus, we are able to refine our understanding of how the work – in all its various subtleties – makes sense.¹⁰³ For example, by comparing the list of conscripts to Kirta’s army to similar lists we concluded that the formal convention is alike, but its thematic significance is different, and even unique to the Kirta epic: its specific formulation within Kirta make sense only in its textual, poetic and narrative context.

Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World: Literature and Culture (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 1–9; and Nicolas Wyatt, “Epic in Ugaritic Literature,” in John M. Foley, ed., *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, 249–250, 252.

¹⁰² I have not attempted to read the work against the background of historical, social and political events, since such a discussion would go beyond the scope of this article. Cf. Aaron Tugendhaft, *Baal and the Politics of Poetry* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

¹⁰³ The ancient audience was more competent in this sense. They simply knew more texts than we do today. These texts were probably known through oral reception, and thus the ancient audience upon hearing one work or even one specific performance of a certain work, could evoke in its mind “the other texts” or “the other versions” of a work.

Our inquiry examined several questions about the meaning of the sections depicting three narrative elements: the army, its march to Udum and the siege. Comprising a large section of KTU 1.14, one of three tablets on which the work is written, these elaborate passages occupy about a quarter of narrated text, although the treatment of the three elements does not describe them as either miraculous or unusually formidable, and there is no war nor great military victory. In fact, the army cannot be said to be an active character in the plot. The people of Ḫubur do not play a concrete role, except for appearing beside the hero, their king. So why, we asked, is the description spread over so many verses? Our answer was that the central idea of this part of the Kirta epic is embodied by this prolonged description and it emerges in the process of reception by the “competent audience” that belongs to same literary community as the poet-performer.

We further argued that the poet-narrator strives to highlight the idea of the people of Ḫubur’s support of their king’s personal cause – willingly or by coercion. The way this meaning is created is complex – through a whole suite of strategies that take effect (or are received) when the work is performed (or read). These include repetitions (instruction and fulfillment), semantic fields, sound repetition, “lists,” hyperbolic numbers, quantitative expressions, and a double use of the seven-day pattern which is also interrupted in the second occurrence, and the traditional imagery of the locust.

Forming part of the army’s description, the catalogue of people who join Kirta’s army is another means for elaborating and emphasizing this idea. The enumerated types – the only son, the blind, the sick, the newlywed groom and the widow – normally are not expected to go forth on a military expedition, but in Kirta’s story, even they join to support the King and his mission. The comparison to Joel 2:16 clarifies the intention of the list – to signify the inclusion of people from all sectors of society. A comparison to the lists in Is 35:5–6 and the passage from *Erra and Ishum* reveals a different message, of a reversed world order. Nevertheless, our examination of

parallels reinforces the understanding of this strategy of elaboration. Since the list in Kirta is read in context and includes not just the disabled but also the son, widow and groom, it seems to bear a further meaning unique to the epic. The probable association is with the fate of the king and especially the prologue where all his offspring and wife perish. This fits together with the other strategies.

The journey of Kirta's host and the siege are also described at length, formulated through the double use of the seven-day pattern. This pattern creates great expectations for the success of the journey and of Kirta's undertaking. After all, his actions are motivated by the instructions of El. The contrast between Kirta and Pabuli, drawn already in the instruction account, is a reminder of the reason for the expedition and explains why all of Ḥubur set out to Udum with their king. At this point the audience surely anticipates the fulfillment of El's prediction, but the deviation from the seven-day pattern in the fulfillment account creates a conflicting expectation, because it hints at the ill fate that awaits Kirta. The big question is not "will Kirta get away with his unfulfilled vow," but "How will Kirta's ill-fate come about?" This use of the seven-day pattern is a sophisticated way to create suspense and interest in the audience. For listeners, it is a form that facilitates understanding of the implicit message.

The account of the siege by Kirta and the people of Ḥubur bears several similarities to the siege of Jericho. In both stories, the non-militant nature of the siege is particularly evident. However, the most obvious difference between the two relates the siege's purpose. Whereas the object of the siege on Udum is to obtain the hand of the princess Ḥuraya, whose unique fitness as bride for Kirta is attested to in the description in KTU 1.14 iii 38-49, vi 22-35 and KTU 1.15 i 1-7, the goal of the Jericho siege is the conquest of Jericho. The purpose of the latter narrative is to demonstrate the divine intervention and to praise God and his power. The war therefore is depicted as a wholly fantastic event. Another obvious difference is that Kirta's army does indeed attack the city's surroundings, but not the city itself,

both because the city is a divine gift of El, and because the princess is within the city. Negotiation is deemed better than attack, and indeed after seven days of siege, Pabuli sends envoys to Kirta to find out what he wants. Comparing this story with the account of the “supernatural” Jericho siege allows us to perceive the mundane terms in which the Kirta account is painted. Still, the nature of Kirta’s expedition is indeed wondrous and fabulous because of its all-inclusive aspects and hyperbolic description. We may conclude that the Ugaritic poet is not interested in divine praise of El, but in constructing an impressive legendary account of the expedition and siege, weaving his narrative poetry in accordance with the conventions and the purpose that define “epic.”

The poet also employs catalogs as literary scaffolding for the description of the military preparations, march, attack, and siege. I have already discussed the list of people who join Kirta’s army, but there is also a list of workers who are attacked by Kirta and his host, as well as a list of animals and each the noise it makes. The first list conveys the idea that all the people of Ḥubur, including the widow, the only son, the sick and blind and groom suspend their personal business and join Kirta on his journey to amend the ill fate that befell him at the beginning of the story. Daily life ceases in Ḥubur. Similarly, the list of attacked workers conveys the idea of daily life interrupted. The effect of the siege is intensified by the third list – this siege is indeed something larger than just a human military siege, as in Joel 1:18. This fabulous aspect may be a reminder to the concealed action of El. These examples emerged from a detailed examination of the text, which demonstrated that a short catalog list is a favored form of expression in Ugaritic poetry.¹⁰⁴ The form is also familiar from Mesopotamian and Biblical literatures, where it serves to emphasize inclusiveness, totality or extremes. This poetic phenomenon deserves further attention, which is beyond the scope of this article. It suffices to re-affirm that, “as in the Bible, there is no

¹⁰⁴ Cf. KTU 1.16 iii 13–16; KTU 1.17 vi 20–24 and for example formulae such as the epic formula of receiving bad news in KTU 1.19 ii 44–47 and other places.

mere visual description in the Canaanite epic. Every description is pertinent and integral to the narrative's theme."¹⁰⁵ The convention of including a catalog list can point us toward a general meaning, but it is the context and specific content and formulation (the specific variation) that allows us understand what it means *here*. Indeed, this last statement is true of the use of the seven-day pattern in Kirta or of any convention in the literature with which the audience is familiar.

Following on these observations, we can state that the army's description, journey and siege is by no means marginal; it epitomizes, rather, the ideas that stand at the center of the work.¹⁰⁶ The didactic function of the Kirta epic has already been recognized in the study of Ugaritic literature.¹⁰⁷ But it is to be expected of an epic work that it be multi-faceted and contain more than a single tendency. It is possible therefore that the lengthy description of the army, its journey and siege is meant to teach that the king's motivations are also the peoples' motivation: the king is the most important person and his needs precede the individual lives of his people; on the other hand, the king is also equal to others before the gods, and his transgression deserves divine punishment.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Greenstein, "Biblical Prose Narrative," 14.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. the conversation between Anat and Aqhat (KTU 1.17 vi 16–41) which is significantly longer than other dialogues that appear in the poetic texts from Ugarit and which is also articulated with sound repetition, *leitwörter* and contrasts. See Shirley Natan-Yulzary, "Contrast and Meaning in the Aqhat Story," *VT* 62 (2012):433–449. This conversation conveys the most central idea in the epic – the human condition, human continuity (through offspring) and human fate (death). Cf. the description of the two cities on the shield of Achilles (*Iliad* 18:468–608) and the description on the shield of Aeneas (*Aeneid*, 8:626–729).

¹⁰⁷ See reference in note 3 above.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. the story of David in the book of Samuel. The hero enjoys divine favor and divine succor in his battles, but he is punished for his sin. As in the Kirta epic, the narrator tells of the obstacles the hero confronts, how he obtained his wives, the revolt of his children. Similarly scholars identified Wisdom ideas in the book of Samuel. See, for example, Roger N. Whybray, *The Succession Narrative: A Study of II Samuel 9–20 and I Kings 1 and 2*, SBT 9 (Naperville: Alec R Allenson, 1968), 56–95 ("Wisdom in the Succession Narrative").