All of those who work with the Ugaritic tablets are quite aware of the fact that the scribes occasionally made errors as they produced their texts. This is of course a common characteristic of any manuscript production, and we can hardly single out the scribes of Ugarit for their lapses. The types of scribal errors found in the Ugaritic tablets are similar to those commonly noted in other cuneiform texts and in linear inscriptions as well, and at times particular mistakes can provide hints as to the conditions under which the manuscript was being produced. Certain errors, for example, may suggest that the scribe was writing at the dictation of another person and misheard what the latter said, while others may indicate that the scribe was copying from a written manuscript when the mistake was made. Another class of errors may hint that a scribe was simply not on task and was careless, tired or distracted. This article will look at a series of scribal mistakes that appear to belong to the latter category.

There are three common categories of errors found in the Ugaritic tablets: (1) haplography, in which the scribe accidentally omits a part of the text—from a line, phrase or word, to an individual letter, or even a wedge or wedges within a letter that can make the letter appear to be a different one; (2) dittography, in which a scribe accidentally duplicates part of the text, from a line, phrase or word, to a letter or wedges within a letter; or (3) the simple writing of a mistaken letter, word or phrase.

In recent years I have been looking at the scribal practices evident on the large literary texts produced by the scribe Ilimalku, the student of Attenu the diviner, the latter a chief priest in Ugarit and a high official in the court of King Niqmaddu. Ilimalku was a fine scribe, with a clear and precise hand, but careful study of the tablets indicates that he was a young scribe still learning his craft, and that he made his fair share of scribal errors. Trying to quantify the errors on his tablets is not an easy task. Several factors make it difficult to determine an actual number. In the first place, of course, most of the tablets are significantly damaged, so that many lines and portions of lines are missing. In addition, our knowledge of the vocabulary of Ugarit is limited enough that sometimes we cannot be certain whether a word is actually misspelled or is perhaps an otherwise unattested lexeme. Nor is it always clear that a haplography has occurred when a passage is repeated from elsewhere, but is missing a word or line. Nor is it easy to decide
whether to count a larger mistake as one or multiple errors. For these reasons, no two scholars are likely to agree on the number of errors in any one tablet. But in order to set the passage I will discuss into the larger context of Ilimalku’s scribal work, I have chosen to provide a general sense of the error frequency in Ilimalku’s work, by looking at the number of mistakes noted by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín in their important edition of the texts, CAT.\(^4\) According to my count, they register ca. 150 scribal errors in the ca. 2400 preserved lines of the major texts of Ilimalku, i.e., the Baal, Kirta and Aqhat epics.\(^5\) This averages out to one error for every sixteen lines. Two of the tablets, CAT 1.14 and 1.19, however, stand out with exceptional numbers of errors. If these two are removed from the statistics, then we find that the other tablets have an error rate of one for every 19.2 lines.

Most of the errors on the tablets are untouched and uncorrected. However, occasionally one finds a case where the error has been corrected, either by simply placing the appropriate letter over the wedges of the mistaken one, or by attempting to retouch the clay and fill back in the wedges of the mistake in order to place the correct letter over the erasure. It is not easy to remove a mistaken letter completely from clay. When the clay is hard enough to retain the wedges for writing, it is also hard enough to make it difficult to push the clay back into the mistaken wedge and smooth the surface well enough to hide the error. It is clear that corrections were not a high priority for most scribes. Most of the Ilimalku tablets exhibit little evidence of correction.\(^6\)

In working on the tablets of the Kirta Epic, however, I came across a particularly unusual section of CAT 1.14 in which the number of scribal errors unexpectedly soars and is accompanied by an unparalleled number of corrections and erasures undertaken in order to remedy this situation. Between 1.14 column III, line 52 and column V, line 8, a passage of sixty-eight lines, I have noted some twenty discreet corrected errors and erasures on twelve different lines (III 52, IV 3, 14, 17, 38, 49, 50, V 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8), plus four uncorrected errors on four lines (IV 42, 50, 51 and 52). Twenty-four errors in sixty-eight lines gives us the startling ratio of one error for every 2.8 lines of text! Clearly, something unusual occurred while Ilimalku was working on this part of the tablet.

Errors actually begin to occur early in column III, where a cluster of uncorrected mistakes appears in lines 5–11. These are simple mistaken letters. Instead of a /t/, he accidentally writes an /m/ (III 7). He leaves out the /p/ in /bnpk/ (III 9). He puts an /b/ where he means to write a /m/ (also III 9), and he produces a /y/ instead of the correct /h/ (3.11). Each of these errors seems to

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\(^5\) Following is my tally by tablet, based on the readings in CAT. As will be seen below, the number of errors in 1.14 is considerably higher than indicated in CAT.

\(^6\) There are only thirty scribal corrections noted in CAT for all of the other Baal, Kirta and Aqhat tablets: 1.1 II 14 and IV 13; 1.3 I 11, II 25 and III 31; 1.4 V 10 and VII 38; 1.5 I 2, VI 4 and VI 11; 1.6 II 7, II 36 and V 17; 1.14 (outside the area discussed here) I 16, I 20, I 27, and II 46; 1.16 VI 6 and VI 48; 1.17 I 5, I 11, V 30; 1.18 IV 19; 1.19 I 11, II 44, III 5, III 7, IV 10 (two corrections) and IV 14.