

Canaanites and Amorites

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The . . . Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.

—Numbers 13:29

Two ancient peoples figure largely in the early history of Israel—the Canaanites and the Amorites. An accurate portrayal of the Canaanites and their culture according to our current level of knowledge should lead to a clearer understanding of the distinctions between Canaanites and Israelites.

The Bible is replete with references to the land of Canaan and its inhabitants. The words *Canaan* and *Canaanite* occur some 160 times in the Bible.¹ The first appearance of the name is the reference to Canaan, the grandson of Noah. Canaan was cursed in the aftermath of the incident in Genesis 9:18–23 in which Ham, Canaan's father, looked upon the nakedness of the drunken Noah. Much later, the story of this ancient incident became the explanation for the Israelite enslavement of some of the Canaanites.²

The patriarch Abram was called by God to go into the land of Canaan. When he arrived at Shechem in the central hill country of Canaan west of the Jordan River, God promised to give the land of Canaan to Abram's descendants as a perpetual patrimony (Gen. 12:1–7).³ That promise was repeated

1. Only three of these references are in the New Testament: Matt. 15:22 refers to the encounter of Jesus with a Canaanite woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon; in Acts 7:11 Stephen mentions the famine in Egypt and Canaan in the patriarchal period; and in Acts 13:19 Paul notes the destruction of seven nations in the land of Canaan.

2. The prehistoric story of Noah became a part of Israelite written literature after a long period of transmission as oral literature.

3. On the critical and ongoing importance of the promise of the land, see Harry M. Orlinsky, "The Biblical Concept of the Land of Israel: Cornerstone of the Covenant between God and Israel," *Eretz-Israel* 18 (1985; Nahman Avigad volume): 43*–55*.

to Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 26:3; 28:13; 35:12) and is referred to at the very end of Genesis, where the dying Joseph reminded his brothers of the promise and insisted that, when God moved to fulfill his pledge, they should carry his bones with them into the promised land (50:24).

At the call of Moses, God promised to deliver the Israelites from their affliction in Egypt and to bring them into "the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exod. 3:8, 17 NRSV). Assuming that in this formulaic statement the order of names moves from the greatest to the least number of people, the major occupants of the land of promise were a people called the Canaanites.

Name

The origin of the name *Canaan* is obscure. Possibly the earliest written evidence for the name is from Ebla in central Syria, where Italian archaeologists have recovered numerous clay tablets dating to approximately 2250.⁴ In a list of offerings to various deities, the god Dagon is called "lord of Canaan (*dbē kà-na-na-im*)."⁵ An eighteenth-century letter from Mari provides the next evidence for the name in a phrase that connects "thieves and Canaanites."⁶ The *land of Canaan* is also attested in a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century text from Syria.⁷ *Canaan* and *Canaanite* also occur in Egyptian on a stele of Amenhotep II (Dynasty 18, ca. 1450–1425) discovered at Memphis and on the "Israel Stele" of Pharaoh Merneptah (Dynasty 19, ca. 1227–1217).⁸

Many scholars used to relate *Canaan* to the Akkadian word *kinahhu* ("red purple"), an explanation based on the purple dye that Canaanites living along the eastern Mediterranean coast produced from sea snails.⁹ The derivation of the name from this source, however, has been largely disproved. The name more likely derives from a personal name, as indicated in the He-

4. Ebla is the ancient name of modern Tell Mardikh, south of Aleppo; see Paolo Matthiae, *Ebla: An Empire Rediscovered*, trans. Christopher Holme (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981).

5. Giovanni Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla: An Empire Inscribed in Clay* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 246, 248, 253 (the reference is to TM.75.G.1376 rev. ii 7–iii 3). The evidence is problematic; some scholars locate *ga-na-na-um* and its variants to the east of Ebla.

6. Jack M. Sasson, "The Earliest Mention of the Name 'Canaan,'" *Biblical Archaeologist* 47 (1984): 90.

7. In 1939 the statue of King Idrimi of Alalakh was discovered at Atchana in Syria; see ANET 557–58.

8. ANET 376, 378. This inscription is the earliest reference to Israel known outside the Bible. The telling phrase is, "Israel is laid waste, his seed is not."

9. Patrick E. McGovern, "A Dye for Gods and Kings," *Archaeology* 43:2 (1990): 33.

brew story of Noah and in Greek and Phoenician sources. *Canaan* combines the Semitic root *k-n-* ("to sink, be low") with a common suffix *-(a)n*, but this gives little basis for the name as it stands. One attractive suggestion is that the root meaning could be applied to the movement of the sun sinking in the west. Thus the Canaanites would be the "Sundowners, Westerners."¹⁰ (Interestingly, this is also the meaning of the name *Amorite*.) Whether the land took its name from the people or vice versa remains undetermined.

Defining the Land of Canaan

Biblical writers considered the Canaanites to be but one of a number of groups that occupied the land of Canaan at the time of the exodus and conquest—Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites (Exod. 3:8).¹¹ It is not possible to establish exact dates for the exodus and the conquest (the historicity of these events is a matter of scholarly debate), but a general consensus is that they occurred near the end of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1200). Israelite incursions into the land of Canaan, as well as Philistine and Aramean occupation of other areas once held by Canaanites, signaled the demise of Late Bronze Age Canaan.¹² But before the close of the Late Bronze Age, what territory did ancient Canaan occupy? The answer to this question is that territorial designations fluctuate over time and in relationship to the mighty powers of the ancient Near East—Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Egypt was inevitably and persistently interested in the Syro-Palestinian land bridge to its north between the Mediterranean Sea and the eastern desert. In Egyptian references dating to the Old Kingdom period (ca. 2700–2400), the inhabitants of this Asian region were called 'Aamu, while the area along the Phoenician coast was known as Fenhu (the meanings of these

10. Alan R. Millard, "The Canaanites," in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 34; D. R. Ap-Thomas, "The Phoenicians," in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 263. Cf. Michael C. Astour, "The Origin of the Terms 'Canaan,' 'Phoenician,' and 'Purple,'" *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 24 (1965): 346–50.

11. For a discussion of other lists of people groups in Canaan, see Tomoo Ishida, "The Structure and Historical Implications of the Lists of Pre-Israelite Nations," *Biblica* 60 (1979): 461–90; Nadav Na'aman, "Canaanites and Perizzites," *Biblische Notizen* 45 (1988): 42–47; and Kevin G. O'Connell, "The List of Seven People in Canaan," in *The Answers Lie Below: Essays in Honor of Lawrence Edmund Toombs*, ed. Henry O. Thompson (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984), 221–41.

12. Although Canaanite material culture continued to influence the cultures of both Israel and Philistia after the close of the Late Bronze Age, Canaan as a politico-geographical entity ceased. The end of the Late Bronze Age can conveniently be considered the close of the Canaanite era. Only the Phoenicians continued Canaanite culture in an unbroken stream.

names are unclear).¹³ This Egyptian connection is confirmed by inscriptions discovered in the excavations at Byblos in Lebanon,¹⁴ and the Canaanite link to Egypt is evident in Canaanite pottery found in Egyptian tombs of Dynasty 1 (ca. 3100–2890). The Egyptian presence in Syria is equally clear from the discovery at Ebla of fragments of Egyptian stone vases bearing titles of Pharaoh Khafre (Dynasty 4, ca. 2500), along with part of an Egyptian alabaster vase bearing the complete titles (in hieroglyphs) of Pepi I (Dynasty 6, 2300).¹⁵

Mesopotamian inscriptions from the third and second millennia refer to all the country west of the Euphrates as far as the Mediterranean (the Sea of Amurru) as *the land of Amurru*. Because Mesopotamian experience with this region was primarily in Syria, references to the land of Amurru are primarily to that area, yet all of Syria-Palestine could be included in the expression. For example, during the Ur III period (ca. 2000), Canaanite Tyre on the Mediterranean coast was ruled by a local representative of the king of Ur in southern Mesopotamia.¹⁶ Some scholars insist that Ebla was outside the region of Canaan,¹⁷ but the native language (known as Paleo-Canaanite or Eblaite) found in approximately twenty percent of the texts thus far recovered from Ebla appears to have strong Northwest Semitic affinities.¹⁸ This language exhibits a number of similarities to Biblical Hebrew, which was itself a dialect of Canaanite in use over a millennium later.

In the early second millennium, Canaan likely comprised the eastern Mediterranean coast from the River of Egypt northward past Carmel Head (modern Haifa) well into Lebanon.¹⁹ A Late Bronze Age tradition in Joshua 13:3 extends the name to include the coastal plain all the way to the Shihor River

13. Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, 2d ed., trans. and ed. Anson F. Rainey (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 65.

14. These date back to Nebka (Khasekhemwy), the last king of Dynasty 2, ca. 2686, indicating an Egyptian interest and presence. Typical Egyptian materials from the same period were found also in an early temple on the site.

15. Matthiae, *Ebla*, 9.

16. William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (repr. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1979), 113.

17. As an example of Ebla-Canaan connections, see Robert R. Stieglitz, "Ebla and the Gods of Canaan," *Eblaïtica* 2 (1990): 79–89.

18. Pettinato, *Archives of Ebla*, 56. Alfonso Archi, however, refuses the designation *Early Canaanite* for the language of Ebla in "Ebla and Eblaite," *Eblaïtica* 1 (1987): 8. Less adamant is the view of Igor M. Diakonoff in "The Importance of Ebla for History and Linguistics," *Eblaïtica* 2 (1990): 29. The classification of Eblaite among the language groups of the Early Bronze Age is still problematic, as Cyrus H. Gordon notes: "Eblaite is indeed a border language, with isoglosses in both directions," that is, toward both East Semitic and West Semitic (*Eblaïtica* 1 [1987]: 1). In fact, some scholars hold that Eblaite is an early form of Akkadian and not directly related to Northwest Semitic.

19. John Gray, *The Canaanites* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1964), 15.

on the border of Egypt.²⁰ The same passage in Joshua extends the territory of Canaan northward through the Philistine plain into the region of Sidon. Judges 5:19, reflecting an Iron Age I tradition, mentions "the kings of Canaan" whose forces under the command of Sisera fought against the Israelite tribes. These kings must have been rulers of small city-states in the plains of Jezreel, Megiddo, and Beth-shan as well as in Galilee, including Hazor. The king of Hazor is called "the king of Canaan" (Judg. 4:2, 23–24), and Hazor was called "the head of all those kingdoms" (Josh. 11:10).

In the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2000–1550), the Egyptians began to use the name *Retenu* for the regions of Syria-Palestine all the way to the Euphrates. *Retenu* continued in use in the New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1200), but two new names appeared as well: *Djahi* and *the land of Hurru*. The latter obviously refers to the Horites (Hurrians), a people mentioned in the Bible (Gen. 14:6; 36:20–30; Deut. 2:12, 22) who apparently entered Canaan during the period in which the Hyksos ruled Egypt and dominated Canaan (ca. 1750–1550).²¹ Egyptian records from the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries, including the Amarna letters, contain the names of a number of rulers of Canaanite city-states who are clearly Hurrian.²² Another name in full use during the New Kingdom is the *land of Canaan* (noted above). In the Amarna letters the Canaanite kings call themselves *Kinahu* or *Kinanu*. Also appearing on a stele of Pharaoh Amenhotep II recovered at Memphis (just south of modern Cairo),²³ this expression is clearly the equivalent of Northwest Semitic *Canaanite*.

Egyptians used *Retenu*, *Djahi*, *land of Hurru*, and *Kinanu* as general titles for the area of their dominance in Syria-Palestine during the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550–1200).²⁴ They understood the name *Canaan* as referring to the full area: from the Brook of Egypt (south of Gaza) northward along the coast past Gebal/Byblos, then inland to the western fringe of the Syrian Desert, then southward to incorporate eastern Bashan down to the Yarmuk River, then down the Jordan Valley to the southern end of the Dead Sea, then westward through the Wilderness of Zin, and back to the Brook of Egypt. The

20. James K. Hoffmeier, "Shihor," in *ISBE* 4:476.

21. The Hyksos were chariot warriors out of Syria-Palestine who ruled the delta region of Egypt during the Second Intermediate period in Egyptian history.

22. The Amarna letters, discovered in Egypt in 1887, date to the fourteenth century and were written in Akkadian, the diplomatic language of the time. Of approximately 377 tablets, nearly 300 were from petty kings in Syria-Palestine to the Egyptian pharaoh. On ethnic and linguistic evidence from the Amarna letters, see Richard S. Hess, "Cultural Aspects of Onomastic Distribution in the Amarna Texts," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 21 (1989): 209–16.

23. Sabatino Moscati, *The World of the Phoenicians*, trans. Alastair Hamilton (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965), 3.

24. Cf. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 68–69.

territories of the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites were outside the Egyptian view of the land of Canaan, although the Transjordanian groups shared a common material culture with the neighboring Canaanite city-states.

The Late Bronze Age Egyptian province of Canaan is approximately the same region as the biblical land of Canaan.²⁵ A later biblical definition of the land of Israel occurs in the phrase *from Dan to Beer-sheba*, but the historical memory of the larger limits of Canaan were retained in the Bible.

Canaanite Origins

The origin of the Canaanites remains obscure. Struggling to integrate evidence from archeology and ancient texts in order to clarify Canaanite origins, experts confront these basic problems: Were the Canaanites native to the region or emigrants? If they emigrated, from where did they originate?

According to Donald Harden, Canaanites were not the aboriginal inhabitants of the region, but migrated into the area that was to bear their name. Unable to establish when the migration occurred, Harden thinks that they likely came northward out of Arabia or the Persian Gulf, perhaps as early as 2350.²⁶ The evidence from Byblos (noted above) perplexes him, however, for it indicates connections between that city and Egypt at a much earlier date. So Harden suggests the bare possibility that there might have been Semites dwelling at Gebal (the Semitic name of Byblos) who traded with the Egyptians as early as 3000.

John Gray also thinks that the Canaanites migrated, but from a nearby region—the north Arabian steppe—“from which its Semitic stock was constantly replenished when annual seasonal migrations of nomads for summer grazing after harvest became periodically mass settlement or armed invasion.”²⁷

It is unclear whether the Canaanites descended from Chalcolithic-era natives or entered the region from elsewhere. What is clear is that there are significant differences between the material culture of Chalcolithic Canaan and the subsequent Early Bronze culture, which many archeologists mark as the beginning of the Canaanite period. Kathleen Kenyon, for example, notes that the widespread Chalcolithic Ghassulian culture from the Jordan Valley “does not seem to have made any appreciable contribution towards what followed.”²⁸ Groups entering Palestine in the last centuries of the fourth millen-

25. Ibid., 74, 77.

26. Donald Harden, *The Phoenicians* (New York: Praeger, 1962), 21.

27. Gray, *Canaanites*, 25.

28. Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Amorites and Canaanites*, Schweich Lectures 1963 (London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1966), 6.

nium, likely from the east and northeast, were the people who established sites that became towns in the succeeding cultural phase. These sites ultimately became walled cities in the Early Bronze period.

Archeologists recognize that variations between the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze eras occur in terms of settlement patterns, population size and density, agricultural practices, trade relations, and artifact assemblages and forms.²⁹ At the same time, some elements of Early Bronze Age culture do exhibit continuity with the preceding period, and skeletal remains from the two periods fail to indicate the displacement of one population type by another. All this suggests a transition between the two periods, which is described by Amihai Mazar as “an intermingling of new features—originating in Syria, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia—with elements rooted in the local culture of the preceding period. . . . It is possible that new peoples arrived . . . mainly from Syria and mixed with the remnants of the autochthonous population.”³⁰

Previously, William F. Albright advocated a similar view: “It is clear that the ethnic identity of the people later known as ‘Canaanites’ was already established no later than the end of the fourth millennium B.C.”³¹ He bases this statement on the large number of towns with standard Semitic names established in the region before 3000—towns such as Beth-erah, Megiddo, Jericho, and Arad. Additional evidence in support of this view comes from the Egyptian borrowing of Semitic words (e.g., *karmu* [“vineyard”] and *qamhu* [“wheat flour”]) no later than the early Pyramid Age (ca. 2700). Albright allows for the incursion of non-Semitic populations (e.g., from Anatolia) into the region who introduced the so-called Khirbet Kerak ware around 2500.

Between the twenty-third and twentieth centuries, Mesopotamian culture influenced the region, as reflected in the caliciform ware transmitted through Syria during this time. At the time Albright wrote, Ebla had not yet been discovered. Now this site supports his argument that a powerful Mesopotamian influence permeated Syria-Palestine during this period. Even more, however, Ebla testifies to a thriving center of culture in Syria with widespread connections to Anatolia, Egypt, and Mesopotamia.³² The movement of a Syrian population into the southern adjacent region in the late third millennium is

29. Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 10,000–586 B.C.E.* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 104–5.

30. Ibid., 105.

31. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 110–11. Moscati (*World of the Phoenicians*, 5) holds that the Phoenicians (descendants of the coastal Canaanites) were quite likely the result of a historical evolution in the Syro-Palestinian area and not a migration of people from outside.

32. Cf. Paolo Matthiae, “The Mature Early Syrian Culture of Ebla and the Development of Early Bronze Civilization in Jordan,” in *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*, ed. Adnan Hadidi (Amman: Department of Antiquities, 1982), 1:77–91.

the most likely explanation for the arrival of the Amorites, who (as noted) were one of the predominant groups occupying the land of Canaan at the end of the Late Bronze Age.³³

Amorite Origins

The urbanization of Canaan in the Early Bronze Age II (ca. 2900–2700), illustrated by sites such as Arad and Ai, declined during the Early Bronze Age III, which ended about 2300. Walled cities were destroyed or abandoned, and urban culture gave way to a pastoral, village way of life over the next two centuries, Early Bronze Age IV (about 2300–2000). The reasons for such drastic changes are unclear, but three possible causes may be suggested: (1) Egyptian military action, (2) changing environmental factors including overpopulation, or (3) an invading horde of Amorites. The Amorites would have destroyed the urban centers and established the variant lifestyle characteristic of the period until urbanization flowered in the subsequent Middle Bronze Age II. It is possible that all of these factors played a role in the changes that distinguish this transition from Early Bronze IV to Middle Bronze I.³⁴

Numbers 13:29 states: “The Amalekites live in the land of the Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan” (NRSV). While the Amorites are here listed among the peoples of the land, the Bible provides scant evidence about them. By the time of the prophet Amos (2:9), the Amorites were vaguely remembered as a people of the heroic past. Extrabiblical texts, however, do provide a tentative basis for understanding the Amorites.

The word *Amorite* has ancient origins, deriving from Akkadian *Amurru*, the equivalent of the earlier Sumerian *Martu*. In both languages the word could designate a region, people, or direction. As a directional indicator, the

name was already in use by about 2300. To the Mesopotamians, *Martu/Amurru* referred to the west. Just as the north was called Subartu, the east Elam, and the south Sumer—after the peoples who lived in those directions—so too the west was named after the Amorites.³⁵

Martu was employed as an ethnic expression as early as 2600. Numbers of Martu people of a later period are mentioned in texts recovered at Lagash, Umma, Adab, and Susa. These Martu apparently immigrated from the west into Mesopotamian cities before and during the Ur III period (ca. 2000). References to the Martu indicate that they were nomads and shepherds, supplying sheep and goats to the urban populace. Contact with and adaptation to urban environments inevitably brought changes: some Martu are mentioned as dealers in leather goods and others are named among the recipients of rations, probably for work done. Such references suggest that their assimilation to Mesopotamian urban society was in progress.

The Amorites (*Martu*) described in Mesopotamian records had their roots in Syria. The nomadic lifestyle noted and recorded in Mesopotamia, however, may not have been representative of all Amorites in Syria. We now know, thanks to archeological discoveries in Syria during the last two decades, that Amorite city-states existed in Syria in the last half of the third millennium. It is apparent that many westerners were urbanites. Texts from Mari clearly indicate that nomads (or seminomads practicing seasonal transhumance) together with farmers formed one ethnic unit rather than a dichotomy.³⁶

It is evident that the home region of the Amorites was Syria. In fact, the Middle Bronze Age texts from Mari indicate a region of *Amurru* within Syria, and in the Late Bronze Age a kingdom of *Amurru* ruled by a certain Abdi-Ashirta existed in the mountainous part of Syria.³⁷ The problem, then, is to determine when the ancestors of the biblical Amorites migrated south into Canaan. At this point a definitive answer eludes us. Earlier archeologists posited the Amorite migration as the catalyst of the transition in Canaan from the Early Bronze Age IV to the Middle Bronze Age I (ca. 2250–2000). This transition coincided with the First Intermediate period in Egypt and a period

33. For a contrary opinion, see Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham*, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 133 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974), 89–96.

34. On the transition from the Early Bronze Age to the Middle Bronze Age, see William G. Dever, “New Vistas on the EB IV (‘MB I’) Horizon in Syria-Palestine,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 237 (1980): 35–64; Suzanne Richard, “Toward a Consensus of Opinion on the End of the Early Bronze Age in Palestine-Transjordan,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 237 (1980): 5–63; Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 151–73; John J. Bimson, “Archaeological Data and the Dating of the Patriarchs,” in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, ed. Alan R. Millard and Donald J. Wiseman (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 53–89; Moshe Kochavi, “At That Time the Canaanites Were in the Land . . .,” in *Recent Archaeology in the Land of Israel*, ed. Hershel Shanks and Benjamin Mazar (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1981), 25–29.

35. Compare Samuel N. Kramer, *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta: A Sumerian Epic Tale of Iraq and Iran* (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1952), lines 141–46, and his translation of the “Curse of Akkad” in ANET 648.

36. Cf. J. Tracy Luke, “‘Your Father Was an Amorite’ (Ezek. 16:3, 45): An Essay on the Amorite Problem in OT Traditions,” in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. Herbert B. Huffmon, Frank A. Spina, and Alberto R. W. Green (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 221–37. See also Mario Liverani, “The Amorites,” in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, ed. Donald J. Wiseman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 107; and Victor H. Matthews, “The Role of the *Rabi Amurrim* in the Mari Kingdom,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 38 (1979): 129–34.

37. Liverani, “Amorites,” 116.

of disruption in Mesopotamia,³⁸ and the Amorites were identified as the culprits. More recently, the connection of the Amorites to this transition is discounted because there is no supporting data from Canaan.³⁹ Rather, it is suggested that the Amorites arrived in Canaan at the start of the Middle Bronze Age II and that they were responsible for the renewed urbanization.⁴⁰

For the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550–1200),⁴¹ Egyptian texts corroborate what the Bible clearly states: the population of Canaan was quite diverse in this time. Egyptian records document the following peoples: ‘Apiru, Canaanites, Hurrians (Horites), Israelites, and Shasu (= Bedouin tribes);⁴² the Bible refers to Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, Hittites, Jebusites, Kadmonites, Kenites, Kenizzites, Perizzites, and Rephaites (Gen. 15:19–21).

But the discernment of specific ethnic groups from archeological evidence is next to impossible. Excavations from Hazor in the north to Lachish in the south clearly indicate that throughout the region during the period of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages the material culture was uniform. In the absence of inscriptional material it is impossible to determine the relationship of particular material remains to a specific group. Nevertheless, Kathleen Kenyon begins with the biblical statement that “the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan” (Num. 13:29 NRSV). Mapping the towns specifically designated as Amorite and Canaanite, she concludes that “the overall pattern, though it has gaps, accords well with the general location of the peoples of the land given in Numbers xiii.29. . . . The inhabitants of the hill country both to the east and the west of the Jordan were regarded by the Israelites as Amorites, and the inhabitants of the coastal plain, the valley of Esdraelon, and the valley of the Jordan as Canaanites. . . . The Amorites were hill dwellers, the Canaanites plain dwellers.” Kenyon emphasizes that “the picture of two cultural provinces divided by the Jordan is that which in fact is given by the archaeological evidence.”⁴³ Yet Amorites existed on both sides of the Jordan (Josh. 5:1; 10:6).

38. Kathleen Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land*, 3d ed. (New York: Praeger, 1971), 159–61.

39. William G. Dever, “The Patriarchal Traditions,” in *Israelite and Judaeon History*, ed. John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 102–11; Kochavi, “At That Time,” 28; Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 169–71.

40. William H. Stiebing Jr., “When Was the Age of the Patriarchs?—Of Amorites, Canaanites, and Archaeology” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 1.2 (1975): 17–20; Kochavi, “At That Time,” 29. Cf. William G. Dever, “The Middle Bronze Age: The Zenith of the Urban Canaanite Era,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 50 (1987): 148–77.

41. Albert Leonard Jr., “The Late Bronze Age,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 52 (1989): 4–39.

42. The ‘Apiru are mentioned in Amarna letter 271 (ANET 486), the Hurrians in the victory hymn of Merenptah (ANET 378), and the Shasu in a report of a frontier official (ANET 259).

43. Kenyon, *Amorites and Canaanites*, 3.

The distinctions between some of these population groups, however, indicates that they may be clans, rather than different ethnic groups. Mario Liverani argues that the biblical writers indiscriminately used *Amorite* or *Canaanite*. Alternatively, they used *Amorite* to refer to a geographical region that the term *Canaanite* did not fit.⁴⁴ This view is supported by William Stiebing, who suggests that “quite possibly, Amorites and Canaanites were ethnically and culturally identical, with the name Canaanite applied to those Amorites who inhabited the cities of the coastal plain, and specifically the merchant class that dominated those cities.”⁴⁵ The ease with which the Bible intermingles *Amorite* and *Canaanite* is seen in Genesis 36:2–3. First we are informed in general terms that Esau married Canaanite women; then we are told specifically that his three wives were Hittite, Hivite, and Ishmaelite.

The close identity of the Amorites with the Canaanites is illustrated in Ezekiel’s reprimand of the Jebusites living in Jerusalem: “Your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite” (16:3 NRSV).⁴⁶ In the prophet’s view, ethnic identities are blurred and subsumed under the broader term *Canaanite*.

Canaanite Language

Canaanite is one of two main branches of the Northwest Semitic family of languages (the other is Aramaic). These languages and related dialects are distinguished from the Semitic languages of Mesopotamia, South Arabia, and Ethiopia. The oldest attested Semitic language is Akkadian, which is found in texts from the time of Sargon of Akkad (ca. 2300). Akkadian slowly displaced the earlier language of the Sumerians in the third millennium as Semites rose to power in Mesopotamia. While Akkadian appeared early, it continued to be spoken and written in Mesopotamia, evolving into Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian in the second millennium, when it was also in use at Mari. In the first millennium, Assyrian and Babylonian dialects prevailed until the rise of the Persian Empire.

Prior to the discovery of cuneiform texts at Ebla, a third-millennium Canaanite language was postulated but unproved.⁴⁷ Now Eblaite is tentatively identified as Old Canaanite because of its affinity with later Canaanite dialects. Eblaite was in use among urban peoples of Syria. Amorite was ap-

44. Liverani, “Amorites,” 125.

45. Stiebing, “When Was the Age of the Patriarchs?” 21.

46. Luke, “Your Father Was an Amorite.”

47. Pettinato, *Archives of Ebla*, 57.

parently the language of the rural people, and the only form of Amorite that has survived is known from personal names embedded in texts from Mesopotamia, Syria, and Egypt dating to the first half of the second millennium.⁴⁸ Eblaite likely differed only dialectically from Amorite, and linguistically there is little distinction between Amorite and Canaanite dialects until the middle of the second millennium, distinctions that might point to differences in ethnic origin or in time of arrival in Syria-Palestine.

Canaanite is derived from the Semitic language in use in Syria-Palestine in the third millennium. Early evidence of the language comes from Late Bronze inscriptions at Serabit el-Khadim in the Sinai Peninsula and in the slightly later Amarna letters.⁴⁹ The Amarna letters consist primarily of diplomatic correspondence between petty rulers of city-states in Syria-Palestine and the Egyptian pharaohs during the mid-fourteenth century. Surprisingly, in this period Akkadian rather than Egyptian was the language of diplomacy. As a reading aid for the Egyptian court officials who received the correspondence, Canaanite scribes frequently added Canaanite words written with cuneiform signs to explain Akkadian terms. These glosses provide a window through which to view scattered elements of the Canaanite language in the Late Bronze Age. Because of the direct relationship of Canaanite and Hebrew, the glosses are of particular interest to students of Hebrew.

The 1929 discovery of clay tablets at Ras Shamra, the site of ancient Ugarit, provided an important source of information on a language closely akin to Canaanite.⁵⁰ The find was made along the Mediterranean coast a few miles north of modern Latakia in Syria in a context datable to the Late Bronze Age. Written in a cuneiform script based on an alphabet rather than on a syllabic system of writing, the texts provide significant information on the social, political, economic, and religious ideas and practices of a city-state

48. Herbert B. Huffmon, *Amorite Personal Names in the Mari Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965). Amorite names tended to consist of a verb and a subject or object.

49. On the Serabit el-Khadim materials, see William F. Albright, *The Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions and Their Decipherment*, 2d ed., Harvard Theological Studies 22 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969); Benjamin Sass, *The Genesis of the Alphabet and Its Development in the Second Millennium [sic] B.C.*, Ägypten und Altes Testament 13 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988); and Joseph Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet* (Jerusalem: Magnes/Leiden: Brill, 1982), 23–27. Over 350 clay tablets were discovered in 1887 in the ruins of Tell el-Amarna in Egypt.

50. See Cyrus H. Gordon, "The Ugaritic Texts: Half a Century of Research," *Biblical Archaeology Today: Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem, April 1984* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society/Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities/American Schools of Oriental Research, 1985), 492–501; W. Herrmann, "Ras Shamra—fünfzig Jahre Forschungen," *Das Altertum* 25.2 (1979): 99–102; Gordon D. Young (ed.), *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981).

quite similar and related to southern Canaanite city-states.⁵¹

The Canaanite language had evolved by 1000 into several regional dialects: Phoenician, Hebrew, Edomite, Moabite, and Ammonite. Further north in Syria, Aramaic had developed from the earlier Northwest Semitic stock. In the course of time it would eclipse related languages to become the international language of the Persian Empire, to a large extent even displacing Hebrew as the language of the Jews.

Canaanite Religion

Religion is in part a human response to the environment. The environment exhibits powers—for example, sun, moon, sea, earthquakes, volcanoes, death, and reproductive power—that are greater than the individual and hence potentially destructive or beneficial. In the ancient world such powers were personified as deities, and ancient people responded to such powers with beliefs and practices that were the shared experiences and explanations of life in living communities. Religion is expressed, then,

51. Peter C. Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); Adrian Curtis, *Ugarit (Ras Shamra)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); Rudolph H. Dornemann, "The Excavations at Ras Shamra and Their Place in the Current Archaeological Picture of Ancient Syria," in *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic*, ed. Gordon D. Young (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 59–69; Gabriel Saadé, *Ougarit: Métropole Cananéenne* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1979); Keith N. Schoville, *Biblical Archaeology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 236–42.



Canaanite head from Ugarit (Ras Shamra), 14th–13th century B.C. (height: 6.3")

Courtesy of the Direction Générale des Antiquités et des Musées, Damascus

as a pattern of human behavior in the face of life's difficulties. It is behavior shared by the group of people who trust in the beliefs and participate in the practices.

In attempting to describe the religion of the Canaanites, we must keep in mind that at best we can but speculate on the deeper nature of Canaanite religion. We cannot know what was in the heart and mind of a devotee of the Canaanite religious experience. Further, we can know little of the folk religion practiced by rural Canaanites, since they left no written records.

What can be known about the Canaanite religion derives from two general sources of information: written records and material remains. The Bible is an important source, but the biblical writers naturally present a somewhat biased point of view that deprecated the Canaanite religion (Deut. 18:9–14).⁵² Of primary importance in providing insight into Canaanite religion are the Ugaritic texts—both literary (e.g., myths and legends) and nonliterary (e.g., offering lists).⁵³ Before the Ugaritic discoveries, scanty written information relating to the Canaanite/Phoenician religion was available: Phoenician and Punic inscriptions, references in Greek and Roman sources, and the writings of the Phoenician priest Sanchuniathon.⁵⁴ Archeological excavations in what was ancient Canaan have recovered evidence of sanctuaries, deity figurines, incense burners, altars, and related paraphernalia. At Phoenician colonies on Cyprus and further west on the coasts of the Mediterranean, evidences of the later Punic form of the Canaanite religion have been recovered, including

52. On Ugarit and the Old Testament, see Peter C. Craigie, "Ugarit and the Bible: Progress and Regress in Fifty Years of Literary Study," in *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic*, ed. Gordon D. Young (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 99–111; idem, "Ugarit, Canaan, and Israel," *Tyndale Bulletin* 34 (1983): 145–68; C. Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1986); John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Jonas C. Greenfield, "The Hebrew Bible and Canaanite Literature," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 545–60.

53. See Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, Analecta Orientalia 38 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1965); idem, "Poetic Legends and Myths from Ugarit," *Berytus* 25 (1977): 5–133; Michael D. Coogan, *Stories from Ancient Canaan* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978); John C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1976); and John Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan: The Ras Shamra Texts and Their Relevance to the Old Testament*, 2d ed., *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1965).

54. The original work, written in Phoenician in the sixth century, has been lost. What we have of it was transmitted through Philo of Byblos (who wrote in Greek ca. A.D. 100), and church historian Eusebius (265–339) in his *Praeparatio Evangelica*. We also have information on Sanchuniathon's work through Porphyry in his treatise *Against the Christians*. Born at Tyre in A.D. 234, Porphyry went to Athens to study in 254 and then to Rome in 263, where he died between 301 and 310. See also James Barr, "Philo of Byblos and His 'Phoenician History,'" *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 57 (1974): 17–68.

cemeteries (called *tophets*) that confirm the sacrifice of children; however, no *tophets* have been found in Canaan proper.⁵⁵ (Note, however, the recent discovery of a possible *tophet* at Tyre, mentioned by William A. Ward in the chapter on the Phoenicians in this volume.) The excavations at Ugarit also revealed cultic centers (i.e., temples) and related features.⁵⁶

Any reconstruction of the Canaanite religion from these sources is ultimately inadequate, for the sources are fragmentary. Phoenician and Punic inscriptions give little more than the names of the gods being invoked, and only a part of Sanchuniathon's work survives. The Ugaritic texts provide authentic Canaanite records that contain firsthand expressions of Canaanite religious thought and practice, but the texts are incomplete and often damaged. And archeological remains are but the surviving remnant of what once existed. The meaning given to archeological remains is an educated guess. Nevertheless, a general picture of Canaanite religious beliefs and practices emerges from a study of these sources.⁵⁷

Myths

A religious myth consists of words spoken in connection with ritual actions. The words are intended to help make the rites effective for the officiating priests and the people who follow their instructions in the rituals. The acts of the worshipers imitate the actions of the characters in the myths. In a magical way, the rituals are made effective by the recitation of the appropriate myths as the acts are performed.

The literary texts from Ugarit include both myths (in which the gods are the actors and the center of focus) and epics (in which mortals are the major characters, although the gods may be involved). The myths involve Baal (also known as Hadad, god of thunder and lightning), the most active god of the Ugaritic pantheon;⁵⁸ Yam, the god of the sea (Hebrew *yām* means "sea"); El, the patriarchal deity, and his spouse Athirath (Asherah = Astarte); Kothar-

55. Evidence suggesting human sacrifice was recovered in excavations at Gezer in Israel, according to Reuben Bullard, staff geologist (private communication).

56. The temples of Dagon and Baal were major buildings located on the acropolis of the site. Between them was the house of the chief priest containing a library from which religious texts were recovered.

57. André Caquot and M. Szymer, *Ugaritic Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1980); Patrick D. Miller Jr., "Ugarit and the History of Religions," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 9 (1981): 119–28.

58. Baruch Margalit, *A Matter of "Life" and "Death": A Study of the Baal-Mot Epic* (CTA 4–5–6), *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 206 (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1980); Mark S. Smith, "Interpreting the Baal Cycle," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 18 (1986): 313–40.

wa-Khasis, the god of crafts; Mot, god of the underworld, death, and sterility (Hebrew *môt* means "death");⁵⁹ and Anat, the sister of Baal.⁶⁰

There is some internal evidence in the texts to indicate that the main Baal myths were used in connection with rituals. The myths were possibly a part of a liturgy of the autumnal New Year festival, but they may also have been used during other parts of the agricultural year.⁶¹ (Only faint hints of the Canaanite calendar remain.) The myths were not primarily esthetic nor speculative, but religiously functional.⁶² The Canaanites, like their neighbors in Anatolia, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, were not detached onlookers but an integral part of their environment. No one at any stage in history can be completely detached from the cycle of nature; the Canaanites were emotionally involved with the realities of life as they perceived them, and the forces of nature were personified by the gods and perpetuated in the myths.

The Canaanites' view of life focused on the forces of nature, both benevolent and malevolent, against which they were helpless. The annual cycle of life in ancient Canaan was often tenuous, subject to periods of drought or inadequate rainfall in a land between the desert and the sea. The Canaanites knew the chaos of the raging sea and the disaster of a placid stream flowing from the mountains that could become a destructive torrent in minutes. They knew the importance of the winter rains and thunderstorms for the fertility of the soil, and Baal, the god of rain, was also recognized as the source of fertility for flock and family. In the myths, then, Baal fights against the chaotic forces that threaten life in the Levant—sea, river, death, and sterility.

But the annual cycle of life in Canaan included the dry summer months of the Mediterranean climate. So in their myths, Mot (Death) overcame Baal for a time, and Baal died, was buried, and revived. The most likely setting for the reenactment of Baal's myth was in late September when the fall rains returned to renew the agricultural year. The recitation of the myth at the turn of the agricultural New Year would have involved the worshipers in a drama that

59. Mark S. Smith and Elizabeth M. Bloch-Smith, "Death and Afterlife in Ugarit and Israel," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108 (1988): 277–84.

60. John Gray, "The Blood Bath of the Goddess Anat in the Ras Shamra Texts," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 11 (1979): 315–24; H. F. Van Rooy, "The Relation between Anat and Baal in the Ugaritic Texts," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 7 (1979): 85–95.

61. Lester L. Grabbe, "The Seasonal Pattern and the 'Baal Cycle,'" *Ugarit-Forschungen* 8 (1976): 57–63.

62. Robert Ratner and Bruce Zuckerman, "'A Kid in Milk': New Photographs of KTU 1:23, line 14," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 57 (1986): 15–60; T. L. Fenton, "The Claremont 'MRZH' Tablet: Its Text and Meaning," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 9 (1977): 71–75; Richard E. Friedman, "The MRZH Tablet from Ugarit," *Maarav* 2 (1979–80): 187–206; Baruch Margalit, "The Ugarit Feast of the Drunken Gods: Another Look at RS.24.253 (KTU.1.114)," *Maarav* 2 (1979): 65–120.

actualized the natural order. There would have been weeping and lamentation for the dead god and expressions of joy at his return. In a magical way, the enactment of the ritual and the recitation of the myth assured the continuation of life. And the god's subduing of chaos helped establish or maintain the natural order, the status quo. It served to relieve the tensions of humankind and to assure them of the future.

Besides the major gods who possessed temples at this place or that, there were other holy places without buildings where local deities and divine manifestations could be recognized and given due regard. And always there was the possibility of magic. Even El resorts to magic in one text. Thus, by myth and ritual at festivals, through the maintenance of temple and cult, and through the power of magic, the Canaanites sought to survive in the face of the multitude of forces that hedged their lives about.

Legendary Epics

In the epic about King Keret of Hubur, disasters leave him a widower without heirs.⁶³ He bewails his condition, and kindly El instructs him in a dream to mount a military campaign to Udom. There Huriya, the daughter of King Pabil, can be obtained as his wife. En route to Udom, Keret swears an oath to Asherah of Sidon that he will give the goddess gold and silver if she prospers his plan. She does, he brings Huriya home to Hubur, and she bears him sons. One will be nursed by the goddesses Asherah and Anat (and will therefore be able to succeed Keret). But trouble comes because Keret forgets his vow. He falls ill to the point of death. One of his sons questions his divine nature and immortality (in some cultures, kings in the ancient world became demigods at death). Mention is also made that the earth suffers because of the king's illness. With the help of El, Keret's health is restored. Meantime, one of Keret's sons, Yassib, who thought his father was dying and who wanted to succeed to the throne, came to his father's chambers to declare his intent. The end of the epic is missing, but the fragment ends with a terrible curse pronounced on Yassib. The Keret epic is likely a social myth, conserved because it was used regularly in the social life of Canaan, perhaps at royal weddings.⁶⁴

Another epic presents the theme of the death and resurrection of the main character, Aqhat, the son of King Danel, who is promised to Danel by El himself.⁶⁵ Danel, a virtuous king who judges rightly the cause of the widow and the orphan, receives a guest one day, Kothar-wa-Khasis, the god of crafts. The

63. See ANET 142–49 for English translation.

64. Gray, *Legacy of Canaan*, 112.

65. See ANET 149–55 for English translation.

artisan god carries a bow and arrows destined for the goddess Anat, but Aqhat receives them. Anat, seeing the boy with the weapons, desires them and offers him much silver and gold, which he refuses, adding that she should have her own made like his. She then promises him immortality like Baal, if he will give the bow to her. He replies that she cannot give immortality to a human whose destiny is to die, and he adds that the bow is a man's weapon, not to be used by a woman. In a mishap, Aqhat is killed and the bow is lost. Anat, frustrated in her desire, weeps over the fallen Aqhat and announces that she will restore him to life so that he may give her the bow and arrows and so that fertility may be restored on the earth. Meantime, Danel becomes aware of the death of Aqhat, vows vengeance, mourns his dead, and curses three cities. The end of the tablet is missing.

In both these legends the close relations between rulers, their families, and the gods is indicated. The health and well-being of the king (and the heir apparent) are intricately involved with the natural order of things upon which the Canaanites were so desperately dependent. The myths and epics likely reflect Canaanite views in the Middle Bronze Age, although the extant copies belong to the Late Bronze period.

Other Sources

Additional evidence about Canaanite religion can be gleaned from Late Bronze administrative texts, among them lists of sacrifices to various gods, rituals for sacrifices and offerings, lists of gods, names of religious personnel.⁶⁶

Two temples have been excavated at Ugarit, the largest of which is the temple of Baal, called the "son of Dagon." The other temple is associated with Dagon, a god of grain who is hardly mentioned in the extant mythic texts.⁶⁷ Originally a fertility god worshiped from earliest times in Mesopotamia, Dagon was the chief god of the city-state Tuttul east of Ugarit in the Balikh River region.

A temple was a monumental building that functioned as the dwelling place of the god, comparable to the palace of a king. It was not used for religious gatherings; its courts, however, might be used for festival assemblies. Of course, the god did not dwell in the earthly temple, but in the heavens, although his presence was assumed to be established in the earthly building. Proof of the deity's presence was the statue set up in the building. The temple

66. On administrative texts, see Michael Heltzer, *The Internal Organization of the Kingdom of Ugarit* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1982).

67. Ulf Oldenburg, *The Conflict between El and Ba'al in Canaanite Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 46–57; John F. Healey, "The Underworld Character of the God Dagon," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 3 (1977): 43–51.

personnel were there to minister to the needs of the god. Sacrifices, liquid offerings, incense, etc., were provided to the god by humans (servants of the gods) and, in return, humans might hope for divine rewards. The earliest Canaanite temples (ca. 3000–2000) were single rooms with a door in the long side of the room.⁶⁸ Middle and Late Bronze Age temples tended to be square, with a special vestibule or portico over the entrance.⁶⁹ In time, a third room was added to the rear of the large, square room. This cubicle, raised above the main room and reached by steps, is identified as the holy place, the inner sanctum. This was a prototype for later temples, such as the Solomonic temple built about 950 in Jerusalem,⁷⁰ which contained a porch, a long narrow hall, and the cubicle inner sanctum.

In the epics of Ugarit, the king assumes certain sacerdotal functions, for he was believed to have a continuing and close contact with the gods, and he represented his human community before the gods. One piece of carved ivory graphically depicts the relation of the royal family to the divine. Two young princes of the royal family are shown suckling from the breast of a goddess.

From the administrative texts, however, we find that there were twelve priestly families at Ugarit, and one text names a high priest. Among the cultic personnel listed at Ugarit are priests, consecrated persons,⁷¹ singers, makers of vestments, and sculptors. At the end of one text the high priest Attenu the Diviner is cited as an authority for a version of the Baal myth, so priests probably functioned as scribes as well.

One text from Ugarit lists the names of many of the gods and the proper sacrifices for each of them. Along with the major pantheon some lesser gods are mentioned (e.g., "the lords of threshing"). Offerings included oxen, sheep, burnt offering (in which the entire sacrifice is burned to the god), and communion offering (where part of the sacrifice was eaten by the offerer); other sacrificial materials included grain, wine, oil, and other produce. Religious terminology included "gift," "vow," "to offer up the victim," "to prepare (for sacrifice)."

68. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 125–7.

69. *Ibid.*, 211–13.

70. On cultic structures, see William G. Dever, *Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Biblical Research* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 110–17; Avraham Biran (ed.), *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times* (Jerusalem: Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, 1981).

71. These may have been cultic prostitutes; see Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Cultic Prostitution—A Case Study in Cultural Diffusion," in *Orient and Occident: Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. Harry A. Hoffner Jr., *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 22 (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 213–22; Mayer I. Gruber, "Hebrew *Qēdēšāh* and Her Canaanite and Akkadian Cognates," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 18 (1986): 133–48.



bronze plaque from Hazor, 14th-13th century B.C. (height: 3.7")

Courtesy of the Hazor Excavations in Memory of Yigael Yadin, Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Canaanite religious practices focused upon the myths and rituals connected with Baal and the lesser gods and goddesses of fertility. It is quite probable that the major festival was the New Year's festival in the fall, but other festivals likely existed at harvest times.

Canaanite Culture

Culture has been defined as a uniquely human system of learned habits and customs, transmitted by society, and used by humans as their primary means of adapting to their environment.⁷² (Although here treated separately, religion is an integral part of culture.) The Canaanite culture that the Israelites confronted at the end of the Late Bronze Age was the result of a continuum that began around 1900 (following the Early Bronze Age IV-Middle Bronze Age I cultural interruption noted previously). Archeological and textual evidence provide a basis for understanding and appreciating the achievements of the Canaanites before they began to fade into history as the result of socio-political changes in Palestine at the beginning of the Iron Age.⁷³

The Middle Bronze Age II Canaanites were exceptional engineers, building great fortified cities. The battered-earth ramparts that they constructed and that give the tells their characteristic form have been exposed at many sites.

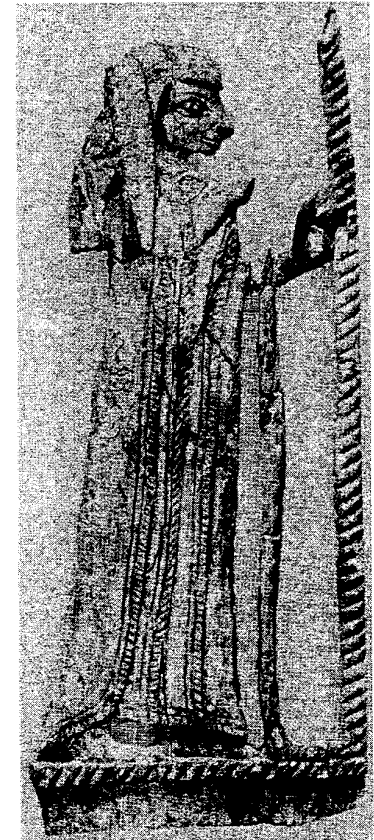
72. James Deetz, *Invitation to Archaeology* (Garden City, N.Y.: Natural History Press, 1967), 6-7.

73. For nontraditional views on the appearance of Israel in Canaan, see Norman K. Gottwald, "Two Models for the Origins of Ancient Israel: Social Revolution or Frontier Development," in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. Herbert B. Huffmon, Frank A. Spina, and Alberto R. W. Green (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 5-24; and Gösta W. Ahlström, *Who Were the Israelites?* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986).

At Tell Dan (ancient Laish) an earlier wall and a city gate with a stepped-street entrance were incorporated into and covered with the rampart. The new entrance to the city has not been discovered; however, at other Middle Bronze Age II sites, such as Hazor, a new gate design that could accommodate war chariots on its smooth surface and straight entrance replaced earlier stepped-street entrances. The rampart was constructed of alternating layers of occupational debris from within the site and wadi material from outside. The massive amount of material moved and the interlocked effect of the layering give evidence of careful planning and the sophisticated social organization required to complete such a project.⁷⁴

Ramparted fortification apparently moved from the north, beginning in Syria, toward the south, eventually finding expression as far south as Gaza (Tell el-Ajjul). The development of effective battering rams may have stimulated the building of the battered-earth ramparts. Underground drainage systems carried water away from the imposing gate structures, palaces, and temples.

The Canaanites were also creative artisans, producing exceptionally beautiful pieces of jewelry—earrings, pendants, armlets, and signet rings—made from sheets of gold and golden wire as well as silver. The artisans used sophisticated techniques—engraving, filigree, inlay, and the like. Canaanite engravers carved



Woman in ivory from Megiddo, 1350-1150 B.C. (average thickness: 0.6")

Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago

74. In the seventeenth and sixteenth centuries (the Hyksos era), Hurrians from northern Syria migrated southward. Under the leadership of Indo-Aryan chieftains (as indicated by their names; see Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 114-15), these chariot warriors appear to have established themselves as a ruling class over the masses in a fruitful, symbiotic relationship. The construction of ramparted defenses may best be attributed to this group of elite leaders.

ivory and bone for inlays in decorative furniture and also worked semiprecious stone. Sculptors worked in stone and metal to produce images of deities and guardian lions. They drew inspiration from the artistic traditions of neighboring peoples in Egypt, Syria, Anatolia, the Mediterranean isles, and the Mesopotamian civilization, adding their own creative distinctives.

Canaanite metallurgists cast bronze mirrors, daggers, swords, tools, and figurines.⁷⁵ Molds have been discovered, indicating standardized production of some forms. The making of true bronze, a combination of tin and copper, became commonplace.⁷⁶

Canaanite potters produced graceful yet practical domestic pottery—storage jars, cooking pots, bowls, jugs, juglets, and chalices—as well as the Canaanite jar, used for shipping products such as grain, wine, and olive oil by caravan or sea.⁷⁷ The use of a fast potter's wheel and firing at a high temperature produced strong, thin-walled ceramics. Special pieces were produced in the form of animals (zoomorphic), cultic incense burners, and masks likely used in religious ceremonies.

Canaanites were enterprising merchants; in fact, by the time of the prophet Isaiah the word *kēna'an* (normally “Canaan, Canaanite”) could mean “merchant, trader” (Isa. 23:8) and a derivative word could signify “wares, bundle” (Jer. 10:17). A fourteenth-century Egyptian tomb painting, depicting Canaanite merchant ships unloading cargo, is illustrative of Canaanite commerce. Lovely decorated pottery imported from Crete and Cyprus testify to Canaanite interest in luxury items.

Canaanites were ingenious inventors. Caught between the cumbersome writing systems of Mesopotamian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs, the Canaanites invented a simplified form of writing that was destined to become the predominant means of written communication—the alphabet.⁷⁸ Our ability to write and read by means of alphabetic signs is traceable directly

75. Ora Negbi, *Canaanite Gods in Metal* (Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University, 1976).

76. Michael Heltzer, “The Metal Trade of Ugarit and the Problem of Transportation of Commercial Goods,” *Iraq* 39 (1977): 203–11.

77. Ruth Amiran, *Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1969).

78. Robert R. Stieglitz, “The Ugaritic Cuneiform and the Canaanite Linear Alphabet,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 30 (1971): 135–39; Alan R. Millard, “The Canaanite Linear Alphabet and Its Passage to the Greeks,” *Kadmos* 15 (1976): 130–44; idem, “The Ugaritic and Canaanite Alphabets—Some Notes,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 11 (1979): 613–16; Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet*; Émile Puech, “Origine de l'Alphabet: Documents en Alphabet Liné et Cunéiforme du II^e Millénaire,” *Revue Biblique* 93 (1986): 161–213; Martin Bernal, *Cadmean Letters: The Transmission of the Alphabet to the Aegean and Further West before 1400 B.C.* (Wilmington Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

back to the Canaanite alphabet. The Canaanites were also intellectually sophisticated, using their writing system not only for commercial and cultic purposes, but also to produce a body of literature that left its subsequent imprint on the authors of our Hebrew Bible. The prophet Isaiah identifies the speech of Judah with the language of Canaan (19:18).

Canaanites were intelligent, presumably developing from a tribal organization into a city-state form of government that was well adapted to the physical environment of the region. The terrain of fertile valleys separated by hills and mountains provided for such petty monarchies, each with a central fortified city and adjacent villages and hinterland. The surrounding agricultural and pastoral lands, through subsistence farming, made each kingdom essentially self-sufficient.⁷⁹ While Canaanite kings, as with the later kings of Israel, controlled the political and commercial enterprises as well as extensive property, the kings and their subject people were mutually obligated to each other. The people supported their kings, while the kings were charged with defending the widow and the orphan.⁸⁰

Canaanites were religious, expressing their worldview through myths in which the forces of nature were personified and deified.⁸¹ How Canaanites viewed life is also seen in legends in which epic human figures interacted with gods and goddesses, perhaps reflecting the tensions and turmoils that people experienced in life. They held religious festivals. They had temples and priests. They made offerings to their deities (similar to those that Israel offered to Yahweh). They prayed. So religious were they that they offered the fruit of their loins as offerings to the gods. Though there is little evidence in Syria-Palestine of child sacrifice among the Canaanites, ample evidence of the practice exists among their descendants, the Phoenicians, at Carthage in North Africa and at other colonies scattered around the Mediterranean basin.⁸²

79. On farming see Michael Heltzer, *The Rural Community in Ancient Ugarit* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1976); Lawrence E. Stager, “Farming in the Judean Desert during the Iron Age,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 221 (1976): 145–58.

80. Cf. Aqhat 2.5.6–8: “He [the king] decides the case of the widow, / he judges the suit of the orphan.”

81. Richard J. Clifford, “Phoenician Religion,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 279 (1990): 55–64.

82. Alberto R. W. Green, *The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series 1 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975); P. G. Mosca, *Child Sacrifice in Canaanite and Israelite Religion: A Study of Mulk and Molech* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1975); Morton Smith, “On Burning Babies,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95 (1975): 477–79; and Lawrence E. Stager and Samuel R. Wolff, “Child Sacrifice at Carthage: Religious Rite or Population Control?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 10.1 (1984): 30–51.

This, then, was the people the invading tribes of Israel set out to conquer in the name of the Lord under the leadership of Joshua. The biblical traditions indicate that Israel was supposed to utterly destroy the Canaanites and the other groups that occupied the land of Canaan (Deut. 7:1–5). The God of Israel called for this drastic treatment “because of the wickedness of these nations” (Deut. 9:4–5; cf. 12:29–31). They even burned their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods (Deut. 12:31). Thus the inhabitants of Canaan are depicted by the biblical writers as depraved and wicked because of the way in which they worshiped other gods (Deut. 7:4, 25; 9:5).

The command to destroy the Canaanites was never fully executed. The Israelite occupation of Canaan extended over a period of time, according to the Book of Judges. From the surviving Canaanites the Israelites learned dry-land farming, the digging of cisterns to hold water in the dry season—in short, adaptation to subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry. Ultimately, the remnant of the Canaanites in the region was absorbed into the Davidic kingdom. Particularly in the northern kingdom, the subtle influence of the Canaanites modified the Israelite culture in a process that reached a dramatic climax in the time of Ahab and Jezebel (ca. 850). In the aftermath of that period, the northern kingdom continued a decline that ultimately ended in the exile of its leading inhabitants. Judah, also under the influence of Canaanite culture, followed the same path in a decline broken by two reforms—that of Hezekiah and that of Josiah—before that kingdom, too, ended in exile away from the land of Canaan.

The Bible reflects the dangerous attraction of Canaanite culture for the Israelites. The distinctive features of official Israelite religion, with its exclusivistic monotheism, were in direct and continuing conflict with the religious views of the inclusivistic polytheists of Canaan, and archeology indicates that the monotheistic view did not completely conquer.⁸³ Israel inherited the ma-

83. On the relationship of Canaanite and Israelite religion, see Michael D. Coogan, “Canaanite Origins and Lineage: Reflections on the Religion of Ancient Israel,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick D. Miller Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 115–24; William G. Dever, “The Contribution of Archaeology to the Study of Canaanite and Early Israelite Religion,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick D. Miller Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 209–47; Elmer B. Smick, “Israel’s Struggle with the Religions of Canaan,” in *Interpretation and History*, ed. R. Laird Harris, S. H. Quek, and J. Robert Vannoy (Singapore: Christian Life, 1986), 123–33; Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); T. J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 39 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989). A reference to Yahweh and his Asherah, recovered by Zev Meshel in 1978, has stimulated research on the Israelite-Canaanite religious interconnections; see Kunttilä *‘Ajrud: A Religious Centre from the Time of the Judaeon Monarchy on the Border of Sinai*, Israel Museum Catalogue 175 (Jerusalem: Israel Mu-

terial culture of Canaan, along with the language of the Canaanites and their simplified writing system. It was difficult for Israel to resist the attraction of the Canaanite cult and worldview, with its emphasis on fertility.⁸⁴ Ultimately, the majority of the Israelites succumbed to Canaanite influences, despite the warning cries of the prophets of the Lord. Only a remnant survived in exile in Babylon, there to be purged of the fatal attraction that, according to the Bible (2 Kings 17; 23:4–27), had destroyed their forebears. From that time on Jews did not use idols.

Recommended Reading

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seum, 1978); idem, “Did Yahweh Have a Consort?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 5.2 (1979): 24–35; John Day, “Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986): 385–408; David N. Freedman, “Yahweh of Samaria and His Asherah,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 50 (1987): 241–49; Walter A. Maier III, *Asherah: Extrabiblical Evidence*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 37 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); Patrick D. Miller Jr., “The Absence of the Goddess in Israelite Religion,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986): 239–48; Mark A. Smith, “God Male and Female in the Old Testament: Yahweh and His ‘Asherah,’” *Theological Studies* 48 (1987): 333–40; William G. Dever, “Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence from Kunttilä ‘Ajrud,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 255 (1984): 21–37; idem, *Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Biblical Research*, 140–49; and Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990).

84. See Dever, *Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Biblical Research*, 119–66.

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Phoenicians

William A. Ward

*The glory of Lebanon will come to you,
the pine, the fir and the cypress together,
to adorn the place of my sanctuary.*

—Isaiah 60:13

The word *Phoenician* comes from an ancient Greek nickname for the people and cities of the eastern Mediterranean littoral during the first millennium.¹ Phoenicia lies along a narrow coastal strip for roughly two hundred miles, from the island of Aradus (modern Arwad) in the north to Tyre in the south. The Lebanon mountain range to the east has throughout history created a political and cultural barrier between the coast and inland Syria. While rain falls in the region only during the winter months, mountain springs provide water the rest of the year for the rich agricultural land along the sea. The land is limited, however, and the cities founded around the natural harbors of the coast remained small. The great coniferous forests that once blanketed the mountains were the major natural resource of ancient Phoenicia and the basis for an active export trade in lumber, wood, oil, and resin.²

The present essay deals with the "classical" Phoenicians of the Iron Age (ca. 1200–332), though this civilization did not spring into history without antecedents.³ The Iron Age Phoenicians represent a later phase of the general

1. For the theories on the origin of the Greek term, see Claude Vandersleyen, "L'Étymologie de Phoinix, 'Phénicien,'" in *Phoenicia and the East Mediterranean in the First Millennium B.C.*, ed. Édouard Lipiński, *Studia Phoenicia* 5 (Louvain: Peeters, 1987), 19–22; Michael C. Astour, "Origin of the Terms 'Canaan,' 'Phoenician,' and 'Purple,'" *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 24 (1965): 346–50; James D. Muhly, "Homer and the Phoenicians: The Relations between Greece and the Near East in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages," *Berytus* 19 (1970): 24–30.

2. See John P. Brown, *The Lebanon and Phoenicia: Ancient Texts Illustrating Their Physical Geography and Native Industries*, vol. 1: *The Physical Setting and the Forest* (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1969), chap. 5.

3. Wolfgang Röllig, "On the Origins of the Phoenicians," *Berytus* 31 (1983): 79–93; Robert R. Stieglitz, "The Geopolitics of the Phoenician Littoral in the Early Iron Age," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 279 (1990): 9–12.