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## Canaan

From International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

**CANAAN** kâ'nən **CANAANITES** [Heb *kēna'an*, *kēna'anî*]. Canaan is an ancient name for the area that includes all of the land west of the Jordan and Syria to the level of Lebweh. "Canaanites" designates the occupants of that land in the period preceding the Israelite occupation, and their cultural successors; the word is also found as an appellation for merchants.

### I. Name

The origin and meaning of the name Canaan has yet to be satisfactorily explained. The etymon closest at hand is the Semitic *knō* ("be humble, bow down"; Aram, Heb only in derived stems). The ending *-an* is quite common in Semitic names, though it remains unexplained. However, attempts to derive the name on this basis (e.g., traditional "lowlands"; cf. also M. Astour's suggestion "West" in JNES, 24 [1965], 346–350) have been forced to postulate unattested extensions of the root's known meaning and must remain hypothetical.

The once attractive derivation from a word for blue-colored cloth, *kinahhu*, has been shown to be linguistically problematic. This word, found at Nuzi, probably represents a Hurrian version (\*q[i]nag>g>u) of the culture-word found, among other languages, in Akkadian as *uqnû* and Greek as *kyános* (B. Landsberger, JCS, 21 [1967], 166f). As such it has nothing to do with Canaan.

Besides the question of etymology, it would be helpful to know when and where the name originated, and whether it originally designated the land or the people. No answers to these questions are presently available, but a hint lies in an early documentation of the name in a Mari text of the Assyrian interregnum (G. Dossin, *Syria*, 50 [1973], 277–282). This text is a general's report on his activities in an unidentified area, possibly the Balikh Valley. He mentions a group of "thieves and Canaanites" (*ūḫa-ab-ba-tum u lūki-na-aḫ-nu*) with which he is "eyeball to eyeball." In parallel with "thieves," "Canaanite" might well designate an

occupational class — specifically, merchants. "Merchants and thieves" is not an unlikely collocation. The earliest Egyptian reference to Canaanites, in the Memphis stele of Amenhotep II (ANET, pp. 245–47), presents a similar picture. In a list of captives Canaanites are found between *maryannu* (nobility associated with chariot warfare) and the children of princes. These are only hints, but it may not be far from the truth that the use of the word "Canaanite" for a merchant class is older than its use for the land and its population (cf. B. Maisler [Mazar], BASOR, 102 [Apr. 1946] 7–12).

If this is true, then the later biblical use of *kēna'anî* for "merchant" or "trader" may have very ancient roots (Job 41:6 [MT 40:30]; Prov. 31:24; Isa. 23:8; Zec. 14:21; cf. also 11:7, 11, reading [*li*] *kēna'aniyyê* for MT [*lā*] *kēn'aniyyê*; similarly *kēna'an* at Ezk. 16:29; 17:4; Hos. 12:7 [MT 8]; Zeph. 1:11). In any case, the name became identified with the people who were the merchants par excellence of the ancient world.

### II. Land

The name Canaan as a designation of the land was current, according to established records, only in the Late Bronze Age (ca 1550–1200). By the time of the establishment of the monarchy in Israel it was clearly archaic and no longer corresponded to any political reality. Similarly, the use of the term for Phoenicia in Hellenistic texts was archaic, a nostalgic revival.

**A. Extrabiblical Sources** A very early reference to the land of Canaan is found in an inscription of Idrimi king of Alalakh (15th cent). He reports that during a period of exile, assuming the throne, he had gone to Ammia in the "land of Canaan" (*ma-at ki-in-a-nimki*). Ammia can be located near present-day Enfe, SW of Tripoli. Probably this is at or near the northern boundary of the land.

Ugarit was quite clearly not part of the land of Canaan in any period. An alphabetic cuneiform tablet (UT 311:7) lists a Canaanite (*kn'ny*) among other foreign merchants. An Akkadian text, unfortunately broken, describes the

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settlement of a dispute between some citizens of Ugarit and of Canaan (TUR.MEŠ KUR-*ki-na-hi*; in *Ugaritica*, 5 [1968], 112 [36:6, 8]).

The Amarna Tablets make the picture more precise. In the period represented (14th cent) the Syro-Palestinian area was divided for Egyptian administration into three regions: the northern coastal region, including Byblos, with the administrative center at *Šumur*; the inland area from the upper Orontes south, including Damascus, with an administrative center at Kumidi; and the southern region excluding Transjordan, with its center at Gaza. To these three areas the names Amurru, Upe, and Canaan would seem to correspond (W. Helck, *Mitteilungen der deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft*, 92 [1960], 1–13); however, the evidence is not decisive. Although the king of Alašia (Cyprus) does on one occasion refer to a “province of Canaan,” the word may have had a more general reference to the land under Egyptian control. This is suggested by 109 where Rib-Addi includes Amurru in Canaan. Another text (AmTab 151), in which the king of Tyre responds to the pharaoh’s question about Canaan by talking about the whole of upper Syria including Amurru, Danuna, Ugarit, and Kadesh, is clearly not germane to the question here. The king, who is in Canaan, is merely describing the events that impinge on his and the pharaoh’s interests.

The heartland of Canaan was the coastal area from Byblos to Carmel and the Jezreel Valley. A number of Amarna references to Canaan center in this area (AmTab 8; 131; 137; 148; 367). Some scholars have argued that this narrower region is the original land of Canaan. That, however, goes beyond the evidence.

A most interesting Egyptian source is the satirical letter, Papyrus Anastasi I (ANET, pp. 475–79), which refers to the old military road from Sile to Gaza as the “end of the land of Canaan.” This fixes the southern boundary of Canaan in the area of *Wādī el-‘Arīsh* precisely as in the biblical lists. The reference to the town of Canaan (*p-kn’n*) in the illustrated inscription of Seti I at Karnak (ANET, pp. 254f) also is probably to Gaza, the first important city in Canaan.

Thus, the general picture that emerges from the scattered data is remarkably consistent. Canaan is a general name for the Asian holdings of Egypt. While in the earlier sources it may have been limited by Upe and Amurru, after the battle of Kadesh it becomes synonymous with *Hurru*, a general word for the area of Egyptian hegemony including Upe. (Amurru was by this time part of the Hittite area of influence.) The famous “Israel Stela” of Merneptah (ANET, pp. 376–78) uses these two terms to form an inclusion around several Palestinian place names (cf. Papyrus Anastasi IV, 16:4). At the end of the Late Bronze Age, therefore, Canaan includes all of Cisjordan from *Wādī el-‘Arīsh* in the south, the Mediterranean coast to the borders of Amurru in the north, and the inland area from Lebweh to Bashan.

**B. Biblical Sources** The biblical descriptions of the land of Canaan correspond to the Late Bronze Age usage in a way that can be explained only by the existence of a list of the principal boundary points. The persistence of this tradition is quite remarkable in view of the fact that the territory of Israel never included the whole of Canaan.

The two principal boundary lists are Nu. 34:1–12 and Ezk. 47:15–20; 48:1–28, supplemented at various points with other materials. These lists include several sites that cannot be identified with certainty. They differ somewhat in the number and names of the sites, but the boundary lines they describe are very similar.

The southern boundary is fixed, just as in Egyptian sources, by the Brook of Egypt (*Wādī el-‘Arīsh*) in the west. The course of this boundary toward the east is most completely described in Josh. 15:1–4, which traces it from the southeast corner of the Dead Sea (cf. Gen. 10:9), through the Scorpion pass (exact site unknown), the wilderness of Zin, the oasis of Kadesh, to the brook of Egypt. The Sinai is not part of Canaan.

The western boundary is the Mediterranean Sea up to the southern boundary of the state of Amurru (cf. Josh. 13:4).

The northern boundary is fixed principally by the “entrance of Hamath” (Heb *lᵉḇô’ ḥamāt*; see HAMATH), which is probably modern Lebweh

(Egyp *r-b-ε*, *Amarna labana*; Akk *lab'u*; cf. LBHG, pp. 65f). To the west the border runs to Mt. Hor (Nu. 34:7) or Hethlon (Ezk. 47:15; 48:1), neither of which can be positively identified. To the east it runs through Zedad (*Ṣadâd*), NE of Lebweh on the edge of the desert, and out to Hazar-enan, probably an oasis E of Zedad (Aharoni [LBHG, p. 67] suggests Qaryatein).

The eastern boundary is the most difficult to define precisely. Many of the sites are unknown, but the general picture is clear. It runs S from Hazar-enan to the area of Mt. Bashan and then westward to the southeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. There it turns S again to follow the Jordan River. The Bible clearly excludes the area E of the Jordan from the land of Canaan, a fact that lies behind Josh. 22; there the Tansjordanian tribes are said to have built an altar at the Jordan because they feared later generations would say, "you have no portion in the Lord" (v 25).

The promise that the land of Canaan would be theirs gave rise to the idea that the people of Israel had claim to all of it. Thus in Ezekiel's vision (47:13–20) the tribes are distributed across the whole territory; cf. the concept of the "land that remains" in Josh. 13:2. But this ideal was never confused with another, even more extravagant claim of all the land to the Euphrates (Dt. 1:7; contrast Gen. 15:18–20 [J] with Gen. 17:8 [P]).

### III. People

The Canaanites may best be described as the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. They should not be thought of as a race in modern terms. People in ancient times were identified by the political group to which they belonged — city, tribe, clan, or state. The land of Canaan, which was never politically unified in the historical period, contained citizens of various political groups living side by side with aliens (Heb *gērîm*) and stateless persons called *'apiru*. The term Canaanite is a rather vague reference to these people who could be more precisely identified with their city or tribe. The use of the term in the Amarna Tablets and the records of Ugarit suggests that the scribes preferred the designation Canaanites (or kings and citizens of

Canaan) when they had regional rather than local interests in mind.

With the end of Egyptian domination of the area of Canaan and the rise of nation-states like Israel and Aram in the Iron Age, the term lost its political significance and came to be applied to the people who were the cultural heirs of the Late Bronze Age civilization. This change is reflected in uses of the term "Canaan" for Phoenicia (cf. Hecateus of Miletus *Periegesis* fragment 272, in F. Jacoby, ed, *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, I/A [1923], 36; Eusebius *Praepev* i.10; ix.17).

The Bible shows familiarity with both the LB and Iron Age uses of the word. The two earliest references, for example, Ex. 15:15 and Jgs. 5:19, follow the LB pattern. The former distinguishes between the inhabitants of Canaan and those of Transjordan and Philistia (cf. G. Steindorff, *JEA*, 25 [1939], 30–37, for an Egyptian inscription left by a "messenger of Canaan and Philistia"). The latter describes the northern coalition of kings as "kings of Canaan," much in the manner of the Amarna Tablets. These are simply generalized uses of the term without reference to more specific ethnic relationships. Particularly illustrative of this is the notation in Gen. 36:2f (P?) that among the "Canaanite" wives of Esau is a Hittite, a Hivite (later Horite), and an Ishmaelite. Note also Ezekiel who says of Israel, "Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite" (16:3).

A special case of the generalized use of Canaan is found in the index of political and geographical relationships in Gen. 10. Canaan is included in the Hamitic family as part of the Egyptian empire (v 6). His sons are Sidon and Heth (the Hittites). This recalls the collocation of Ezekiel, Amorites and Hittites, and is in the same way a memory of the ethnic mixture of Semitic and non-Semitic elements that composed the Canaanite culture of the Late Bronze Age. There follows (vv 16–18) a list of peoples, mostly of cities, in a rough order of south to north, representing the peoples of Canaan at its greatest possible extension. In its present position this list is quite probably secondary.

Alongside these general uses of the word are found frequent biblical references to the Canaanites as one people among others. These lists vary in length and complexity. The simplest have only two terms, like the Amorites and Canaanites of Dt. 1:7 (cf. Josh. 5:1), or the Canaanites and Perizzites of Gen. 34:30. The longest list (Gen. 15:19–21) specifies ten different groups. Several of the lists also indicate the area occupied by the various groups (Nu. 13:29; Dt. 1:7; Josh. 5:1; 13:3; 17:15–18; Jgs. 1:1–36). These not surprisingly locate the Canaanites in the area that was always the heartland of the culture, the coastal region including its natural extension into the Jezreel Valley and the Jordan area.

Clearly the lists contain names of very different types. Some probably were originally social classifications (e.g., the Perizzites and Rephaim), other ancient tribal groups (the Kenites, Kadmonites, and Kenizzites), still others remnants of great cultures (the Hittites and Horites). What they have in common is their antiquity at the time of the writing of the Bible.

Despite the broad diversity of the origins of the people who inhabited Canaan, one can speak of a Canaanite culture. This cultural unity extended generally to language, religion, political forms, legal institutions, architecture, and the domestic arts. Groups that arrived in Canaan with different customs, like the Philistines, were soon drawn into the dominant culture while adding to it their own special contributions.

The cultural heirs of the Bronze-Age Canaanites were the Phoenicians. While the Greeks knew them by the latter name, they apparently called themselves Canaanites (cf. Augustine *Epistolae ad Romanos inchoata expositio* 13 [PL, XXXV, 2096]; sources cited by Z. Harris, *Grammar of the Phoenician Language* [American Oriental Series, 8, 1936], p. 7). Thus the woman who in Mk. 7:26 is called a “Syro-Phoenician” (Gk *Syrophoinikissa*) is called a “Canaanite” (*gynē chanaia*) in Mt. 15:22. The latter term (*Chananaios*) must be distinguished from *Kananaios*, “Zealot” (from Aram *qan an*; cf. F. C. Burkitt, *Syriac Forms of NT Proper Names* [1912], p. 5), the designation of Simon in Mt.

10:4 (TR *Kananitēs*, “citizen of Cana”) and Mk. 3:18.

#### IV. History

When and how the dominant culture known as Canaanite first appeared is not directly answerable from the data now available. The most important transition points in the early history of this area are marked by the changes in the material culture that have given rise to the present, somewhat inaccurate, division of time into ages identified with specific metals — copper, bronze, and iron. Customarily the Bronze Age (ca 3200–1200 B.C.) is designated as the Canaanite period, though that should not prejudice the question of when the culture known from the latest phase of this period was formed.

**A. Early Bronze Age** Since only in the Late Bronze period can the political history be written with any confidence, observations about the earlier periods must be limited to general and largely hypothetical statements. The evidence is mostly archeological with occasional help from Egyptian and Mesopotamian documents. The enormous archive of Ebla holds great promise for clarifying matters for the later part of the Early Bronze Age.

The transition from the Chalcolithic Age to the Early Bronze Age was one of the most important and formative periods in the history of Canaan. Considerable disagreement still exists about the details of the transition and even about the terminology to be employed. Apparently ca 3200 B.C. several groups of a distinctively new people entered Palestine and pushed out or suppressed the Ghassul-Beer-sheba culture that had preceded them. These groups, who had their origins in the north (Syria and Anatolia), are especially important because they appear to have brought with them the seeds of the first truly urban culture in Canaan. Partly for that reason some archeologists (Kenyon, Hennessy) prefer to call this period Proto-Urban (others call it EB I; still others Late Chalcolithic). The picture is not simply one of linear development, however. Along with successive population increments of divergent types (and importation of new

techniques) came an increase of population density. Undoubtedly there were other now unknown factors. But, whatever the catalyst, in the early years of the 3rd millennium occurred the formation first of villages and then of fortified cities.

These were small settlements by modern standards, typically about 25 acres (10 hectares) within the walls. The fortifications were hefty, however, with walls as much as 25 ft (8 m.) thick. Some of the towns, like Arad (cf. R. Amiran in Sanders, ed, *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 83–96), show evidence of careful planning. Houses were in one part of the city, public buildings in another; the various buildings were arranged along streets and plazas.

Why these fortifications were erected cannot be known with certainty. Egyptian interests in the area were already established and their raiding parties may have contributed to this development. Narmer of the 1st Dynasty apparently took and held Gath for a few years in the Proto-Urban period. But probably a more important factor was protection from a numerically superior non-urban population that surrounded these cities.

In view of the later pattern one might expect that these cities were small, competing city-states, needing protection from each other. Some evidence, however, suggests that these urban folk were unified on a broader basis (P. W. Lapp in Sanders, ed, p. 114). On analogy with the large commercial empire of Ebla, as well as with the movement toward unification in Egypt earlier and in Mesopotamia under Sargon, this is not unlikely.

This culture existed without major interruption for a very long time, about 700 years. It came to an end quite quickly with the destruction of the cities and a reversion to village life (ca 2300). Who brought about this destruction is a matter of controversy. Egyptian raids are documented, especially for the 6th Dynasty, which overlaps this period of destruction. But this is also the time of the Amorite movements, so some have attributed these destructions primarily to them. Still others look to non-Semitic invaders from Anatolia. The question need not be decided for one of these options to the exclusion of others.

What happened in Canaan is part of a large pattern of destruction which eventually enveloped every civilization of the ancient world. Many factors must have been at work, and migrations were as much the result of these destructions as the cause of them.

**B. Middle Bronze Age** The first part of the Middle Bronze Age (MB I, ca 2200–1950) is largely a continuation of the last part of the EB period (EB IV). The characteristics of this period are regionalism of the material culture, lack of fortifications, abandonment of the EB urban sites, and extension of occupation, at least seasonally, into fringe areas. The inhabitants of the land were primarily herdsmen, organized very likely by village and tribe. It is conventional to call this culture (or cultures) Amorite (Sum. *mar-tu*, Akk *amurru[m]*), which means “Westerners.” This was the designation given by the Mesopotamians to similar groups who seem to have had the same origin (the Syrian steppe) and who penetrated the Mesopotamian area in the late 3rd and early 2nd millennia. That they were a West Semitic people is clear from their names.

With the second phase of the MB period (MB IIA, ca 1950–1800) begins the development that led to the next great urban age in Canaan. It is owed in part to new influences, again from the north. The people who brought this new culture have been called “urbanized Amorites” (cf. Kenyon, *Amorites and Canaanites*). That expresses both the continuity and the discontinuity of this culture and the preceding phase. The newcomers were, in contrast to the people of MB I, city folk. Where they learned urban ways is a matter of dispute, but Kenyon’s hypothesis, which centers attention on Byblos, must likely be abandoned in favor of an inland site. Once again, the materials from Ebla (Tell Mardikh) should be extremely important.

Many reflections on this period are found in Egyptian literature. Among the most important are the Tale of Sinuhe (ANET, pp. 18–22) and the Execration Texts (ANET, pp. 328f). Although both of these sources must be used with caution, they indicate strong Egyptian interest in Asia. Numerous objects of trade and diplomacy that supplement the literary

materials argue for some Egyptian hegemony during the 12th Dynasty (ca 1991–1786). In fact, the commercial and diplomatic ties that link Egypt and Asia in this period are similar to those known from the Amarna period some five centuries later (cf. G. Posener, *CAH*, I/2, 532–558).

The pattern of political organization in this period appears to be a complex dimorphism of village and tribe. What little can be made out from the Execration Texts indicates that power was becoming more centralized toward the end of the period. Undoubtedly some of the more powerful centers exercised control over smaller ones, creating regional blocs. This pattern, though modified by subsequent developments, was responsible for the shape of Canaanite culture for the rest of the Bronze Age.

The remainder of the Middle Bronze Age could be considered the “golden age” of Canaanite culture. Out of the villages of the MB IIA period grew powerful cities, a distinctive feature of which was their fortification. Great ramparts of beaten earth were built around the city. The largest, that of the lower city of Hazor, was more than 100 ft (30 m) wide at the base and enclosed an area of more than 175 acres (70 hectares). This reflects the importance of Hazor, remembered in biblical times as “formerly ... the head of all those kingdoms” (Josh. 11:10; cf. A. Malamat, *JBL*, 79 [1960], 12–19).

Toward the end of the Middle Bronze Age, Egypt came under the control of the Hyksos (Egyp *ḥkꜥ ḥꜥ swt*, “foreign chiefs”). Until recently scholarship had considered them an intrusive element, responsible for fortifications in Palestine as well as disruptions in Egypt. It seems now that the fortifications must be dated independently and that the Hyksos were primarily the product of the flowering of Canaanite culture. They were Asiatics (mostly Semitic) who took advantage of the weakening of Egyptian power to take control of the Delta.

The 16th cent, in which the Middle Bronze Age ends, saw two developments of far-reaching significance. The first was the renaissance of native Egyptian power with the consequent expulsion of the Hyksos. The second was the increasing importance of a non-Semitic

population in the south, mostly Hurrian (a people known from much earlier times in the north) but with rulers who possessed Indo-Aryan names. These two movements, one from the north, the other from the south, largely established the character of the subsequent centuries in Canaan.

**C. Late Bronze Age (ca 1550–1200)** The resurgence of Egyptian power began with the campaigns of Ahmose (ca 1570–1546), who, as part of his effort to rid Egypt of the hated Hyksos, ventured into Canaan. Considerable violence accompanied the change of orders and many cities were destroyed. Of more lasting importance were the campaigns of Thutmose III (ca 1504–1450), detailed in a series of royal inscriptions, which extended and stabilized Egyptian rule in Canaan.

But almost from the death of Thutmose Egyptian power began to diminish, partly because Egyptian hegemony permitted the numerous small kingdoms of Canaan to continue to exist. Revolts and petty conflicts were the result. But the Egyptian decline was due mainly to the rise of a major power in the north, Hatti, and a general, though not uniform, weakening of the will or the ability of Egyptian rulers to police their holdings in Canaan.

The 14th cent was an era of change in the Middle East. At the end of the 15th cent there were three great powers on the periphery of Canaan: Egypt, its fortunes declining; Hatti, dormant in its Anatolian homeland, beleaguered by the Kaska; and Mitanni, a Hurrian kingdom in Upper Mesopotamia. Mitanni and Egypt were nominal allies and seem to have come to tacit agreement about holdings in Syria. But all this changed drastically in the 14th century. The Hittites, under the vigorous and ambitious Šuppiluliuma I, began a series of expansionist wars. The result was an empire that included Mitanni, the small states of southern Asia Minor, and Syria as far south as Kadesh. Egypt, in the throes of the Amarna revolution, was unable or unwilling to help.

This period in Canaan is brilliantly illumined by the Amarna correspondence. The letters, written from the vassal kings in Canaan to the pharaoh, show Canaan in turmoil. Particularly

plaintive are the letters of Rib-Addi king of Byblos, who appealed for help against the encroachments of the kings of Amurru — to no avail. In the southern part of Canaan arose Lab'ayu of Shechem, much to the distress of those more loyal to Egypt. Gangs of men who had lost their citizenship (*'apiru*) roamed the land. This is, however, probably only part of the picture. Allowance must be made for the tendency of the letter writers' to overstate the case when asking for military assistance and for the fact that Canaan remained an Egyptian territory throughout this period.

Attempts to solidify the Egyptian hold on Canaan and to retake territory lost to the Hittites were made by Seti I and Ramses II. A campaign in the latter's fifth year led to a decisive confrontation with Hatti at Kadesh (ca 1300). Both sides claimed victory, but the Egyptians seem fortunate to have escaped. A peace treaty followed, which established the boundary between the two great powers approximately on the line described by the northern boundary of Canaan in the biblical lists.

The battle of Kadesh was, however, the beginning of the end for both great powers' domination in the area. Soon both had a much greater problem. Already at the battle of Kadesh (and earlier) various Indo-Aryan groups of Western origin were present as mercenaries. They are a symptom of the great incursion of Western peoples that reached its peak at the end of the 13th century. These Sea-peoples, as they were known to the Egyptians, were the catalyst for a general collapse of the Bronze Age culture. Only Egypt was able to resist and throw back the invaders. As the result of that Egyptian victory, the most famous of the Sea-peoples, the Philistines, came to occupy Palestine.

In the midst of this confusing time Moses and his followers left Egypt, and Joshua with a second generation entered Canaan. They were not alone. It was a time of change, of migration, of destruction and turmoil — a dark age that ended 200 years later with the emergence of nation-states like Israel. It marked the effective end of the history of the Canaanites.

## V. Society

Direct information about the social structure is scarce from Canaan itself. The texts of Ugarit and Alalakh are very informative, however, and with due caution against too much generalizing they may be used to fill the gaps in knowledge of Canaan.

Essentially Canaanite society was in two tiers. The more fundamental of these was the society of the agricultural villages. The production of the villages was the basis for the state's economy. The villages themselves were small and organized into one or more clans, governed by the heads of the clans, the elders. In some instances the clans were organized into tribes. A leading example of the symbiosis of tribe and state can be found at Mari.

On this simple village economy was imposed the palace. In contrast to the villages, the state was highly centralized and in the case of Ugarit reached bureaucratic proportions. In theory the king was the central authority in all areas of life. In the smaller states this was probably true in practice as well, but in the larger states the actual exercise of this authority was left to his administrative personnel (Ugar *bnš mlk*). These included a technically trained clergy, a professional army, a palace judicial system, and overseers of the various aspects of economic life.

The economy itself was largely a state monopoly. The palace regulated trade and controlled the production of artisans. At Ugarit the artisans were organized by trade. In addition, large tracts of state land were worked by tenant farmers. A military aristocracy that bore the title *maryannu* was supported in return for certain services to the state. The *maryannu* were a feature of the Hurrian Indo-Aryan overlordship that was imposed on Canaan in the middle of the 2nd millennium.

Slavery, both for debtors and prisoners of war, existed in Canaanite culture, but it seems not to have been very common. More important was the corvée imposed on the citizens and used for various state projects. The state also collected taxes. The result of this heavy state machinery was the steady alienation of persons and groups who became *'apiru*, officially stateless

people who typically formed bands of freebooters and when sufficiently numerous became a danger to the state itself.

## VI. Language

The term Canaanite is used to describe the non-Aramaic group of first-millennium languages that are part of the Northwest Semitic family, principally Phoenician and Hebrew (cf. Isa. 19:18). It is also used for the postulated ancestor of these languages.

For the ancestral language the sources are chiefly Ugaritic texts (generally considered a Canaanite dialect), glosses and other peculiarities in the Amarna Tablets, and names, mostly from Egyptian sources. Another, very large, group of names culled mostly from Mesopotamian sources is classified as Amorite, a West Semitic language whose position vis-à-vis Canaanite and Aramaic is still a matter of dispute. The preliminary reports on the language of Ebla (Tell Mardikh) of the 3rd millennium indicate that it falls outside the usual classification of early Semitic languages. It exhibits important isoglosses with later Canaanite (as well as major differences) and on the strength of those similarities has been tentatively labeled as Paleo-Canaanite (G. Pettinato, *Orientalia*, n.s. 44 [1975], 361–374).

Obviously the resources for reconstructing West Semitic dialect-geography in the 2nd millennium are very meagre. It can be said, however, that some of the features that distinguish the Iron Age Canaanite dialects had begun to form at a relatively early date (e.g.,  $am > om$ , ca 1500). It is likely that some dialectic specificity characterized Canaan even earlier.

The greatest Canaanite contribution to civilization was the alphabet. The forms of writing used at that time (Egyptian hieroglyphic and Sumerian-Akkadian cuneiform) were very cumbersome, because the hundreds of signs had both ideographic and syllabic values. The simple phonetic alphabet was a great improvement, which developed into the alphabet now used in Western and Near Eastern cultures. The earliest known attempt at simplification is found in the inscriptions from Byblos, still largely

undeciphered, dating to the early 2nd millennium. They use a syllabic script that has far fewer signs than the scripts of either Egypt or Mesopotamia. Far more important are a group of middle-second-millennium inscriptions that use an alphabetic script retaining some of its original pictographic features. The largest and best-known group is from Serabit el-Khadem in the Sinai. The step forward that these writings represent was probably taken under the influence of Egyptian, but it is clearly a West Semitic invention. No attempt to derive the alphabet directly from Egyptian has been successful (cf. K. A. Kitchen, in M. Liverani, ed, *La Siria nel tardo bronzo*, pp. 85–87).

Another alphabet, in cuneiform, is found at Ugarit. The cuneiform system (wedges formed by pressing a stylus into soft clay) was far better suited to the clay tablets used by Ugaritic scribes. An innovation of this alphabet is its use of three signs for the glottal stop, one for each of three principal Semitic vowels ('a, 'i, 'u).

## VII. Influences on Israel

The people of Israel clearly thought of themselves as separate from their Canaanite neighbors. In fact, they were repeatedly enjoined to maintain that separateness (cf. Dt. 7). But the distinctiveness of Israel was built upon a basic commonality that runs through Canaanite culture.

This can be most easily seen in language and literature. The Canaanites and Hebrews spoke a common tongue. They used, as the Ugaritic texts reveal, a common stock of literary conventions. Even the language they used in the cult — the names for sacrifices, the divine titles — are similar (cf. F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* [1973], pp. 1–75).

Canaanite influence is evident also in the structures of society. The monarchy in Israel largely follows the patterns of Canaanite kingship, especially during and after the time of Solomon. In matters of material culture, architecture, and the like, they are virtually indistinguishable.

All this does not diminish the distinctiveness of Israel. Nor can one trace a direct line of



development between the cultures of Canaan and Israel. But the distinctiveness of Israel's conception of God, society, and time are most clearly seen against the backdrop the Canaanite culture in which they shared.

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