The Background to Jewish Studies in the Bible and in the Ancient East

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THE BACKGROUND TO JEWISH STUDIES IN THE BIBLE AND IN THE ANCIENT EAST

by

Cyrus H. Gordon

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*The present paper is an expanded version
of the Abe and Ida Miller Lecture
given at Purdue University, December 4, 1991.*

Foreword

The beginnings of this study go back to the summer of 1989 while I was preparing for a lecture tour that autumn in Japan and Korea. My Korean sponsors requested that I submit in advance a typescript of four lectures that I would deliver on topics of my choice, relating to the Hebrew Bible. Those topics constitute the first four chapters of this essay. The first two deal with the bearing of the cuneiform tablets from Ugarit and Ebla on the Hebrew Scriptures, while the last two are essays designed to help us evaluate the Old Testament as a whole. Chapters I–IV deal with

the Bible in the cultural context of the Ancient Near East and Mediterra-
nean.

Meanwhile, in late 1987, I became involved in the complex but
important link between the Bible world and the Far East. This has
broadened our geographical horizons far beyond the Near East. I have
delineated this new development in Chapter V.

Dr. Gordon D. Young, Associate Professor of History and Chair of the
Jewish Studies Committee at Purdue University at that time, invited me to
give a public lecture on the Near Eastern background of the Hebrew Bible
and Jewish Studies on 4 December 1991 and a seminar on the following
day for his advanced students in ancient Near Eastern history. The public
lecture, entitled "Jewish Studies, The Bible, and the Ancient Near East,"
was based on material selected from Chapters I–IV, while the seminar dealt
with the topic in Chapter V.

I. Ugarit and the Old Testament

The status of any subject cannot remain the same when new and
pertinent facts come to light. The abundance of new texts and monuments
emerging from the soil of the Bible Lands obliges us to modify, and often
abandon, long-held views, while enabling us to see things we did not see
before. We shall start our survey with the most important group of finds
bearing on the Hebrew Bible that have come to light in the last hundred
years.

Ugarit, whose modern name is Ras Shamra, was the capital of a flour-
ishing city-state and cultural center, particularly in the Late Bronze Age
from about 1400 to 1200 B.C.E. As a seaport on the Syrian coast, fairly
close to Cyprus, it was well located for trade between the mainland and
the Mediterranean and, via overland routes, with Anatolia, Mesopotamia,
all of Canaan, and Egypt.

Shortly after excavations began early in 1929, clay tablets were found
in two cuneiform scripts: one was the Akkadian syllabary of Mesopotamia
and the other a completely new alphabet of thirty letters. Within a year the
alphabet was deciphered, and the language proved to be a hitherto
unknown branch of West Semitic related to Hebrew. The translation of the
alphabetic Ugaritic tablets progressed quickly, thanks largely to Hebrew
scholars who brought the evidence of the Old Testament to bear on the
Ugaritic texts.

Eventually the thirty alphabetic letters, always arranged in the same
fixed order, were found on a number of Ugaritic school texts. The
sequence of the Ugaritic "ABC" is the one maintained in the Hebrew,

Greek, and Latin alphabets wherever the letters of the 30-letter Ugaritic ABC survived in the reduced 22-letter Phoenician/Hebrew ABC which the Greeks used in the Archaic Period until ca. 600 B.C.E. Thus we still preserve the sequence of a - b - - d - h - - k - l - m - n - - p - q - r - s - t. So far, the earliest form of the modern Occidental alphabet arranged in its present order comes from Ugarit of around 1400 B.C.E. However, there is epigraphical evidence that the same ABC was current several centuries earlier in the prototypes of the long-known Phoenician-Canaanite letter-forms and that the Ugarit letter-forms are cuneiform transcriptions thereof within the mechanical requirements of cuneiform writing on clay tablets.

The Ugaritic tablets include mythological and epic poetry remarkably like Old Testament poetry in language and literary structure. For instance, compare the *Ugaritic Textbook* (Cyrus H. Gordon, Analecta Orientalia 38 [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1965]; hereafter UT) text ᶜnt:II:39–40:

ṭl šmm	'dew of heaven
šmn arṣ	fat of earth'

with Genesis 27:28:

m-ṭl h-šmym	'from the dew of the heavens
w-m-šmny h-ᵓrṣ	and from the fat of the earth'

Note that all four words in the Ugaritic recur in the Hebrew and that the parallelism between "dew of heaven" and "fat of earth" (signifying fertility) reflects the same poetic tradition.

The following example illustrates closeness not only in language and poetic structure, but also in a specific humane value. Compare what is said of a virtuous ruler in UT, text 2 Aqhat V:7–8:

ydn dn almnt	'he judges the case of the widow,
yṭpṭ ṭpṭ ytm	adjudicates the cause of the fatherless'

with Isaiah 1:17:

špṭw ytwm	'adjudicate (the case of the) fatherless,
rybw ᵓlmnh	plead (the cause of the widow)'

Here we find the same kind of poetic structure and an identical conventional parallel pair (ᵓ*almnt* ‖ *ytm*); also the first verb is the same (Ug. *ṭpṭ* = Heb. *špṭ*, for Ug. *ṭ* regularly corresponds to *š* in Heb.). But there is an additional factor: the Ug. and Heb. both express the same virtue: "social justice" in the sense of defending the cause of the widow and orphan. At Ugarit it was the duty of rulers, whereas in Israel it was extended to the entire community.

What we have just pointed out explains why the Hebrew language and literature do not confront us with any primitive stage. The earliest biblical Hebrew, including the poetry, is stately and polished because Hebrew

language and literature started on the high level already achieved in the speech and poetry of Canaan as exemplified by Ugaritic.

The distinctiveness of the Old Testament lies not so much in its form but in its content. The contrast between the literatures of the Hebrew and their neighbors is sharp because the Bible often advocates values consciously opposed to those of the pagan Near East. Thus Leviticus 18:23–28 expressly outlaws sexual vices including intercourse between man and beast because they were practiced by the earlier population. Indeed, such abominations are given as the reason God dispossessed the pagan population and gave the land to Israel. Israelites are warned that if they commit those vices, they too will be dispossessed. Before the discovery of the Ugaritic tablets, this looked like unfounded anti-Canaanite propaganda. However, in the sacred religious mythology of Ugarit, Baal has intercourse with a heifer to sire the divine bull-calf (UT 67:V:17–22). This act may well have been performed in ritual dramas of the fertility cult, with a priest taking Baal's part. From the Canaanite viewpoint such bestiality would be *imitatio dei* (i.e., following their god's example). But such pagan piety was abominable to the religious leaders of Israel. The biblical authors were quite familiar with the mythology and practices of their predecessors and neighbors, as will be indicated below.

We can go still deeper in our understanding of why there is no primitive period in Israelite history or institutions. Ugarit was a highly intellectual urban center. Its scribes were scholars trained in the arts and sciences of their international ecumene and were familiar with a variety of scripts and languages. Among the school texts found at Ugarit are quadrilingual vocabularies in four parallel columns: Sumerian, Babylonian, Hurrian, and Ugaritic. One cannot call such a cosmopolitan and polyglot milieu primitive. To the contrary, it must be viewed as sophisticated. Here we must note that a millennium before the Ugaritic tablets were inscribed in the Late Bronze Age, there already was at Ebla (about fifty miles east of Ugarit) a highly literate urban center. The only culture the Hebrews ever knew was dominated by literate and technically advanced urban centers. This is reflected in the Genesis account of "pre-history" (or "before the flood," to use ancient Near Eastern terminology): The Hebrews knew that civilization requires agriculture and animal husbandry to feed the urban societies and release large segments of the population for activity in other fields, ranging from arts and crafts to the sciences. Thus the first children of Adam and Eve are Cain, the farmer, and Abel, the herdsman. According to one of the genealogies in Genesis (4:17), Cain had a son named Enoch, who founded a city. Here it is a grandson of Adam and Eve who initiates urbanism.

Note that the Bible shows no interest in primitivism. Immediately after the food-gathering Adam and Eve come (in the persons of their sons Cain and Abel) the two basic ways of life—agriculture and herding—without which there can be no civilization. Then comes urbanism, in the person of Adam and Eve's grandson Enoch.

If we observe the occupations of the antediluvian prototypes, we see that Tubal-Cain, the prototype of the metallurgists, worked with iron and copper (Genesis 4:22). The Hebrew author knows that without iron and copper, the technology of the culture known to the Hebrews would be unthinkable. Tubal-Cain's brother was Jubal (Genesis 4:21), the forerunner of all musicians who play both stringed and wind instruments. Music happens to be a characteristic of all groups of mankind. Other creatures, notably certain birds, may sing beautifully, but man alone invents and plays a vast array of instruments and cultivates music as an art and even as a science.

Noah himself is described as capable of constructing and caulking a ship and knowing something of navigation; e.g., using birds for finding land and perhaps homing pigeons for finding direction when one is lost at sea. The Mesopotamian forerunner of the Deluge (in the eleventh tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic) is more technically advanced than the later Hebrew account.

·All this is important in understanding Hebrew origins. They are solidly rooted at the very hub of a sophisticated Near East: the crossroads of Egypt and Western Asia, astride the waterways to the Atlantic via the Mediterranean and to the Indian Ocean via the Red Sea. Furthermore, Israel's occupation of Palestine comes on the heels of the most international period in the second millennium B.C.E.: the Amarna Age, when Egypt, Canaan, Cyprus, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia were interconnected by diplomacy and trade, with Akkadian as the written lingua franca for intercommunication.

The above sketch of internationalism and urbanism is inherent in the early biblical narratives themselves. Abraham is born in Ur of the Chaldees, in Aramean terrain; he moves to Haran, which lies in south central Turkey near the Syrian border. He travels through Canaan and has dealings with various ethnic groups such as Philistines and Amorites. He sojourns in Egypt and returns to Canaan, where he is treated with great honor by the Hittite enclave around Hebron (Genesis 23:6). He always gravitates around cities and has contacts with royalty and the socially elite.

The best extrabiblical data we have for understanding Abraham's way of life, and the movement of which he was a part, come from Ugarit. Under the aegis of the Emperor of the Hittites, Hattusilis III (ca. 1282–

1250 B.C.E.), merchants of Ur were obliged by Hattusilis to limit their activity in Ugarit to the harvest season (when people had the wherewithal to pay their debts) and then to leave Ugarit and return home for the winter. Those merchants of Ur were not to reside the year round in Ugarit nor acquire real estate there. However, they were to be allowed to conduct their business and collect what was owed them, even to the point of enslaving their debtors and the latters' families.

This dossier of tablets from Ugarit is the best source we have so far to inform us of the group to which Abraham belonged.[1] A close look at the activities of the Patriarchs shows the same interests and features that are attributed to the Merchants of Ur. They are repeatedly portrayed as a wealthy group, rich not only in livestock but also in silver and gold, and concerned with trade. They are on the move and therefore desirous of the right to reside permanently in a home of their own. The right to acquire real estate is granted to Abraham only in Hebron, at a high price which Abraham is able to pay in cash: 400 shekels of silver of a quality acceptable to merchants (Genesis 23). When the Shechemites want to establish permanent and close relations with Jacob, they offer him the three items singled out in the tablets from Ugarit concerning the merchants from Ur: (1) the right to do business, (2) the right of permanent residence, and (3) the right to acquire real estate (Genesis 34:10, 21).

It is interesting to note that the sole role of herdsmen ascribed to Jacob and his family when they entered Egypt is a scenario concocted by Joseph (Genesis 46:31–34), as first noted by Rabbi Manuel Gold, to get them a haven in Egypt, as cattlemen in Goshen (the eastern Delta). This facilitated their immigration because it was a useful service that did not threaten or compete with Egyptian businessmen. However, the actual mercantile activity of the Hebrews in Egypt is reflected in Genesis 42:34.

There are individuals named *Abrm* in the archives of Ugarit (UT § 19.8), but none of them should be identified with the biblical Abram from Ur of the Chaldees. In a sense the Ugaritic tablets about the Merchants of Ur are more important than a tablet naming the biblical Abram would be. Our dossier on the Merchants of Ur provides us with background of a major movement of which Abra(ha)m was part: a group of international merchants from Aram beyond the Euphrates under the control of the Hittite emperors. "Ur of the Chaldees" is in northern Mesopotamia; it is

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[1]See my articles on "Abraham and the Merchants of Ura," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 17 (1958), pp. 28–31, and "Abraham of Ur," *Hebrew and Semitic Studies* (= G.R. Driver Festschrift) (1962), pp. 77–84.

not Sumerian Ur, which is mentioned in hundreds of cuneiform inscriptions but is never called "Ur of the Chaldees."

The religion of Ugarit is portrayed first-hand by the devotees of Baal, Anath/Ashtoret, Mot, Resheph, Shemesh, Yāreah, Shahar, and other pagan deities worshipped by the Canaanites and mentioned in the Bible. There are ritual texts listing sacrifices made to various deities. But more significant are the mythological texts which in a sense constitute the Bible of the Canaanites among whom the Israelites lived.

In the Ugaritic myths, we read of the activities ascribed to the various deities. The head of the pantheon is El, and Asherah is his wife. Incidentally, the Temple of God in Jerusalem also housed a cult of Asherah[2] until it was removed once and for all by Josiah in his sweeping reform (2 Kings 23:7) in 621 B.C.E.

At Ugarit only two temples have been found: one dedicated to Baal and one to Dagan (= Dagon). Baal is sometimes called the Son of Dagan, and sometimes the Son of El. Baal is not of the older generation of the gods but is the glamorous younger god who, along with his sister/consort Anath, is the most active member of the pantheon in the mythological texts. The fertility cult was the most prominent aspect of Canaanite religion, and therefore Baal and Anath (gods of fertility) were exceedingly popular. But other deities were also involved with the fertility cycle.

UT 52 deals with the seven good gods of fertility sired by El out of two women. Those seven gods stand for the seven-year sabbatical cycle which the Hebrews adopted from the native population. However, the Hebrews reacted sharply against the lewd practices of the Canaanite fertility cult. There is reason to believe that the impregnation of the two women by El was acted out, because the text is in dramatic form with stage directions. The part of El may well have been performed by a priest in public at the festival marking the start of a new sabbatical cycle.

The sun goddess Špš is prominent in the myths, even as Šmš (pronounced Shemesh in Hebrew) the sun god was throughout Canaan. The moon cult was also quite important, and we have a text (UT 77) celebrating the wedding of the Moon god Yarih (Heb. Yāreah) with the lunar goddess Nikkal (< Sumerian Nin-gal).

It is significant that in the Creation (Genesis 1), the author (as first seen by Professor David Neiman) avoids calling the Sun and the Moon by their names, but instead designates them as "the Great(er) Luminary" and

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[2]Clearly stated in the Hebrew but usually garbled by the translators, who could not face the theological implications.

"the Small(er) Luminary" (Genesis 1:16), to avoid attributing to God the creation of the pagan solar and lunar deities who were widely worshipped in Canaan. We may add that Genesis 2:2 avoids calling the day of rest the Sabbath, but instead calls it "the Seventh Day" because *šabbat* 'Sabbath' calls to mind the planet Saturn (*šabbetai* is the Hebrew name of Saturn; for the Sabbath 'Saturday' is indeed Saturn's day). Thus we have in Genesis 1:1-2:3 a policy of demythologizing.

There are two royal epic legends among the poetic texts from Ugarit. One has to do with a righteous ruler named Dan³el, who was blessed with a model son named Aqhat. The name Aqhat appears as *Qĕbāt* ("Kohath" in the English Bible), the son of Levi. Dan³el was bereft of Aqhat through the machinations of Anath, but the text implies that Aqhat was restored to life as a divine boon to his virtuous father, Dan³el. It is interesting to note that the Prophet Ezekiel (14:14–20) refers to three saintly men of old who not only survived catastrophe, but managed to come through it with their children. The three are Noah, Dan³el, and Job. We know from Genesis the story of Noah, who was righteous in his generation and who survived the Flood with his sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth. We also know that Job was exemplary in his conduct and was put to a terrible test that robbed him of his children (Job 1:18–19), who were, however, restored to him (42:13–14) because of his virtue. Dan³el cannot be the Daniel of the Book of Daniel, who is portrayed in a Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenian setting. The well-known Daniel of the Lion's Den does not fit in with the ancient Noah and Job, who lived long before Ezekiel's time. The ancient Dan³el is the virtuous ruler now known to us from the Ugaritic epic in which the pre-Hebraic Dan³el regained his revived son Aqhat. Accordingly we are confronted with the fact that a great biblical author (Ezekiel) was familiar with a "classical" pagan background, even as Christian authors have been familiar with the Greek and Latin classics and have drawn on them freely. (Milton is a particularly good example of a committed Christian whose poetry is adorned with references to the classics of pagan Greece and Rome.)

The other Ugaritic epic concerns King Kret, whose name (spelled consonantally KRT) appears as the eponymous ancestor of the Cretans, Kĕrētîm, in Zephaniah 2:5–6. The content of the Epic of Kret is important for biblical studies. Kret is bereft of his children so that his line is faced with extinction. It is essential that his dynasty be continued through an heir borne to him by his destined bride, Ḥry, even as Abraham's royal line can only be continued through Sarah's son, Isaac. (Hagar's son, Ishmael, is not destined to be the link in the chain from Abraham to David.)

First Kret has to recover Ḥry from another king's palace (UT Krt:281–300), even as Abraham had to recover Sarah from the palaces of Pharaoh (Genesis 12:15-20) and of King Abimelech of Gerar (Genesis 20:1-18). Then Kret has to make the proper sacrifices (Krt: 62-79, 156-170) and undergo incubation (Krt: 31-43, 154-155) before he can sire his crown prince out of Ḥry, even as Abraham had to make sacrifices and undergo incubation before receiving the divine promise of progeny (Genesis 15:9-14). The recovery of the destined bride from a foreign palace is well known from the Iliad, which tells of the Trojan War fought so that King Menelaus could retrieve his destined bride, Helen, from the palace of Priam of Troy.

The Patriarchal narratives, the Ugaritic Epics, and the Iliad are all set in the Heroic Age in the Late Bronze Period (that ended with the beginning of the common use of iron around 1200 B.C.E.). And all three sets of epic (Hebrew, Ugaritic, and Greek) deal with kings and can be described as the "East Mediterranean royal epics of the Late Bronze Age."

A "heroic age" is characterized by wanderings and uncertainties. The picture we get from the Bible, Homer, and Ugarit is not merely a literary creation: it reflects a historic reality. Beautiful ladies were indeed abducted in such unsettled times. There is an actual "Helen of Troy" situation in the Ugaritic archives. King Ammistamru II of Ugarit married an Amorite princess named Piddu, who was contractually guaranteed to bear his crown prince. The title of such a royal wife was "Rabîtu." Piddu, for reasons that are not spelled out in the tablets, wound up in the palace of her brother, Shaushgamuwa, King of Amurru. Ammistamru demanded her return, and the tension brought Ugarit and Amurru to the brink of war.[3] Accordingly, such crises were part of real life in the Heroic Age around the East Mediterranean in the Late Bronze Age. In any case, the text of Genesis takes on considerable meaning that was obscured until the discovery of the Ugaritic tablets.

The unearthing of a tablet at Ugarit recording a psalm in praise of the moon-goddess Nikkal is noteworthy in that it is accompanied by the musical notations recording the entire melody. It is thus the record of a hymn complete with libretto and score from the fourteenth century B.C.E.

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[3]See C. H. Gordon in *Ascribe to the Lord* (= Peter Craigie Memorial Volume), *Journal of the Study of Old Testament*, Supplement Series 67 (1988), pp. 128-129.

It has been published together with a phonograph record rendering it as it may have sounded in antiquity.[4]

This tablet is of interest if we are to understand the achievement of David as the all-time greatest composer of psalms. David lived around 1,000 B.C.E., about 300 years after the Ugaritic psalm was recorded at Ugarit.

Whenever we come across the high-point in any aspect of human accomplishment, we should regard it not as a beginning, but as the climax of a long development. Bach, marking the apex of church music, arose at the end of centuries of liturgical music from antiquity through the Middle Ages and Renaissance. By the same token, David, far from being merely a gifted folk-singer, marks the climax of psalmody in the highly civilized Near East of pre-classical antiquity.

The Ugaritic psalm text shows us that 300 years before David, the "academy" at Ugarit fostered music and kept recordings on file the way we collect sheet music, phonograph records, tapes, and CDs. The genius of David the musician is no longer a historic mystery: he emerges as the climactic hymnal composer (of both words and melodies) in a culture that not only had music (for all humanity—even the most primitive tribes—has music), but actually fostered it as an academic discipline in the intellectual centers.

To understand the Bible as fully as it is now possible, there are many newly discovered sources of great value: Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Anatolian, Mediterranean, etc. The student of the Old Testament cannot possibly delve deeply into all of them. If a student would choose the one extrabiblical source that sheds the most abundant and direct light on the Old Testament, he should select Ugaritic. This holds regardless of whether the student is interested in grammar, vocabulary, poetic structure, religion, rituals, comparative philology, or cultural history. In our time there can be no serious, up-to-date Old Testament scholarship without Ugaritic.

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[4]Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, Richard L. Crocker, and Robert R. Brown, *Sounds from Silence: Recent Discoveries in Ancient Near Eastern Music* (Berkeley, CA: Bit Enki Publications, 1976).

II. Ebla and the Old Testament

As we have noted above, Ugarit has yielded the most important archeological finds made in the twentieth century. We shall now turn to Ebla, where the outstanding epigraphical find of the second half of the twentieth century was discovered. The Ebla Archives were written in the Early Bronze Age (E.B.), specifically in the twenty-third century. To understand the more ancient advances which had made them possible, we shall begin with developments that got under way about 12,000 years ago.

It was in Neolithic times (ca. 10,000—6,000) that the two basic sources of producing food were developed: agriculture and animal husbandry. The surplus of food raised by the farmers and herdsmen made it possible to form communities whose plantations and herds could sustain not only the farmers and herdsmen, but also the guilds for the various arts and crafts: building; weaving wool and linen; manufacturing wares made of cloth, stone, bone, and wood; trading; priestcraft; etc. It was during the Neolithic Age that ceramics began its enduring course.

In the Chalcolithic Age (4,000—3,000), copper, silver, and gold, as well as stones, were worked. Also the beginning of monumental architecture (like the ziggurats of Mesopotamia), fine art (e.g., seal cylinders), and the seeds of writing then appear. The last item refers to numerals and commodities which were indicated ideographically and which developed into Mesopotamian ideograms around 3,000 B.C.E. at the dawn of the Early Bronze Age.[5]

Intellectual urban centers flourished throughout Sumer and Akkad and spread, albeit in modified form, wherever Mesopotamian tradesmen and armies went.

The largest archives of the Early Bronze Age (3,000—2,000) in the world come not from Mesopotamia but from Syria. An Italian expedition, under the directorship of Professor Paolo Matthiae, has unearthed so far about 15,000 cuneiform tablets dating from the twenty-third century. The principal language in the Ebla Archives has affinities with East Semitic (= Akkadian or Assyro-Babylonian) and to West Semitic (= Hebrew, Aramaic, Ugaritic, Arabic), and for that matter, in varying degree, with all the Egypto-Semitic languages. We call it Eblaite because extensive archives

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[5]Such antecedents of cuneiform have been published often and in detail by Denise Schmandt-Besserat. She has summed up her important contribution in *Before Writing. Vol. I: From Counting to Cuneiform; Vol. II: A Catalogue of Near Eastern Tokens* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).

in that language were first found at Ebla. However, the same language was also written on tablets unearthed at other cuneiform centers such as Mari, Kish, and Tell Abu Salabikh. All this indicates that Eblaite was not the dialect spoken at Ebla, but rather the written lingua franca used by traders and diplomats throughout an ecumene embracing at least much of Babylonia and North Syria.

Eblaite was primarily used by scribes. It was not spoken at home. It is likely that scribes and even some diplomats and merchants could speak it with each other. We might compare the use of Latin in pre-modern Western Europe, where the educated segment of the population wrote in Latin and could even converse with each other in it, while in daily life everyone (including women and children) used the regional vernacular.

Although the date of the Ebla Archives is a millennium earlier than the Ugaritic libraries and antedates the earliest period ever seriously suggested for Abraham, the Ebla Archives have a bearing on the Old Testament, linguistically and culturally. This is because there is a considerable measure of continuity in Syro-Palestinian civilization and speech, from the Early Bronze Age through biblical times down to the present.

Before the excavations at Ebla that began in 1964, it was widely held that Syria-Palestine in the Early Bronze Age was essentially pastoral with a nomadic population. If the population included Semites, they were thought to be uncouth Amorites who infiltrated from the Syro-Arabian desert. Ebla has disproved such notions convincingly.

Ebla was a large walled city that embraced an intellectual center where cuneiform scribes were educated in the arts and sciences of the day. Young scribes who had studied abroad at other centers such as Mari on the middle Euphrates on occasion came to Ebla. A mathematician at Ebla was imported from the Mesopotamian city of Kish. And the textbooks ("school tablets" used for instruction) included several known from other cuneiform centers. Accordingly, the "university" at Ebla belonged to a network of cuneiform academies that shared the same civilization, the same system of education, and the same Mesopotamian syllabary.

The sophistication of the culture is reflected in bilingual vocabularies defining Sumerian in Semitic Eblaite. The latter, as noted above, is often so close to the Semitic languages used at other cuneiform centers, such as Mari and Kish, that there is reason to consider it a lingua franca used by diplomats and merchants who were based at such cities. Treaties between city-states have been found in the Ebla Archives.

Ebla was the center of an important, though ephemeral, commercial city-state. The period of the Ebla Archives endured less than a century, because it was so close to a still more impressive site: Yamhad (= Aleppo).

We know from the Mari Archives that until Hammurapiᵓ picked off his rivals one by one to forge his empire, Yamhad was the strongest kingdom in the entire Cuneiform World.

The Ebla Archives are contemporary with the Dynasty of Sargon of Akkad and the Pyramid Age of Egypt. It was Naram-Sin, the second successor of Sargon, who captured and destroyed Ebla by a fire, which fortunately baked the tablets to the hardness of brick and buried them in the ashes of the wooden shelves on which they had been arranged. Inscriptions with the titles in hieroglyphs of Chefren (Fourth Dynasty) and Pepi I (Sixth Dynasty) have been found in the same stratum as the Ebla Archives, showing that the archives cannot predate the twenty-third century, in which the reign of Pepi I falls.

It thus turns out that high culture in E.B. was not limited to the great cradles of western civilization in Mesopotamia and Egypt, but was shared by the Syro-Palestinian land-bridge that connected them. Actually this should have been obvious from an early study by the Czech orientalist, Bedrič Hrozný. He showed that the Mesopotamian and Egyptian methods of brewing beer were so similar technologically that they had to have a common origin. It is interesting to note that the biblical Hebrew term for beer is *šēkār* = Akkadian *šikaru*, 'beer'. The Hebrew word for drunk(ard) is *šikkôr* and 'to get drunk' is *hištakkēr*. Therefore the intoxicant par excellence in biblical Palestine was beer, forming a cultural link between Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Verbal continuity from Eblaite to Hebrew is sometimes reflected in the lexicon. The noun *gašm-* in the sense of "rain" is rather limited in distribution within the Semitic family. It appears in Hebrew as *gešem* and in Ugaritic consonantally as *gšm* and now in Eblaite in the month-name ITU *ga-sum* 'Month of Rain'. Hebrew *nezem* 'ring' (especially "nose-ring") has so far turned up elsewhere only in Eblaite *ni-zi-mu*.

A striking case of cultural and verbal continuity is provided by an incantation against a much-feared demon possessing horns and tails. In Ugaritic he is referred to as *Ḥby bᶜl qrnm w-dnb* 'Ḥaby, possessor of two horns and a tail.' In Eblaite his name is reduplicated to *Ḥabḥaby*, and he is characterized by the pair of horns of the moon and by the tail(s) (= rays) of the sun. Then he appears twice in the Old Testament: Isaiah (26:20) warns us to take cover in the innermost chamber until Ḥaby departs; Habakkuk 3:4 mentions the demon as *ḥebyôn* (with the suffix *-ôn* added to *ḥaby*) and preserves a reference to his horns. The fact that our iconography of Satan (or the Devil) to this day calls for horns and tail reflects how deep-seated Ḥaby is in our own past. Note that Hebrew *haś-Śāṭān* and Greek *ho Satanâs*, 'the Satan,' and *ho Diábolos*, 'the Devil,' are

not strictly speaking proper names, but epithets with the definite article, substituted for the real name of the demon (*Haby*) which was avoided as too terrifying and dangerous.

In the religious sphere, there is also continuity. The Ebla pantheon included pagan gods mentioned in the Old Testament: Rasap (= Resheph), Dagan (= Dagon), Baal, Hadda (= Hadad), and many others which also crop up in Ugaritic.

In a bilingual text, ŠUM, 'Name,' is equated with the Mesopotamian god Tammuz. In Hebrew, starting with Leviticus 24:11–16, *haš-šēm*, 'The Name,' stands for the "Ineffable Name" of the God of Israel, and to this day traditional Jews refrain from pronouncing "Yahweh" and, except in prayer, even avoid pronouncing its substitute, "ᵓAdônāy." Instead they say "*haš-šēm*." When Ezekiel (8:14) complains of Jewish women "weeping for The (!) Tammuz," they may have identified that deity with the God of Israel, since both were *The Name*, par excellence.

An Eblaite deity called *ᵈA-dam-ma* is to be compared with the first man, Adam, who, like other worthies down to the Flood, were greater than life-size and should be considered deities or at least demi-gods. Noah's son Japheth (the ancestor of the Ionian Greeks) bears the same name as the Greek Titan, Iapetos. Noah's first-born son *Šem* bears a Semitic name as befits the divine ancestor of the Semites. Ham, the divine ancestor of the Egyptians, has a good Egyptian name with two different meanings: *ḥm* refers both to the majesty of the deified Pharaoh (for *ḥm.f* means "His Majesty") and to any servant or slave. So *ḥm*, 'Ham,' is not only the appropriate honorific designation for the ancestor of the Egyptians, but it also suggests the servile status of Canaan, the son of Ham, after the Hebrew Conquest. Polysemy is a frequent factor in the Bible world, but this one (i.e., the two meanings of *ḥām*) has been missed because it involves the Egyptian, and not the Hebrew, language.

Note how Shem is of Semitic derivation, and Ham of Egyptian derivation, while Japheth is at home in Greek mythology.

The designations of the rulers is the subject of lively debate among Eblaite scholars. The most prominent male chief bears the Sumerian title EN, ideographically. The title *ma-li-ku* is rare and does not seem to designate "king," but rather some lesser personage, perhaps "counsellor." The chief lady of the realm is, however, often called the *ma-lik-tum*, 'queen'. She is also known as the AMA-GAL, 'great mother,' of the EN's successor. Inasmuch as she is also the DAM-GAL, 'chief wife,' of the EN, she corresponds to the Akkadian *rabîtu*, Hebrew *gĕbîrāh*, who is contractually entitled to be the mother of her husband's successor.

Because EN is primarily a priestly designation, it is not advisable to translate it "king." In a theocracy, the EN could be the highest official in a city-state in which church and state are not separated.

Akkadian *en-tum* 'high priestess' is the Semitized feminine of EN. Furthermore, the office of LUGAL, qua "king" (about which we shall have more to say), does occur in the Eblaite hierarchy and is not the same as the EN. Perhaps the EN is the high priest representing the chief god of the state and therefore the god's "executive officer." When the EN dies and is succeeded by his son, the latter's mother (the AMA-GAL, i.e., the former *maliktum*) outranks the younger *maliktum* who is married to the reigning EN.

There are LUGALs, 'kings,' on the Ebla scene. During the reign of some ENs, there are two or more LUGALs, which looks like dyarchy/oligarchy. Cf. Spartan dyarchy with two simultaneously reigning Heraclid lines of kings (as well as the supreme council of five ephors).

While Ugarit in the Late Bronze Age exemplifies the high culture of Canaan just before the Hebrew Conquest, Ebla reflects what preceded even the Patriarchs by many centuries.

The notion of simple, let alone primitive, Hebrew origins is ruled out by what we now know of the Early Bronze Age in Syria-Palestine as well as in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Bilingual lexical texts at Ebla show that the academies of Syria-Palestine were sophisticated in E.B. In Palestine, the E.B. levels of many mounds have not been adequately excavated. Arad is a good example. The mound has a vast E.B. level topped by a relatively small Judean fortress. The latter has been well excavated, studied, and published because it is the Hebrew periods that have been of primary interest for biblical archeologists. The E.B. civilization of the Land has long been known to archeologists, but relatively little has been done about it. There is a great future for the archeology of the Holy Land. It is only a matter of time before the buried E.B. levels of Palestine mounds yield cuneiform archives of the Ebla Age and perhaps still earlier.

Canaan, the land-bridge joining the world's two largest continents with ports on the Mediterranean and Red Seas, destined the Land to be a creative center of the ancient world. It is not an accident that the Greatest Book and the world's most dynamic religions were born and cradled in Canaan.

Addendum

The decipherment of Eblaite and its bearing on Hebrew and Old Testament studies deserve a more detailed account than can be included in a general essay like the above without making it cumbersome and unreadable. The following paragraphs provide a very brief sketch aimed at helping the interested reader get a better preliminary grasp of the problems and results.

Eblaite is written in the Mesopotamian syllabary. Often it employs Sumerograms whose meanings are known. Further, a number of Sumerian determinatives (some placed before, and some after, a word) are used for categorizing a word. AN, 'heaven,' preceding a name indicates that it is a divinity; KI, 'place,' following a name categorizes it as a place-name. Names and other words are often spelled out syllabically. Phonetic complements sometimes tell how a word ends, providing data on suffixed nominal or verbal inflexional morphemes. Short words like prepositions and conjunctions are sometimes spelled out syllabically and thereby provide not only Eblaite vocabulary but also syntactical relationships.

From the above, it can be seen that it is often possible to understand the meaning of a phrase or sentence without knowing how it was pronounced in Eblaite. The citations below will illustrate how the Sumerograms reflect the Eblaite word-order without revealing their pronunciation. This makes the reconstruction of the Eblaite lexicon difficult in spite of the extensive Sumero-Eblaite bilingual vocabularies, which provide a lot of Eblaite words, but not as a rule those commonly used in normal prose. Also the paucity of poetry deprives us of the aid of parallelism such as we find in Ugaritic.

Without more ado, we shall examine representative evidence with reference to the light it sheds on Hebrew and the Old Testament.

The Sumerian word for sailor is MÁ-LAH$_4$ which is borrowed in Eblaite as *ma-la-ḫu*. Accordingly, Hebrew did not have to borrow this word directly from Sumerian or Akkadian, because it (along with other Sumerian loans) was already known in Canaan.

Ḥu-tà-mu is the Eblaite corresponding to Hebrew *ḥôtām* 'seal'.

Ku$_g$-tim, bilingually defined as GUŠKIN, 'gold,' = Heb. *ketem*, 'gold,' which also appears in Egyptian (*ktm*) and probably Minoan.

The Sumerogram ENSI designating a priestess such as one who interprets dreams is bilingually equated with Eblaite *sa-il-tum*, 'asker, inquirer (f.),' related to Heb. *š²l*, 'ask, inquire'.[6]

A bird written BURU₄-MUŠEN in Sumerian is defined as Eblaite *a-a-tum* which corresponds to Hebrew *²ayya(-t)*, 'a bird of prey forbidden as food' (Leviticus 1:14; Deuteronomy 14:13).[7]

Eblaite *bù-kà-lu* corresponds to Hebrew *běkôr*, 'first-born', with *l* (for *r*) as commonly in Eblaite.

I-li-lu (< EN-LIL), defined as 'father of the gods' at Ebla, appears in Hebrew as the common noun *²ělîl*, 'a non-god, lifeless idol'. When new religions displace old religions, the older gods are frequently debased.

The sentence *wa* ÌL IGI-IGI EN *wa* NAM-KU, 'the eyes of the ruler were raised and he swore,' has only one Eblaite word, *wa*, which occurs twice. The rest is limited to Sumerograms. However, the syntax is not Sumerian, but Eblaitic. The use of *wa* before the verb to indicate past time reflects the so-called *w-* conversive with the imperfect in Hebrew to express exclusively past time. The verb with "*w-* conversive" prefixed must stand at the head of the phrase. Eblaite provdes the earliest examples so far of "*w-* conversive."

The idiom *às-du* U₄-U₄ *si-in* U₄-U₄ means 'from days to days' in the sense of 'from time to time', and specifically 'annually'. It reflects the Canaanite idiom that appears in the Old Testament as *miyyāmîm yāmîmā*, 'from days to days = annually'. The preposition *às-du*, 'from,' corresponds to Akkadian *ištu*, 'from,' while *si-in* is distinctively Eblaite 'to, for'.

It is worth noting that West Semitic *min*, 'from,' as well as East Semitic *aštu* occurs in Eblaite, illustrating how East and West Semitic blend in Eblaite.

The same goes for the preposition "in," which is usually *in* in Eblaite (cf. Akkadian *ina*, 'in'), but sometimes *ba* (= West Semitic, as in Heb. *ba*, 'in').

The interpenetration of East and West Semitic is illustrated in the Eblaite numerals. *Mi-at*, 'hundred,' is common Semitic; *li-im*, 'thousand,' is Akkadian; *ri-bab*, 'myriad,' is West Semitic; while *ma-i-at*, 'hundred thousand,' is so far limited to Eblaite.

The proper names, which are derived from various sources, are often of considerable interest for Old Testament studies. *Da-ù-da* is not only

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[6]See *Eblaitica* (*Essays on the Ebla Archives and Eblaite Language* = Publications of the Center for Ebla Research at New York University [Eisenbrauns, 1992]), I. p. 24.

[7]Cf. *Eblaitica*, I, p. 24.

attested in Heb. 'David', but occurs in Minoan Linear A as *Da-we-da* where it is read the same way and taken as a personal name by all Linear A scholars. However, the Eblaite *Da-ù-du* is closest to Arabic *Da³udu*, 'David'.

The god ᵈAK is equated bilingually as both *sà-du-mu* and *rí-ba-nu*. The first is to be compared with *šadday*, an O.T. epithet of God (El-Shadday is sometimes translated 'God Almighty'). *Rí-ba-nu* appears in post-biblical Hebrew as *Ribbôn*, an epithet of God, as in the idiom *Ribbônō šel ᶜôlām*, 'Master of the Universe'. The latter, for chronological reasons, cannot be borrowed directly from Eblaite (for Eblaite vanished long before the Hebrews appeared on the stage of history). Rather it is to be explained as imbedded in Hebrew throughout biblical times, but by chance omitted like so many words in the biblical books.[8]

The foregoing data should at least convey a notion of why the reconstruction of Eblaite is a long and painstaking task. The decipherment of Ugaritic went much more rapidly because of the abundance of literary texts and the alphabetic script, which spells out every word consonantally without ideograms.

Eblaite is expanding our knowledge of the language and culture of the Holy Land back into the Early Bronze Age, a millennium before Ugarit and nearly half a millennium before Minoan.

III. The Eternal Values of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is such a vast treasury of principles to live by that it would be confusing, if not actually impossible, to cover the subject comprehensively. Nor would an educated public be interested in reviewing the well-known details, however meritorious their message. For example, "thou shalt not steal" or "thou shalt not bear false witness" or "thou shalt not commit adultery" are well-nigh universal prohibitions whose infractions disrupt and harm society. One can find them in codes that preceded as well as followed the Bible. In no case are they original contributions of Scripture.

In order to establish the originality of anything in the Bible, it is necessary to know whether it occurs in the sources that antedated the Hebrews. We cannot speak of the Hebrew People as a historic entity before the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. Hence if Hammurapi³'s Code

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[8]Like *niqbāh*, 'tunnel,' in the Siloam inscription.

(ca. 1700 B.C.E.) outlaws theft, the biblical commandment prohibiting stealing is not an original concept in the Bible.

We now have such a rich background from discoveries in the "Bible World," including written sources antedating the Hebrews and the Greeks by over a millennium, that we know that the Old Testament, far from being a primitive beginning, is rather the culmination of a sophisticated international civilization. This realization could convey the false impression that nothing in the Bible is original. To the contrary, it is precisely because we have such a plethora of extra-Biblical sources that we can at last single out the great original insights enshrined in the Bible. Moreover, thanks to the extra-biblical sources, we understand the historical setting that provided the soil on which the seeds of Hebrew originality could grow.

So far, it appears that only the Hebrews, of all the ancient Near Eastern peoples who have left formulations of law, enacted the principle that it was one's duty to help a runaway slave escape, to refrain from turning him over to his master, and to give him every opportunity to support himself as a free man. Throughout the ancient Near East, and indeed throughout much of the world in general, slaves were the private property of their master, and accordingly an honest citizen was duty-bound to do all he could to return a runaway slave to his owner, as he should with any other kind of lost property (e.g., Hammurapiᵓ's Code §§ 15–20). Of all the ancient Near Eastern people who have left us formulations of their laws, only the Hebrews forbid (instead of requiring) handing over a runaway slave to his master. To the contrary, one is to harbor, welcome, and mete out equal opportunity and treat him decently (Deuteronomy 23:16–17). We can now provide a historical explanation.

There was a wide-spread people called the ᶜApiru in the Near East during the second millennium B.C.E. Our documentation concerning them is particularly rich during the Amarna and Ramesside Ages (15th–12th centuries B.C.E.). In the Amarna tablets they appear as marauding outsiders who were wresting Canannite areas from Egypt's sphere of influence. This has suggested some sort of relationship with the Hebrews who conquered the Land after the Exodus.

In the Nuzi tablets (during the same Amarna period), the ᶜApiru appear as outsiders entering into voluntary slavery in the households of established native families. This recalls the slave status of the Jews in Egypt, as well as the institution of the ᶜebed ᶜibrî, 'Hebrew slave,' who can be held only until the sabbatical year, whereupon he must be set free unless he elects, of his own free will, to become an ᶜebed ᶜôlām, 'a permanent slave,' in the home of his master (Deuteronomy 23:16–17).

In the Ugaritic tablets, there is evidence of ᶜApiru in the vicinity of Ugarit on the eve of its fall, about 1185 B.C.E. We know this because the excavators found an oven full of tablets (UT texts 2059-2113) baked for King ᶜAmmurapi⁽ (the last ruler of Ugarit). The city fell before the oven was opened for removing the tablets. It was the French archeologists who excavated the unopened oven and removed the documents which record an ᶜApiru presence (UT 2062:A:7). This calls to mind the "Hebrew Conquest" which took place about this time. Ugarit lies far to the north of Joshua's Conquest, but the Bible four times refers to the Promised Land as extending (from the border of Egypt) to the Euphrates River (Genesis 15:18; Deuteronomy 1:7; 11:24; Joshua 1:4). This might be interpreted to mean that there was a limited Conquest (Joshua's) that became canonical, whereas the "Greater Conquest" embracing northern Canaan up to the Euphrates was more ephemeral, though it did form part of Israel during the United Monarchy of David and Solomon. (See UT § 19.1899, pp. 459-460.)

At Ugarit, tablets emanating from the court of the Hittite king Hattusilis III (ca. 1282-1250 B.C.E.) assure the king of Ugarit that ᶜApiru communities in the Hittite realm would not be permitted to harbor political refugees from Ugarit.[9] Thus we know that the ᶜApiru protected people who were in trouble at home. The biblical Hebrews were not coextensive with the ᶜApiru, but rather a segment of them. The historical Hebrews viewed themselves as the confederation of twelve tribes, descended respectively from the twelve sons of Jacob, and regarded the limited area of Palestine as their Land. The ᶜApiru, on the other hand, appear much earlier in the Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian tablets and are attested all over the Near East including Anatolia and Egypt during the second millennium. The names ᶜibrî, 'Hebrew,' and ᶜApiru may be related, but because one or both of them are borrowed they do not follow all of the minutiae of phonetic law operative for native Semitic words occurring in Hebrew or Akkadian.

The Hebrews themselves explained their kindness to runaway slaves and other underdogs differently: it behooved the Hebrews to be kind because they had been slaves in Egypt. The Hebrews' view of history was the official one in Scripture, according to which all of the Children of Israel had gone down into Egypt, where they were eventually enslaved. Instead of hiding the shame of servitude, they used it as a reason for becoming more compassionate than other people (Deuteronomy 5:14-15).

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[9]Text RS 17.238:3-10 in J. Nougayrol, *Palais royal d'Ugarit* 4 (1956), pp. 107-108.

Hattusilis' documents unearthed at Ugarit provide us with a new approach to Israel's kindness to the runaway slave and other fugitives from oppression. It appears to be a characteristic of the ^CApiru (of which the Hebrews were a part).

When the Ten Commandments tell us not to steal, they echo many an earlier code. But when they enjoin us not to covet, they are making a unique statement among the laws of the ancient (and for that matter modern) nations. It is a profound insight to realize that coveting precedes the act of theft. The morally superior person does not covet the other fellow's property and therefore is never tempted to steal it. The prohibition not to covet is beyond legality; you cannot punish a person for a bad thought unless it has already led to a bad act. Theft is punishable; coveting is not. The Tenth Commandment ("thou shalt not covet . . .") is unique; "thou shalt not steal" is not. Ugarit has clarified why it appears in Hebrew Scriptures but not in the other Near Eastern codes, as we shall now delineate.

Though trade brings various peoples into contact with each other and promotes the ideal of One World, it has its dangers. A commercial milieu like that in Canaan has the pitfall of materialism, which, when unrestrained, robs the individual and society of refined, cultivated, and spiritual values. Ugaritic literature shows that it was a sign of greatness and power for kings and gods to desire things that belonged to others and to stop at nothing, even murder, to filch them if the rightful owners would not yield possession of those coveted articles. The most popular goddess in the pantheon, Anath (the sister and beloved of Baal), wanted the wondrous bow possessed by Aqhat. She offered him any price and every inducement to part with it: silver, gold, and even immortality. He refused rather insultingly, whereupon she had him murdered by a divine assassin and got possession of the bow.[10] Baal is actually celebrated in the Ugaritic myths as coveting land (UT 2001:rev. 1–7) and animals (UT 75:I), which we are specifically forbidden to covet in the Tenth Commandment. The verb used in Ugaritic (*ḥmd*) is the same as that used in the Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21). Accordingly, the Hebrew reaction to Canaanite pagan values and religion account for the Tenth Commandment, which is unique in the laws of the ancient Near East.

The polarity of Phoenician and Hebrew values is acted out in 1 Kings 21:1–27, where the Hebrew king Ahab of Israel, married to the Tyrian

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[10]C. H. Gordon, "Poetic Legends and Myths from Ugarit," in *Berytus* 25 (1977), pp. 8–9 and 15–20.

princess Jezebel, wanted to buy a vineyard owned by his subject Naboth, because it adjoined the palace grounds. Naboth, like Aqhat, refused to part with his property even though the price offered was generous. But Ahab was a Hebrew king reared in Hebrew values. As a Hebrew king (unlike Ugaritic and Phoenician monarchs) he could not seize what rightfully belonged to his subjects. So Ahab could do nothing but sulk. His wife, Jezebel, saw things differently. Her husband was the king; and as she understood the rights of kingship from her upbringing in Phoenician Tyre, no subject had the right to thwart the sovereign's material desires. So she trumped up false charges against Naboth and had him convicted of sacrilege and *lèse majesté*. Naboth was accordingly executed and his estate was confiscated by the Crown and presented to Ahab. In thus manipulating the situation she was emulating her goddess Anath, who had Aqhat murdered so that she could seize his property.

The tragedy was not that a good man (Ahab) was trapped in marriage to a bad woman (Jezebel), but rather that a man and woman of opposing values were united in a hopelessly contradictory union. Jezebel was reared in the Phoenician system of values, whereby kings and queens (like their gods and goddesses) coveted and got what they wanted, regardless of the means. Ahab, whatever his weakness, was a Hebrew who would not spontaneously seize his subject's property no matter how much he coveted it. If Ahab was a good Hebrew king, true to the categorical imperative of his people, Jezebel was a Phoenician princess following the example of her goddess Anath. Ugaritic literature, so to speak, portrays Jezebel in the act of *imitatio deae*. The incident reflects the clash of opposing systems.

The uniqueness of the Tenth Commandment among the laws of the ancient Near East did not require the discovery of the Ugaritic tablets. But the explanation of how that biblical prohibition arose did in fact require it.

The Sabbath is unique not so much as a day of abstaining from work but as a social institution giving rest to the entire community including servants and even domestic animals. The sanctity and beauty of the Day of Rest are qualities that the Hebrews gave to it, though the Sabbath had an origin that is not reckoned with in the Scriptural account.

Hesiod's *Works and Days* deals with the notion of lucky and unlucky days. The idea is that some days are auspicious for work and others are not. On the unlucky days of the month, one should avoid embarking on enterprises and on engaging in any work, to avoid failure and misfortune. This notion did not start with Hesiod; it appears in Sumero-Akkadian tablets and constitutes the background of the biblical Sabbath.

Two entirely different explanations for the Sabbath are given in the two vesions of the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 20:11, we are to rest on the Seventh Day, even as God rested on the Seventh Day after the Six Days of Creation (= *imitatio dei*). In Deuteronomy 5:14–15, the Sabbath is to commemorate the Exodus from Egypt. Israel must never forget that God saved them from slavery, and therefore the Israelites must always provide a day of rest for the entire community, slaves included.

It is a sound general principle that in the development of religions, the rituals are primary; the historical or mythological explanations come later. It is not unusual in Scripture to offer alternative explanations. Traditional societies do not require consistency. If there are two or more traditions, all of them are respected. Thus the name *Ya^{c}ăqōb̲* is explained either as Jacob's grasping Esau's heel (^cqb), or as Jacob's cheating (^cqb) Esau out of his birthright. Unlike us, the ancient Hebrew did not ask: "Which one is right and which one is wrong?" This is still insufficiently understood today. There are four Gospels, all recounting Christ's deeds on earth. There are factual discrepancies among the four Gospels which have long perplexed Christians. A modern "historical" approach might eliminate the discrepancies and thus create one consistent "historical" account of Jesus. Instead, in accordance with Near Eastern traditionalism, all four variants are preserved in the New Testament and are equally revered. Worrying about the discrepancies results when we impose modern attitudes on ancient material.

The significance of the Sabbath does not depend on the pre-Hebraic system of lucky and unlucky days. It depends rather on what the Hebrews did with their pre-Hebraic heritage.

There are a number of Old Testament developments that consist of extending to the entire community principles that, in the ancient Near East societies, were incumbent only on the upper crust, such as the rulers or the wealthy. Thus Hammurapi^ɔ's Code (V:15–24, rev. XXIV:59–62) states that the King was destined to promulgate the Law to protect the weak from the strong. In Ugaritic literature it is the duty of the king to defend the widow, the fatherless, and the downtrodden.[11] What the Hebrews did was to extend this obligation to every member of the community. The principle of "social justice" is demanded by the Israelite prophets as the one overriding requirement that God enjoins on every member of the community. Actually it is not really "court-room justice," because it means that in any conflict of interest the weaker is always right and the stronger

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[11]Gordon, "Poetic Legends," pp. 13, 21, 58.

is always wrong, regardless of the legalities. Legally a landlord is justified
in evicting a widow with her orphaned children if she has defaulted on her
rent or mortgage payments. But in the Prophetic (and Wisdom) books of
the Old Testament, the widow and orphan and downtrodden are always
right and the landlord or creditor always wrong. No society or economy
could function under a system of Hebrew prophetic "social justice," but
it is a beautiful ideal needed to temper the harshness of "legal justice."

Job (29:12-17) was the perfect man who always defended the widow,
the orphan, and the downtrodden. We could say of that model human
being that he was never neutral; he always defended the weaker against
the stronger in any conflict of interest that came to his notice. The
Prophets would, so to speak, have all of us practice such "social justice"
(e.g., Micah 6:8).

The concept of peace is universal. The Hebrew word for "peace"
(*šālôm*) means more than its English translation conveys. It means not
only tranquility and lack of strife, but also physical and psychological well-
being. But there is also the concept of international peace that must some
day prevail among all the nations and tribes of the earth. The ideal, and
the formula for achieving it, are enunciated by two different prophets
(Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3) in virtually the same words: "Nation shall not
lift sword against nation, nor study the art of war any more." The formula
is absolute disarmament: "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares
and their spears into pruning hooks" (= we must convert all military
hardware into useful machinery for helping mankind). So far, this ideal, let
alone the only formula for achieving it, has not appeared in pre-biblical
sources. It is still on the top of our international agenda, and we still fail
to attain it because we cannot get ourselves to realize that as long as any
lethal weapons are around, they can and will be used to kill. So we talk of
"arms reduction" as though by reducing an arsenal of two thousand
nuclear bombs to one thousand, we have lessened the probability of war
or established world peace.

How can we explain the Hebraic innovation of requiring international
peace if the world is to be a fit place for human life?

Hebrew prophetic ideals began to appear in the literary prophets of
the eighth century B.C.E. Before that came the experience under the
United Monarchy of David and Solomon in the tenth century B.C.E., when
Israel became a commercial empire trading by land and sea. Solomon's
conquests included the caravan city of Palmyra/Tadmor in the Syrian desert
(1 Kings 9:18 ‖ 2 Chron. 8:4). Palmyra is an oasis that served as a stop on
the route from Syria to Iraq (i.e., from the Mediterranean Levant to Central

Asia) until the age of air travel in the twentieth century. Solomon occupied and fortified it to control a vital trade route.

The account of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1–13) reflects trade between Yemen (= Sheba) and the Mediterranean. She had gold, incense, and precious stones (v. 10) to market in the Mediterranean basin; Israel and Egypt controlled all the land and sea routes through which she might ship her goods. David anticipated Solomon in his treaty with Hiram of Tyre, whereby Israel and the Phoenicians became partners in commerce. Phoenicians needed the use of Israel's overland routes to the Gulf of Aqaba for lucrative trade via the Red Sea and Indian Ocean to South Arabia, East Africa, and India. Indeed, Herodotus (I:1) states that the original home of the Phoenicians was along the Red Sea. During the United Monarchy of David and Solomon, Hiram needed Israel for regaining access to those sea-lanes.

One of the great lessons taught by international trade is that peace is more profitable than war. If caravans and ships are attacked and lost due to international strife and piracy, the merchants and their royal sponsors faced larger losses and fewer profits. Trade teaches an important lesson: for business, peace is better than war. Israel learned this lesson during the good decades of the United Monarchy. That is why the ideal of international peace appears in the prophets *after* the prosperous age of Davidic and Solomonic trade.

The Hebrews, being very much in the middle of things, expressed an awareness of being a part of a large cultural network spread over the entire Near East, from Iran to Libya, from the Aegean to South Arabia; embracing the Mesopotamian and Egyptian sub-cradles of civilization. Palestine was the hub of this ecumene. The Table of Nations in Genesis 10 portrays the interrelationships of the component parts of the ecumene in terms of genealogical kinship. The biblical scheme is quite straightforward: the human race is a single family descended from one man (Noah) and his wife. That pair, together with their three sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth) and daughters-in-law, were saved from the flood which wiped out every other man and beast that were not on the ark. This means that all members of the human race are descendants of the same father and mother (Noah and his wife) and are therefore kinsmen. To be sure, children are different from their parents and from their siblings and progeny. None of us are clones. But we are all related and belong to each other. There is no racism in Genesis. Ham, Shem, and Japheth, as sons of the same two parents, cannot possibly be of different races. Genesis 10 (vv. 5, 20, 31) states that the differences among the different peoples descended from Noah are geographical and linguistic, but not racial. Arabs and

Hebrews being Semites (descended from Shem) are more closely related to each other than either is to the Ionian Greeks (whose ancestor is Javan, *Yāwān*, descended from Japheth), etc., but ultimately we are all members of the same family and should regard each other as siblings and cousins. Evaluating this concept within the "history of ideas," we find it evident that the Table of Nations inculcates an indispensable prerequisite for world unity. Until mankind regards all fellow human beings as brothers, there can be no real one world or universal peace. We are not talking about history or about science, but about attitudes.

There is another factor in the Table of Nations that is too easily missed. The spread of the ecumene was not limited spatially to the Near East. It had marine offshoots. Thus the Greeks had offshoots in the islands of the Mediterranean (Genesis 10:4-5); and the South Arabians, distant offshoots via sea-lanes on the Indian Ocean (v. 29). This development implies navigation, trade, and colonization.

The quest for knowledge is so widespread that we can call it a trait of mankind in general. Superhuman knowledge is often attributed to different gods. Among various cultures, special classes or castes devote themselves to the quest for knowledge. The Brahmans of India are expected to be learned. The scribes of Mesopotamia were a respected class expected to cultivate the arts and sciences. The Samurai of Japan were dedicated to the cultivation of various arts and virtues including scholarship. But Israel went further and made it a divine commandment for the entire public to study Scripture daily as a life-long pursuit (Joshua 1:8-9) and teach the text diligently to the next generation (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). This is another example of a virtue (here, the quest for knowledge) which can be found among many peoples—before as well as after the Old Testament Hebrews—but extended in the Old Testament from special segments of society to the entire community.

It is of interest to recall that among the many attributes of God is ^ɔēl $dē^cōṯ$ (1 Samuel 2:3) 'God of Knowledge/Ideas'.

Israel had a wholesome dislike for dictatorship and accordingly imposed laws and constitutions on its kings. When Rehoboam succeeded Solomon to the throne of Israel, the people insisted on knowing his policy. They summoned him to Shechem to enunciate that policy, and when he declared that they could expect an iron fist to enforce his will, the Ten Tribes of Northern Israel seceded, leaving to Rehoboam only the south dominated by Rehoboam's own tribe of Judah (1 Kings 12:1-24).

The Bible has inherent in it a structure of balance of power. This classical ideal anticipated what Americans call "separation of church and state." The priesthood was restricted to the tribe of Levi. The canonical

and sole legitimate king had to be of the tribe of Judah, specifically descended from David, son of Jesse. Any attempt to combine church and state into a single authority was considered usurpation and dictatorship. An extreme example is provided by the Maccabean interlude. A heroic priestly family headed by Mattathias rescued the Jewish community from Seleucid tyranny and paganization, and reestablished the Jewish Common-wealth under strict biblical principles. To do this the sons of Mattathias had to lead their victorious armies and exercise the powers of government, and in the end the Maccabean dynasty controlled both state and church. It is no accident that normative Judaism (followed by Protestantism) excluded the Books of Maccabees from the Canon. However noble, necessary, and heroic the Maccabean interlude was, the Dynasty violated the principle of balance of power in society.

Another remarkable development within biblical society was the institution of prophecy. We do not refer to the bands of ecstatic prophets or to the various guilds of prophets, but rather to the individuals who established a reputation for Yahwistic inspiration and ultimately verifiable truth. Those prophets were respected by all Israel from the King down. No matter how unwelcome their words happened to be, they enjoyed "prophetic immunity," by which is meant that they were not to be silenced, let alone put to death, for their teachings.

The "true" prophets were characterized not by their praise of the King, but rather by their criticism and even condemnation of him and his government. This is acted out in numerous passages. For example, in Ahab's court there was a band of court prophets whom the King could count on to give rosy predictions and lavish praise. When Jehoshaphat requested the evaluation of the situation from a true prophet of Yahweh, Ahab stated that there was one, Micaiah by name, but he habitually criticized the King and his policies adversely. Micaiah turned out to be the one true prophet with the correct message (1 Kings 22:1-37).

Jeremiah was not encouraging to the King and the Establishment before the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.E. But Jeremiah was right. The King, Zedekiah, did not like Jeremiah's message, but he respected him and saved him from death.

The clearest case of the true prophet is Amos, who categorically states he was not a professional and not a member of a prophetic guild ("I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet"). He delivered his message of condemnation and doom to the entire Establishment (to both King Jeroboam II and the priest Amaziah). The leaders of the Establishment resented Amos's all-too-blunt words, but they dared not kill him.

"Prophetic immunity" is what made historic writing possible in Israel. No composer of royal annals in Mesopotamia or Egypt dared write anything critical of the Crown. It is no accident that Israel developed a tradition of historiography which was impossible among the Mesopotamians and the Egyptians, where anything other than praise for the Crown would be unthinkable.

The Bible is not monolithic in viewpoint. Priests, prophets, sages, etc. had different points of view. The Book of Leviticus embraces a manual for the cultic approach to life's problems. If one has lapsed from the right path, he can be set aright by making the proper sacrifice in accordance with priestly regulations. In a sense this constitutes a guidebook for achieving "peace of mind." Everyone makes mistakes, and Leviticus tells us how to atone and start living again with a clean slate.

For the Psalmist, a more direct and personal appeal to God is necessary.

For a prophet like Amos, sacrifices were not what God asks of us, but rather "social justice."

For Ezekiel, who was a priest as well as a prophet, both cult and a virtuous personal record were essential.

For the sages in general, wisdom implied prudent living in order to win success and respect. What Torah was to the priest, wisdom was for the sages. The Torah commands us in God's name not to steal, lie, commit adultery, etc. Proverbs tells us that such vices rob us of success, respect, and even life.

Ecclesiastes is a rugged individualist. He admonishes us to study, cherish, and practice the commandments, but to keep an open mind and think for ourselves. He believes in the Golden Mean, in a world where there is a proper time for everything (3:1-8). He goes so far as to state that it is a mistake to practice either virtue or vice to excess (7:16-17); for either would lead to our undoing. He knows human limitations and reminds us that we are on earth, whereas God is in heaven; and therefore it makes no sense for us to talk as though we know everything (5:1). I doubt that Ecclesiastes would be at home in any School of Theology that had dogmas or any fixed beliefs—let alone philosophical discourses on the nature of God, the soul, or the afterlife. He was an intellectual interested in making the most of life without committing the common mistake of breaking with religion and tradition (12:13). Once we discard them, we fall apart.

Obviously there was a strong ethnic factor in ancient Israel, but not blind chauvinism. Balaam was a Prophet of God, though not an Israelite. Cyrus was more than that: God had chosen him, though a Persian, as the

Messiah (Isaiah 45:1-5) to rule the world and implement God's plan. 2 Chronicles (35:22) goes so far as to state that the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho, at Megiddo, was the true mouthpiece of God, while the virtuous Josiah (638-608 B.C.E.), the anointed (= Messiah) of the House of David, was, on that occasion, spiritually too obtuse to recognize God's words spoken through the mouth of Necho.

The Old Testament stresses God's most precious gift: life. Although there is no denial of the existence of the individual after death, the Hebrews (at least prior to the last part of the Old Testament) stressed life on earth. We are commanded to honor our parents not for any reward in the next world, but that our days may be prolonged here in the Land that God has given us (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16).

The reward for goodness is long life and progeny. We go on through our descendants. Joseph was blessed with a long life during which he lived to see his great-grandchildren (Gen. 50:23). The Psalmist (115:17) asks God to help us here on earth because the dead cannot praise God. Ecclesiastes (9:4-5) states that the living are better off than the dead, because the living at least know they are going to die, whereas the dead do not even know that much. Death brings release from the woes of this world, but it offers no more than quietude (Job 3:12-19). The ghost of Samuel is not brought down from heaven but raised from the underworld by a spiritualist (the Witch of Endor), and he resents being disturbed (1 Samuel 28:7-25). It is life on earth that the Old Testament stresses, and we are urged to live it well and make the most of it in accordance with the way of life spelled out in Scripture.

With the exception of Egypt, all of Israel's neighbors took a dim view of life and of mankind's prospects. The mind-set of Egypt was so tied to its land that it could not effectively spread beyond the Nile Valley because its way of life, values, and traditions were indissolubly bound to its geography and climate. Judaism (as distinct from early Hebraism), Christianity, and Islam owe ultimately the concept of a happy afterlife for those deserving it, to Egypt.

The Hebrews formulated the doctrine that God rules the whole universe and that he has a master plan of world history. The world began with paradise, which man lost. Deprived of paradise, man embarked on the course of history with all its vicissitudes, wars, disease, and untold sufferings that end only in death. Our historic world is the meeting ground of the forces of good and evil. But this is not to last forever. The historic process with all its misery and dislocations will come to an end in the Messianic Age: the Kingdom of God on earth when evil shall be banished and God's goal of a good world will be installed for ever and ever.

Before that day comes there will be much havoc, but meanwhile we are not to despair or slacken our efforts. Utter misery and chaos (= Armageddon) precedes that Golden Age, and the worse things are on earth, the closer we are to the Messianic Age. Accordingly, for the Hebrews (and Jews and Christians after them) life is worth living, because God's plan requires the end of the historic process and the inauguration of the Golden Age without end.

It is this undying hope and optimism that have kept the biblical religion alive, whereas Mesopotamian, Greek, and Roman paganism have perished.

IV. How the Hebrews Have Portrayed Themselves

The ideals people have, and how they represent their institutions, do not usually square with actuality. A casual reading of the Old Testament shows us that ancient Israel did not in practice live up to its ideal of being a kingdom of priests and a holy people (Exodus 19:6). And yet it is the ideals, rather than their infractions, which give Scripture its importance. We should pay attention to what the Bible actually states before we try to recast it critically.

As far as individuals were concerned, Israelite society offered options. For example, only if brothers chose to live together (under the authority of a patriarch or fratriarch) was levirate marriage operative, according to Deuteronomy 25:5. Therefore, if a man who had moved away from his brothers died without offspring, none of his brothers back home was obliged to be his surrogate to perpetuate his line.

The ideal way of life was the simple one: to live in tents, drink no intoxicants, and follow the precepts of one's God and eponymous ancestors. In Jeremiah's day, an enclave of the *Bnê Rēkāb* were doing just that and were commended for it (Jeremiah 35). But obviously, the overwhelming majority—rich and poor—were living in houses as urbanites or as inhabitants of outlying villages, controlled by a neighboring walled city.

There long remained a nostalgic feeling that relations between God and Israel were best during the years of wandering from Egypt to the Promised Land between the Exodus and the Conquest. During the Festival of Tabernacles, the people actually dwelt in *sukkôt*, 'booths,' to recall those idealized days. But with the Conquest came the establishment of cities, towns, and villages where people lived in houses.

Judges 13–18 relates in detail how the Danites mingled with the Philistines. Both of these groups had marine interests, and in the Song of

Deborah, Dan is chided for living in ships instead of helping the coalition of land-tribes in their battle against Canaanite domination (Judges 5:17). We read a circumstantial account of how the Danites needed a secure base and found it up north around Laish, which they renamed "Dan" (Judges 18:27–31). In order to be acceptable cultically by the already established tribes, the Danites kidnapped a bona fide Levite along with his cultic equipment so that eventually "Dan ruled his people *like* one of the tribes of Israel" (Genesis 49:16). The use of the preposition "like" reflects the late arrival of Dan into the twelve-tribe system of Israel. Yet, regardless of this textual evidence in Scripture, the official and enduring view of ancient Israel and of traditional Judaism and Christianity is that Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, had twelve sons (including Dan), whose descendants conquered the Land. Those conquerors received land grants by lot under the supervision of Eleazar the priest, Joshua, and the clan chiefs (Joshua 14:1; 17:4). A true first-class Israelite was (in theory) a descendant of one of the conquering warriors and accordingly a member of the land-owning aristocracy which rendered military and other service to the nation when necessary. The Book of Judges portrays that society during campaigns, while the Book of Ruth portrays it during a period of peace.

Membership in the aristocracy was clear-cut because it depended entirely on paternity. Therefore a "mixed marriage" of any sort did not produce "half-breeds." Maternity played a great role in social status, but not in identity.

When the return from the Babylonian Exile took place, it was not merely a question of "all Israel returning to the Land of Israel" (= the ideal of modern Zionism) but rather of every Israelite returning to the perpetual land-grant of his tribal ancestor. Priests also required acceptable genealogies. There were first-class and second-class priests. The elite priests with full rights and privileges had to produce written genealogies to justify their status. Written documentation was required of the laity as well, to establish first-class citizenship. In such situations, there is bound to be a lively business in forged credentials. But our aim here is not to estimate what percentage of the claims were bona fide, but only to describe the system as the Hebrews viewed and represented it.

The theory of the state was that God and Abraham had entered into a Covenant, whereby Abraham and his descendants were to be God's special people and receive the Promised Land in exchange for worshipping God alone and following his commandments. This Covenant is not the first such covenant on record. The Hebrews themselves recognized that other gods had granted other lands to other peoples. Thus Jephthah tells his Transjordanian neighbors that what Chemosh has given to the Moabites,

the Moabites may keep; but what Yahweh has given Israel, the Israelites will keep (Judges 11:24).

The Book of Proverbs (2:16–17) makes it clear that virtuous foreigners should keep their covenant with their own deity. Accordingly, the foreign woman was undesirable not because she did not follow the Laws of Israel, but because she had been untrue to the teachings of her youth and to her covenant with her native god.

This attitude is very much like the ancient Greeks who did not expect Athenians to live according to Spartan law, nor Spartans according to Athenian law. They judged each other by the faithfulness of each to his own law.

The conquerors were in theory the administrators of the government and military, the managers of the plantations, and the priests in charge of the official cult. The conquered people were in theory the peasants, the common soldiers, and the laborers. In Spartan terminology they were the "helots"; in Hebrew terminology they were the Canaanites: "hewers of wood and drawers of water" (Joshua 9:27).

This theoretical system did not always work out. Solomon's vigorous building policy required so much labor that he had to impress noble Israelite tribesmen into the corvée. We read that free Israelites had to spend one month out of three away from home in Lebanon (1 Kings 5:27–29). It was this infringement on the rights of the elite, first-class Israelites that led to the secession of the Northern tribes from Solomon's successor Rehoboam. We mention this to show how greatly theory and practice might differ.

Israel and Judah had two different types of experience as regards dynastic continuity. Judah was able to maintain the continuity of the Davidic line from the tenth century B.C.E. down to the end of the First Commonwealth, when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple in 586 B.C.E., and in theory down to the present: for traditional Judaism and Christianity maintain that only the Messianic King of the Davidic line can occupy the throne of David. Northern Israel had a different history, with bloody usurpations and a succession of different dynasties. Accordingly, it may be said that in Judah, as distinct from Israel, dynastic legitimacy was paramount.

With the royal women in both kingdoms, it is to be noted that there were not *mĕlākôt*, 'queens'. In the Books of Kings and Chronicles, the ruler of Sheba is a *malkāh*, 'queen,' in accordance with South Arabian institutions. In the Book of Esther, the Persian king's favorite (like Vashti or Esther) could be crowned as "queen." In the Song of Songs, the king's women consist of "queens" (= first-class royal wives), "concubines"

(= second-class royal wives), and endless "girls." But in the royal Hebrew court, the chief lady was the *gĕbîrāh* who was contractually entitled to bear the crown prince. The *gĕbîrāh* comes into her own after the death of her husband, when she is the queen-mother and the first lady of the realm. When Solomon became king, the lady enthroned with him was not his wife but his mother, Bath-Sheba (1 Kings 2:19).

When the Books of Kings introduce a new ruler of Judah, the name of his father is given (for the new king must spring from a former king) and usually also the name of his mother, because the new king had to be borne by the aristocratic *gĕbîrāh*.

The king's mother might act as his regent (*môleket*) as did Athaliah during her son's minority, but she is not a *malkāh*, 'queen'.

The *gĕbîrāh* was so powerful that she could be a threat to her royal son, in which case he might under certain circumstances depose his mother, stripping her of the role and title of *gĕbîrāh*. Asa did just this to his mother Maacah, the excuse given being her paganizing ways (1 Kings 15:13).

The head of the family was the patriarch, who had one or more wives. The latter were often of unequal social stature. The chief wife was the one to bear, in accordance with the marriage contract, the successor to the father as patriarch. A familiar example is Sarah, who, as the wife designated to be the mother of Abraham's successor (Isaac), outranks Hagar, even though the latter is the mother of Abraham's oldest son (Ishmael).

Usually a man would be known as the son of his father. But when a wife was much more distinguished than her husband, the children were called matronymically. Zeruiah was the sister of King David, and accordingly her famous sons Joab, Abishai, and Asahel are regularly called the "Sons of Zeruiah."

When a man lived with his wife in her family's domain, he could not force her to leave with him. Moreover, the children belonged to her. If he decided to leave, he could do so but take away only what he had brought with him. Women of wealth or superior social position—especially if the husband was a foreigner or outsider—sometimes contracted this kind of marriage. Thus her husband was prevented from taking his wife abroad where she would be reduced to the status of a foreign woman. The disabilities of foreign women were such that a Hebrew handmaid was not to be sold to foreigners (Exodus 21:7-8).

The leadership of the family did not always pass from father to son. One son might be designated by the father as fratriarch to rule over his brothers. All of the brothers (together with their wives and children) who remained in this fratriarchal unit might thus form a succession until the

last one died, whereupon the leadership would pass to the next generation.

The position of fratriarch was filled by Laban, who occupied a dominant role in running the family even while his father (Bethuel) and mother were still alive. It is Laban (rather than Bethuel) who marries off his sister Rebecca, even though the whole family (including their father Bethuel) are present and give their consent (Genesis 24:50–59).

In seeking the son of Jesse to be anointed as king, Samuel starts with the first-born and, after ruling him out, goes down the line through the vice-fratriarch (= the second son), then the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh son of Jesse until he gets to the youngest, David, whom he does anoint (1 Samuel 16:6–13).

In Egypt, Joseph's brothers are seated at the festive board in order of seniority, starting with the first-born, Reuben, and ending with the youngest, Benjamin (Genesis 43:33).

Fratriarchal succession is still attested in 1 Maccabees, where the five sons of Mattathias exercise fratriarchal rule until the last one dies and the leadership only then passes to the next generation.

Parallel to the fratriarch is the sororarch. In 1 Chronicles 7:18 $\dot{a}h\hat{o}t\bar{o}$ *ham-môleket*, 'his ruling sister,' may be translated 'his sororarch'. A man's oldest son is the *běkôr*, 'first born,' and his youngest the $s\bar{a}^c\hat{i}r$. When Laban had only two children, both daughters, the older (Leah) was *hab-běkîrāh* and the younger (Rachel) has-$s\check{e}^c\hat{i}r\bar{a}h$; and custom required that the older be married off before the younger (Genesis 29:26).

A man with several wives would provide different quarters for each with her unmarried daughters. For example, when Jacob left the domain of Laban and was en route to Palestine, not only Leah and Rachel, but also the handmaids, Bilhah and Zilphah (together with their broods), had each a separate tent (Genesis 31:33).

A man and his sons could form a *bêt-ʾāb*, 'father's house' (pl. *bêt-ʾābôt*), while a woman might head up a *bêt-ʾēm*, 'mother's house,' with her daughters. It is interesting to note that Rebecca ran (with the important news of Eliezer's arrival) not to the house of her father, Bethuel, nor to the house of her fratriarch, Laban, but to the house of her mother (Genesis 24:28).

When Naomi urged her widowed daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orphah, to stay with their own families in Moab, she tells them to go back, each to the house of her mother (Ruth 1:8).

In the Ugaritic Epic of Kret, the divinely promised progeny is twofold: (1) the sons of King Kret, and (2) the daughters of his bride Hry. Moreover, there is a fratriarchal hierarchy among Kret's sons, and a parallel

sororarchal hierarchy among the daughters. The rebellious first-born son, Yṣb, is rejected as crown prince in favor of the devoted younger son, Ilḥu; while Ṯtmnt 'Octavia' (the eighth and youngest of the girls) is made sororarch (*sġrthn abkrn*, 'I shall make the youngest [f.] of them [f.] the first-born [= sororarch]').

The complexity of the Hebrew social system left lots of room for alternative life-styles. While it was best for "brothers to live together," many broke away. Since Jacob became chief heir of Isaac, the best that Esau could do was leave and strike out for himself elsewhere (Genesis 33;16; cf. Luke 15:11–24).

Endogamy was regarded as the best kind of marriage. Samson's parents begged him to marry a daughter of his own people (Judges 14:3), but he insisted on wedding a daughter of the uncircumcised Philistines.

Esau, to the chagrin of his parents, had married two Canaanite girls (Genesis 36:2), but to make amends and please his parents he later married a kinswoman (Genesis 28:8–9).

Kings (notably Solomon) often contracted marriages with foreign ladies for diplomatic reasons. Accordingly, mothers in the Messianic Davidic line were not always Israelites. Bath-Sheba, the widow of Uriah the Hittite, has no Israelite genealogy; she is included among the few ancestresses of the Messiah in Matthew 1. The only other ancestresses of the Messiah named there before Mary are Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth—all foreign women singled out as "worthy of saga" precisely because they were foreign and connected with some extraordinary tale. While endogamy was, in principle, regarded as better than exogamy, social appropriateness was a factor in contracting suitable marriages. In the Book of Ruth (2:1), Boaz is called a *gibbôr-ḥayil* (= a member of the land-owning, warrior aristocracy). Ruth, though a Moabite, is called (3:11) an *ᵓēšet-ḥayil* (= a lady of that same social class). They were thus socially equals, albeit of different peoples.

Historians and religionists tend to be interested in a particular point of view: Hegelian, Wellhausenian, Marxist, Freudian, existentialist, etc. Each of these approaches may yield productive insights, but before we rush into applying such anachronistic systems to Scripture, it would be wise to see the Hebrews and their times as the ancient Hebrews and their neighbors portray them.

We should base our study of Scripture on the biblical text itself, taking it on its own terms. The extensive collateral and secondary sources are also important, mainly insofar as they open our eyes to the plain meaning of the Bible which we failed to see previously. Only after we have grasped the plain meaning are we prepared to delve deeper.

The guidelines above are applicable not only to Scripture, but to all ancient texts. There is a place for commentaries, but they are never as great or rewarding as the classics that have evoked them.

All attempts to make a unified, coherent system of the Bible are effected by imposing an anachronistic and alien viewpoint, and/or by selecting the parts of Scripture that support such a viewpoint and disregarding the rest. In order to highlight the complexity of Scripture, let us consider some uniquely exotic features that are not in keeping with any published view of Scripture. Hosea 2:4-5 contains a legal formula for expelling a reprehensible wife. She is not only to be expelled naked but prosecuted by her own children. Nowhere else is there such a law in the Bible. But we know that it was not an invention of Hosea because it is widely attested in the Nuzi and Hana tablets and survives in the magic bowls of Sassanian Babylonia (in a divorce formula for exorcising demonesses). Tacitus (in his *Germania*) records it as a practice among the German tribes with whom the Roman legions fought.

Isaiah 51:17-18 states that Jerusalem is like a mother of children who have let her down. She is drunk and reeling from the poison in the cup of God's wrath and tragically has no child to hold her hand and lead her. Ugaritic literature (2 Aqhat I:31-32; II:5-6, 19-20) tells us that a model son should hold his drunken father's hand and lead him. Isaiah is not inventing a custom, even though it appears nowhere else in the Bible.

Isaiah 45:1 states that Cyrus the Great of Persia is God's anointed (*māšîaḥ*, 'Messiah') to rule the world as God's agent. Judeo-Christian messianism is complex with many variants, but only in Isaiah 45:1 is God's chosen a gentile, anointed to implement the divine plan on earth.

Much has been written about *the* Covenant, as though there were only one covenant in the Bible. Genesis 9:9-11 spells out a covenant of God not only with all mankind, but also with the animal kingdom; for it was made with all creatures that went forth from the Ark after the Deluge. Among living creatures (except the insects, who are not mentioned), only the fish (and other marine animals) are outside that covenant.

When we read any unified, consistent, and systematic analysis of the Bible, we are witnessing an order imposed on a classic of infinite variety. This holds even for the text itself of the Bible. The uniformity we find in our O.T. *textus receptus* (i.e., the Masoretic text) has been imposed on an earlier diversity, as the pre-Masoretic Qumran Scrolls have made abundantly clear.

What we have said of Hebrew culture is also true, *mutatis mutandis*, of all peoples, and especially those peoples who have bequeathed a rich and creative heritage. No people could be more diverse and individualistic

than the Greeks. Anyone who characterizes the Greeks as rational, artistic, spiritual, scientific, etc., etc. is no more justified by the facts than those who would characterize them as barbaric, cruel, warlike, superstitious, or pederastic.

As biblical scholars, we should seek to understand Scripture both as a whole and in its component parts. Though we can never fully attain this goal, the never-ending quest enriches our lives because of the quality of Scripture.

V. China[12] and the Alphabet

The foregoing chapters indicate that Israel was part of a highly creative and influential ecumene whose spatial and chronological limits are in the course of unfolding before us. Speculation, like science fiction, sometimes anticipates factually based advances; but there is so much real eye-opening source material that there is no need to depend on flights of fancy in our quest to widen our historical horizons.

Trade by land and sea between Mesopotamia and India and the Far East harks back at least to Neolithic times, before 10,000 B.C.E. Traders have to keep records, and they did so before the invention and spread of phonetically spelled writing in Sumer ca. 3,000.[13] Graphs to indicate commodities and quantities (including numerals) preceded phonetic writing in both the Near[14] and Far East. Since such graphs were not phonetic but ideographic, they were intelligible to all the traders in an interregional ecumene, regardless of their disparate languages. The graphs constituted, so to speak, a written lingua franca.

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[12]When citing publications with transliterated Chinese, we will adhere to what each author states. No attempt is made to harmonize the various systems of transliteration. It is up to the reader to know, for example, that "Peking" and "Beijing" refer to the same place.

[13]Sumerian is unrelated to the other languages used in and around ancient Sumer. It is likely that a significant component of the Sumerians came to Mesopotamia from the Far East. One of several reasons for this view is the phonemic tonality of Sumerian reflected in the ubiquitous homophones with the same consonants and vowels but with different meanings. That is, they seem to be differentiated in speech tonally like Chinese and other Far Eastern languages. It is widely held among Sinologists that tonality was not an original feature of Chinese but that it developed subsequently. While this may conceivably be so, the Sumerian evidence should be factored into our estimate of the situation before we can arrive at the correct conclusion.

[14]See Denise Schmandt-Besserat's *Before Writing*, cited in Chap. II, n. 5.

Calendrics were important early on for herdsmen, farmers, and traders. Travel directions, by land and sea, had to specify how many days were required to get from one stage to another. Also weather was important in keeping with different climatic conditions depending on season and region.

Either sunrise or sunset can clearly mark the beginning of a new day, but solar changes from day to day are too gradual for keeping track of the seasons. However, the waxing and waning of the moon is readily perceptible. Therefore lunar zodiacs to keep track of the year by months are widespread. From new moon to new moon takes roughly 29½ days. Accordingly, in a lunar calendar the months consist (for practical reasons) of either 29 or 30 whole days.

Lunar zodiacs were diffused globally in both the Old World and the New. The published ones from the Eastern Hemisphere are numerous. The best-attested examples from the Western Hemisphere are Meso-American, especially Mayan. For over half a century some Sinologists have surmised that the signs of the lunar zodiacs were not only calendrical but also related to the Western alphabet.[15]

The clearest example of a lunar calendar that also serves as an alphabet comes from Ugarit on the Syrian shore of the Mediterranean, where the alphabet consists of 29 distinctive letters (none of which duplicates any other phonetically) plus a phonetically superfluous 30th letter (transliterated "$\check{s}$") that stands for precisely the same sound (s) as the 19th (transliterated "s") and is interchangeable with it.[16] Thus the Ugaritic alphabet corresponds to the 29 minimum days in a lunar month and can be stretched to correspond to the 30 maximum days in a lunar month.[17]

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[15]The pioneering work on this subject is Hugh A. Moran's *The Alphabet and the Ancient Calendar Signs* (Palo Alto, CA: Daily Press, 1953). On p. 25, Moran acknowledges that his teacher Yeh Hsien Seng had long before suggested to him orally that the Western alphabet was derived from the calendar signs. It was David H. Kelley who discovered that the Mayans also had a lunar zodiac related to the ABC. The revised edition of *The Alphabet and the Ancient Calendar Signs* (1969), under the joint authorship of Moran and Kelley, includes the Mayan data.

[16]Thus "horse" may be written *ššw* or *ssw*; and "two mares" can be written *šstm* with one *š* and one *s* (UT § 19.1780). The suggestion that *š* is limited to loan-words (UT § 3.1) is incorrect.

[17]For this and quite a few other salient aspects of our subject, see C. H. Gordon, "The Accidental Invention of the Phonemic Alphabet," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 29 (1970), pp. 193–199.

We know the order of the Ugaritic ABC because the letters are listed on quite a few "school tablets," always in the same fixed sequence.[18] The Ugaritic letters that have been retained in the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin alphabets are in the same sequence as we find them at Ugarit in the Late Bronze Age. Therefore, there is no doubt that we are dealing with offshoots of one and the same tradition.

In the thirteenth century B.C.E. a shorter variety of the Ugaritic ABC appears.[19] Unlike the longer ABC of 29/30 letters which are written from left to right, the shorter one runs from right to left like the 22-letter ABC of the Phoenicians and Hebrews. Relatively few of the tablets found at Ugarit are inscribed in the shorter (also known as the "reverse" or "mirror written") ABC. More have been unearthed at the nearby port of Ras Ibn Hani, south of Ugarit. But the scattering of Ugaritic tablets discovered at inland sites distant from Ugarit, (e.g., Beth Shemesh, Mt. Tabor, and Ta ᶜanak in Israel/Palestine) are in the shorter, "mirror-written" ABC, which about thirty years ago suggested to me[20] that it might have spread still further, beyond the confines of the Near East and the Cuneiform sphere. Little did I realize how much further.

Soon after the appearance and spread of the shorter, right-to-left, 22-letter ABC in the Near East, perhaps by less than a century, the first known assemblages of texts appear in China about 1200 B.C.E. in the Shang Dynasty. They are known as the oracle bones, many of which are on bovid scapulae. But other bones are also used, as well as turtle shells.[21]

The praxis of the oracle priests consisted of heating the bones (or shells) until cracks appeared on them. The bones were then removed from the heat and left to cool. The cracks were then interpreted by the priests as omens in answer to questions posed by rulers, generals, and the like. The priests wrote the interpretations on the bones in black ink. Those texts are not only the oldest known Chinese literature, but they come from various sites and are numerous (running into many thousands).

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[18]UT § 3.1.

[19]UT § 3.6.

[20]UT § 3.6.

[21]David N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang History: The Oracle-Bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

Among the signs written on the oracle bones are 22 graphs, used calendrically.[22] They also have other functions that may be described as numerical[23] and quite possibly alphabetic. The alphabetic function was proposed long ago but was buried in silence and disregarded.

I have been actively interested in the subject ever since Victor H. Mair, the distinguished Sinologist at the University of Pennsylvania, first consulted me on it in a letter dated 26 December 1987. Among other aspects of the subject, he wanted to know what was happening in the Near East around 1200 B.C.E. when the 22 graphs first appeared in China. He thought that the 22 graphs in China and the Phoenician alphabet of 22 letters reflected more than a mere numerical coincidence. I replied that it was around that time that the 22-letter alphabet was spreading in the Near East, and the same shorter ABC appeared in cuneiform guise at Ugarit.[24]

I soon noticed that the shapes of several of the 22 Chinese graphs were identical with distinctively Ugaritic cuneiform letters.[25] This similari-

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[22]Keightley gives a chronological chart of the various forms of the 22 graphs as Table 20 which is entitled "Epigraphic Evolution: Tung Tso-Pin's Kan-Chih Table" (*Sources of Shang History*, p. 200).

[23]In everyday life, the 10 heavenly stems (= the first 10 graphs) are used as ordinal numbers. C. C. Huang of Bennington College informs me that this and other pertinent data are discussed in the first edition of a Chinese encyclopedia whose title means "Sea of Words," published in Taiwan by the Chong-hua (or Zhong-hua) Press during the 1920s. The second edition, issued in the 1930s, is so inferior that it should not be used.

[24]For example: (1) Ug. z is ⚕ ; cf. Early Phoen. and Gk. Ⅰ , Phoen. Ƨ or Ƶ = Gk. and Lat. uncial Z, modern Heb. ן ; (2) Ug. *m* is ⊷ , which is the cuneiform equivalent of Phoen. ⅄ because cuneiform does not allow ⨇ ; cf. the Gk. and Lat. uncial M and minuscule Gk. μ and Lat. *m*; (3) Ug. *š* is ◿Ɣ◿ ; cf. Phoen. 丰 or 丰 , early Gk.≋ (= modern Gk. uncial Ξ). (The position of Ξ in the Gk. alphabet is that of the samek in the Heb./Phoen. alphabet, which shows that one of the ancient pronunciations of the samek [s] was an affricate that the Greeks heard as *ks* [ξ].)

[25]The Ugaritic cuneiform letters resemble the Mesopotamian cuneiform signs only insofar as both consist of wedge-shaped (= "cuneiform," derived from Latin *cuneus* 'wedge, nail') elements. The Mesopotamian and Ugaritic systems are quite different, and the forms of the Chinese graphs that are cuneiform are distinctively Ugaritic and do not occur in the Sumero-Akkadian syllabary of Mesopotamia. Individual Sinologists, operating outside the mainstream, have maintained old connections between Chinese and Mesopotamian writing, but as far as

ty shows that the alphabet, which happens to be the most important intellectual invention of mankind, links the Near and Far East.

David Keightley has expressed to me his feeling that the 22 Chinese graphs should not be considered alphabetic in the phonetic sense, until we have actual names or other words spelled out in them. For this reason, I stress that the Near East alphabet had from the start other uses, notably (1) as a calendar, (2) as a system of numbers, and (3) as a method of arranging (like our "alphabetizing"). Those three uses of the 22 graphs are maintained by the Chinese to this day.

Cultural borrowings are never adopted unchanged. Unlike the Near Easterners (as far as we now know), the Chinese divided the 22 graphs into two categories. The first ten are called "the ten heavenly stems,"[26] while the rest are called "the twelve earthly branches."[27] The first 10 graphs are commonly employed as the ordinal numbers from "first" to "tenth." In the West this is still done too, because if, for example, we designate the ten sessions of a conference as "Session A," "Session B," and so forth, "A" means "first," "B" means "second," and so forth. What is still more striking, in Hebrew, only the first ten letters can stand alone to designate numbers. From "11(th)" on, a combination of letters must be used today. On conference programs, "Moshav א" means "First Session," "Moshav ב" means "Second Session," etc.

Stems are paired with branches to designate the specific years in a cycle of sixty years. The pairing starts with the first stem coupled with the first branch, followed by the second stem with the second branch, etc., until the tenth stem is paired with the tenth branch. This brings us to the end of the ten stems but not to the end of the twelve branches. So the pairing continues with the first stem coupled with the eleventh branch, the second stem with the twelfth branch, the third stem with the first branch, the fourth stem with the second branch, etc. It is with the sixtieth pairing

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I know, no Sinologist was even aware of the existence of the short Ugaritic ABC until Victor Mair corresponded with me. This is not meant as a criticism of any Sinologist, because the "mirror written" Ugaritic ABC is still an esoteric corner of Ugaritica of which most Semitists are still unaware.

[26]The "ten" may possibly represent the 10-day periods known to the ancient Near Easterners, such as the *ᶜāśôr* in Hebrew (so in Genesis 24:55, though elsewhere in date formulae it means "the 10th" [day of the month]). A 30-day month is divisible into 3 "decades," whereas neither a 30- nor a 29-day month is divisible into 7-day weeks.

Note Iliad 1:54, where Achilles acts on *hē dekatē*, 'the 10th day'.

[27]These may correspond to the 12 signs of the solar zodiac which in China have animal names.

that the final (tenth) stem is combined with the final (twelfth) branch. Sixty is "5 x 12."

C. C. Huang has kindly prepared a chart of the ten heavenly stems and the twelve earthly branches, in Chinese characters and in Latin transliteration. The chart includes the sixty pairings of stems and branches to designate all of the sixty years in a cycle. Thus the first year of the cycle is called "jia-zi"; the second, "yi-chou"; the third, "bing-yin"; etc.

In China this "60" is applied to years, much as Westerners apply "100" to years to form a century. This seems to contradict what "60" units of time call to mind in the ancient Near East, where "30" days is a month and "60" days should stand for the well-attested "pair of months." For example, in the Gezer Calendar,[28] the agricultural year is divided into twelve months. Some of the latter are single months (*yrḥ*) and some are doubled (dual *yrḥw* 'two months'). The total is twelve. To this day, calendars are in use in the Near East with double months; e.g., *Tishrin* *ᵓAwwal*, 'First Tishrin,' which is followed by *Tishrin Thânî*, 'Second Tishrin'. The Muslim calendar has *Rabîᶜ* *ᵓAwwal*, 'First Rabîᶜ,' followed by *Rabîᶜ Thânî*, 'Second Rabîᶜ' (after which come First and Second Jumada).[29] It is therefore interesting to note that until about 25 C.E.,[30] the "60" referred to days in China (as recorded in *The Sea of Words*).

We have noted above that only five of the 10 heavenly stems have to be multiplied by the 12 earthly branches to yield the designations of the 60 days (or years). If we multiply all 10 stems by the 12 earthly branches, we have 10 x 12 = 120. Here we may observe that this figure refers not to days but to years in noteworthy passages in the Old Testament. Thus God (according to Genesis 6:3) fixes the life-span of mankind at 120 years, and Moses (the towering figure in the Old Testament) dies at the age of 120 (Deuteronomy 34:7). Jews to this day wish the elderly well by expressing the hope that they live "to 120."

The alphabet has simultaneously had different functions. The phonetic aspect is the most significant in cultural history, for by reducing the number of signs to somewhere between 20 and 35, the alphabet has made popular literacy possible. In the Near East cradle of the alphabet, the older cuneiform and hieroglyphic systems with hundreds of signs had precluded

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[28]The Hebrew text (ca. 10th century B.C.E.) is #182 on p. 34 of G. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, Vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1962).

[29]See the article "Calendar" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., *Macropaedia*, Vol. 3 (1978).

[30]I.e., prior to the Eastern Han Dynasty (ca. 25 C.E. to ca. 220 C.E.).

天　干 (the ten heavenly stems)
tian gan

jia　yi　bing　ding　wu　ji　geng　xin　ren　gui

甲　乙　丙　丁　戊　己　庚　辛　壬　癸

地支 (the twelve earthly branches)
di zhi

zi　chou　yin　mao　chen　si　wu　wei　shen　you　xu　hai

子　丑　寅　卯　辰　巳　午　未　申　酉　戌　亥

mouse　cow　tiger hare　dragon snake horse sheep monkey cock dog　pig

六　十　甲　子 (the 60 jia-zi combinations)
liu　shi　jia　zi

jia-zi	yi-chou	bing-yin	ding-mao	wu-chen	ji-si
甲子	乙丑	丙寅	丁卯	戊辰	己巳
geng-wu	xin-wei	ren-shen	gui-you	jia-xu	yi-hai
庚午	辛未	壬申	癸酉	甲戌	乙亥
bing-zi	ding-chou	wu-yin	ji-mao	geng-chen	xin-si
丙子	丁丑	戊寅	己卯	庚辰	辛巳
ren-wu	gui-wei	jia-shen	yi-you	bing-xu	ding-hai
壬午	癸未	甲申	乙酉	丙戌	丁亥
wu-zi	ji-chou	geng-yin	xin-mao	ren-chen	gui-si
戊子	己丑	庚寅	辛卯	壬辰	癸巳
jia-wu	yi-wei	bing-shen	ding-you	wu-xu	ji-hai
甲午	乙未	丙申	丁酉	戊戌	己亥
geng-zi	xin-chou	ren-yin	gui-mao	jia-chen	yi-si
庚子	辛丑	壬寅	癸卯	甲辰	乙巳
bing-wu	ding-wei	wu-shen	ji-you	geng -xu	xin-hai
丙午	丁未	戊申	己酉	庚戌	辛亥
ren-zi	gui-chou	jia-yin	yi-mao	bing-chen	ding-si
壬子	癸丑	甲寅	乙卯	丙辰	丁巳
wu-wu	ji-wei	geng-shen	xin-you	ren-xu	gui-hai
戊午	己未	庚申	辛酉	壬戌	癸亥

The Stems and Branches with Their Sixty Pairings

popular literacy. Only in the Far East has the ancient complex system endured to the present day. Chinese writing has absorbed the 22 graphs, but, unlike Mesopotamian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs, was not wiped out by them.

The numerical function of the alphabet is a challenging field full of established facts as well as problems requiring further investigation. If we arrange the 22 letters of the Phoenician/Hebrew alphabet like the Chinese stems and branches, we have

ב	B	G	D	H	W	Z	Ḥ	Ṭ	Y		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		

K	L	M	N	S	ʿ	P	Ṣ	Q	R	Š	T
20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	200	300	400

Note that only the first ten letters can be used singly to designate (as in Chinese) an unbroken sequence of numbers (from 1 to 10). It would be worth investigating to determine whether the Hebrew 10 + 12 letters were in antiquity used in combination calendrically like the Chinese 10 + 12 graphs.

The numerical function of our Western alphabet is very deep-seated. For example, though the Greeks long ago gave up the digamma (w) for spelling phonetically, they still assign the numerical value of "6" to the digamma, harking back to w '6' in the Phoenician/Hebrew alphabet from which the Greek alphabet was derived. In Hebrew the sixth letter (w) remains in general use to indicate "6."

In Arabic, only the first two letters (*alif* and *ba*) retain their original position so that they stand for "1" and "2" respectively. Otherwise the Arabic alphabet has been rearranged according to the shapes of the letters. The Arabic repertoire of 28 consonants is larger than the Hebrew repertoire of 22. But wherever a consonant in the Arabic alphabet is represented in the Hebrew alphabet, the Arabs assign to it its Hebrew numerical value. In other words, the numerical value of the Arabic letters is more deeply imbedded than the phonetic value. This makes it at least thinkable that the 22 Chinese graphs might have been borrowed before the 22 "letters" took on their phonetic function. However, it was on purely Sinological grounds that Edwin Pulleyblank originally[31] (and I think

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[31]See Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, p. 70, n. 62.

correctly) assigned a sibilant value to Ψ without knowing that it was the letter z in Ugaritic. In any event, the 22-letter Near East alphabet is reflected in the 22 Chinese graphs on the firm ground that they share the same calendrical, numerical, and ordering/arranging functions. Time will tell whether they also shared the phonetic function.

The preceding essay is quite condensed and elliptical.[32] That the lunar zodiacs with their alphabetic dimension were diffused not only through the Near and Far East, but also in pre-Columbian America, shows that we are dealing with a global phenomenon. The implications for our growing understanding of the One World of human civilization transcend the present status of Near or of Far East scholarship.

The full story of the alphabet cannot be a one-way affair. China as well as the Near East doubtless contributed to the long process. Other regions—notably India—also played significant roles. Furthermore, diffusion is generally a two-way street. While the concept of the 22 graphs/letters was moving from the Near to the Far East ca. 1200, it would be strange if the Far East had not influenced the Near East in one way or another. In *Nature*,[33] it was revealed that Chinese silk had been worked into the hair of an Egyptian mummy that could be dated ca. 1000 B.C.E.—long before silk was regularly imported to the Near East and to Europe. This surprising development was soon afterwards covered in a feature article in the Science section of the *New York Times*.[34]

Afterword

When I first wrote Chapters I—IV, I still reckoned with the Bible World as Palestine and its Near East neighbors to the north, south, east, and west, in an arc of 360 degrees. This included Egypt, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia, Anatolia, Syria/Lebanon, and the East Mediterranean. It was also clear from Genesis 10:4–5, 29 that the heartland had established overseas colonies westward in the Mediterranean, and via the Indian Ocean from South Arabia. By the time I wrote Chapter V, it was clear to me that ancient Israel was also rooted in a global ecumene that embraced

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[32]At present a more detailed treatment would obscure the subject for all but the handful of scholars conversant with both Semitics and Sinology. Further details will be published in books and articles designed for Semitists and Sinologists, respectively.

[33]G. Lubec, J. Holaubek, C. Feldl, B. Lubec, and E. Strouhol, "Use of Silk in Ancient Egypt," *Nature*, Vol. 362 (4 March 1993), p. 25.

[34]16 March 1993, Section C, pp. 1, 8.

creative areas in Eurasia, Africa, and Meso-America. In other words, the global diffusion of a high culture in prehistoric antiquity goes back beyond the Late Bronze Age into Neolithic times. (As is always the case, each component region in the global ecumene had its own individual character.)

We must learn how to discern real sameness in apparent difference, and real difference in apparent sameness. The Iliad looks quite unrelated to the biblical Book of Judges. But once we see that the wrath of Achilles (touched off by the seizing of his woman), which resulted in the death of many men, is the same theme as the story of Samson who (because his woman was withheld from him) went on a mad rampage killing many an innocent bystander, we have discovered sameness masked by apparent difference. On the other hand, common sense tells us that breathing, eating, drinking, and reproducing are universal. That those activities are performed by Eskimos and Australian aborigines does not prove any cultural sameness.

The fact of global diffusion is based on specifically detailed, shared features that cannot be the result of coincidence (spelled out in Chapter V). Understanding global diffusion requires more than a mind-set. A novice cannot grasp it in "x easy lessons." It requires long exposure, complete absorption, and real digestion (as distinct from mere swallowing).

If this article has helped any young men and women advance in their quest for enlightenment, my efforts have not been in vain.