IAN YOUNG

Diversity in Pre-Exilic Hebrew

Forschungen zum Alten Testament
5

Mohr Siebeck

Forschungen zum Alten Testament

herausgegeben von

Bernd Janowski und Hermann Spieckermann

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Diversity in Pre-Exilic Hebrew

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ISBN 978-3-16-151676-4 978-3-16-157795-6 Unveränderte eBook-Ausgabe 2019
ISSN 0940-4155 (Forschungen zum Alten Testament)

Die Deutsche Bibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at *http://dnb.d-nb.de.*

Unrevised Paperback Edition 2011.

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The book was typeset and printed by Gulde-Druck in Tübingen using Times typeface and acidfree paper from Papierfabrik Gebr. Buhl in Ettlingen, binding by Heinr. Koch in Tübingen.

Printed in Germany.

Acknowledgements

This book is for my mother and father, who were my main supports through my undergraduate days and for my wife Karyn, who did likewise during the writing of my postgraduate thesis. It is a great sadness to me that my mother did not live to see the completion of this project.

Great thanks are due to many people, not least my mother-in-law, Mrs. Elke Stoermer who, with a not inconsiderable contribution from my wife, typed the whole work. Mr. Thomas Schaeffer and Mr. Milton Cooke deserve thanks for generously allowing the use of company equipment in its production.

I also owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to teachers and colleagues at Sydney University, among them Professor R. Y. Ebied, Dr. W. J. Jobling, Messrs. Brian Parker and Eddie Pilcer and, of course, Professor A. D. Crown. If Professor Crown had not pointed me the way to go, I could not have taken even the first steps toward the thesis presented in this book. At a later stage, the encouragement and scholarly insight of Professor Avi Hurvitz provided further inspiration to me, in bringing the book to its final form.

Ian Young

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Abbreviations

ABH	Archaic Biblical Hebrew
ADAJ	Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan
AJA	American Journal of Archaeology
AJBA	Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology
AJP	American Journal of Philology
AJSL	American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures
AL	Archivum Linguisticum
AO	Acta Orientalia
AOF	Archiv für Orientforschung
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BH	Biblical Hebrew
BJPES	Bulletin of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society
BJRL	Bulletin of the John Rylands Library
BO	Bibliotheca Orientalis
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
Chron	Chronicles
CTL	Current Trends in Linguistics
Dan	Daniel
Deut	Deuteronomy
EA	Amarna Letters
Ex	Exodus
Ezek	Ezekiel
FL	Foundations of Language
Gen	Genesis
Hos	Hosea
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
Isa	Isaiah
JANES	Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JCS	Journal of Cuneiform Studies
JEA	Journal of Egyptian Archaeology
Jer	Jeremiah

JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JL	Journal of Linguistics
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JNSL	Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages
Josh	Joshua
JPOS	Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
JSJ	Journal of the Study of Judaism
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
Jud	Judges
Lam	Lamentations
LBH	Late Biblical Hebrew
Lev	Leviticus
Mal	Malachi
MH	Mishnaic Hebrew
m. l.	matres lectionis
MT	Masoretic Text
Neh	Nehemiah
Num	Numbers
OA	Oriens Antiquus
OLZ	Orientalische Literaturzeitung
OTS	Oudtestamentische Studien
PEFQS	Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement
PEQ	Palestine Exploration Quarterly
Prov	Proverbs
Ps	Psalms
PSBA	Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology
QDAP	Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine
Qoh	Qoheleth/Ecclesiastes
RB	Revue Biblique
REJ	Revue des Etudes Juives
RQ	Revue de Qumran
RSO	Rivista degli Studi Orientali
Sam	Samuel
SBH	Standard Biblical Hebrew
SEL	Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici
SH	Scripta Hierosolymitana
SO	Studia Orientalia
Song	Song of Songs
UF	Ugarit-Forschungen

VL	Visible Language
VT	Vetus Testamentum
ZA	Zeitschrift für Assyriologie
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft
ZDPV	Zeitschrift des Deutschen Pälastina-Vereins

Common Transliterations

Consonants

	aleph
b, bh	beth, veth
g, gh	gimel, ghimel
d, dh	daleth, dhaleth
h	he
w	waw
z	zayin
ḥ, ḫ	ḥeth, kha
ṭ	teth
y	yod
k, kh	kaph, khaph
l	lamed
m	mem
n	nun
s	samekh
ʿ, ġ	ʿayin, ghain
p, ph	pe, fe
ṣ	ṣade
q	qoph
r	resh
š, sh; ṯ	shin; th
ś	sin
t, th	taw, thaw

Vowels

ā	long a (kamatz)
a	a (patach)
ē	long e (sere)
e	e (seghol)
ī	long i (hireq with yod)
i	i (hireq)
ō	long o (holem)
o	o (short kamatz)
ū	long u (shureq)
u	u (qibbus)
ĕ	shewa
ă, ĕ, ŏ	vocal shewa

Introduction

The presuppositions of orthodox scholarship about the language of the Old Testament can be discerned by reading a well-regarded standard work such as Eissfeldt's *The Old Testament An Introduction*. It immediately becomes obvious that the criterion of language is very important in discussion of the date of works whose origin is uncertain. Thus, when discussing Joel as a post-exilic work, Eissfeldt notes that the appearance of a relatively large number of Aramaisms suits this date (Eissfeldt 1965:394). The same argument is used for Jonah (Eissfeldt 1965:405), Job (Eissfeldt 1965:470) and some sections of Proverbs (Eissfeldt 1965:474). The neatness of the equation that Aramaisms are sure signs of a 'late' ie post-exilic text is evident in his treatment of Ruth: "that we should there go down to about the fourth century follows also from the many Aramaisms which the book has" (Eissfeldt 1965:483). In fact many of Eissfeldt's examples of Aramaisms are more strictly Mishnaisms, that is forms characteristic of the language of the late second century AD Rabbinic work, the Mishnah. It is common, however, to treat the divergent characteristics of Mishnaic Hebrew as being due to some sort of fusion with Aramaic (Kutscher 1982:119).

Apart from the obvious Aramaisms, Eissfeldt's treatment of the date of the Song of Songs introduces another factor. This is the determinative criterion of loanwords, particularly those from Persian and Greek. He suggests the equations: the appearance of a Persian loanword points to a date in the Persian period (c540-c330 BC) or later; the appearance of a Greek loanword points to the Hellenistic Period (from c300 BC) (Eissfeldt 1965:490).

The presupposition behind Eissfeldt's linguistic judgements is evidently that pre-exilic Hebrew evolved into a post-exilic Hebrew. Pre-exilic Hebrew is conceived as being a rather monolithic entity often called Standard Biblical Hebrew. The corpus of Standard Biblical Hebrew is founded on the linguistic coherence of a major proportion of Biblical texts. Thus Standard Biblical Prose is represented by the Pentateuch and the history books Joshua to the end of Kings. Standard Biblical Poetry is based on the great pre-exilic 'writing prophets' such as First Isaiah, Jeremiah or Amos, with reference to the majority of Psalms. The assumption that this Standard Biblical Hebrew was *the* Hebrew of pre-exilic times allows other non-standard works to be judged.

Many scholars identify a group of texts, mainly poems, as having features in common. Since these features are often archaisms, while the texts themselves, where they can be dated, seem to refer to events early in Israelite history (eg

Jud 5), the language of these texts is labelled Archaic Biblical Hebrew. At the other end of the historical spectrum, a group of mainly prose texts both exhibit common divergences from the Standard, and deal with events in the post-exilic period (eg Esther). These texts are labelled Late Biblical Hebrew. As we have seen from Eissfeldt, the emergence of Aramaizing (and Mishnaizing) linguistic elements is considered characteristic of these late texts. Therefore it may be seen that the major presupposition lying behind orthodox scholarship on the Hebrew language is that linguistic diversity can best be comprehended in terms of chronological stratification.

The existence of dialects in pre-exilic Hebrew is of course acknowledged. The Shibboleth incident in Judges 12:1–6 makes plain their existence. However, even where they are acknowledged, the chronological aspect is much more readily usable, as dialectal information is seldom so explicit in the Biblical text. The pre-exilic Hebrew inscriptions have not challenged this picture. The range of divergences which can be indicated by short inscriptions in a consonantal text with few, if any vowel letters is strictly limited. The existence of a 'Northern' dialect is acknowledged, as well as some sort of place for a non-Jerusalem Southern dialect represented by the Gezer Calendar. Nevertheless, the overwhelming impression of the inscriptions is that they are yet another manifestation of Standard Biblical Hebrew, *the* Hebrew of monarchic Israel (Baumgartner 1940–1: 607ff.).

Discrepancies which call into question this orthodox picture are readily discoverable. One important example is the book of Qoheleth. Absolute scholarly orthodoxy holds the late post-exilic date of the work, based on the linguistic evidence. Qoheleth is Aramaizing, Mishnaizing and also seems to contain Persian loanwords. It does not fit in with the monolithic Standard Biblical corpus so therefore it must be Late Biblical Hebrew. Yet the internal evidence of the book, especially the advice about conduct in the Royal Court, would place Qoheleth self-evidently in the monarchic period. It is obvious in such a case that the orthodox understanding of Biblical Hebrew is inadequate to comprehend the language of Qoheleth. Even more, the interpretation of the linguistic evidence has hampered scholarly study of the book.

The aim of this book is to suggest a new model for the Hebrew of the Biblical period, one which is better able to comprehend the evidence. Much of what is said has already been suggested by modern scholarship. What is new, we believe, is the consistency with which the new picture is applied to explain all the evidence. The first chapter deals with the basis of the theory of diversity: the pre-existence of 'Hebrew' as the prestige language of diverse Canaan, and the adoption of this prestige language by the ethnically and linguistically diverse constituents of the people of 'Israel'. The second chapter sets the national language of Israel in the context of the other national languages that made up contemporary Northwest Semitic. The relationship between Hebrew and Aramaic is explored as well as the understanding in modern scholarship of the place of foreign loanwords. Chapter three examines the relationship between

Archaic, Standard, Late and Mishnaic Hebrew and suggests a new synthesis of the evidence. Chapter four applies this new understanding to the pre-exilic inscriptions, and examines the differences between the Official Hebrew of the Inscriptions and the Literary Hebrew of the Bible. Chapter five discusses cases of linguistic diversity in the Bible, for example including a full discussion of Qoheleth and the Song of Songs. Finally, chapter six touches on the question of pre-exilic phonology and aspects of the dialectal question which are related to it.

Chapter 1

Diversity in the Origins of Hebrew

1.1 Predecessors

1.11 Introduction

Although our knowledge of the languages of the ancient Near East has grown greatly during the course of this century, with such notable discoveries as those at Ugarit, Mari and Ebla, direct evidence bearing on the question of the origins of Hebrew may still only be found in a few select places. The reconstruction of the Northwest Semitic language we call Amorite, for instance, has shown that it is not the direct forefather of Hebrew as was once considered (Rabin 1970:313). Again, claims soon after the discovery, that the language of Ebla was some sort of 'Paleo-Canaanite', with affinities to Ugaritic, Phoenician and Hebrew, have been treated with great caution by most scholars. The majority of scholars now give due weight to those features shared with Akkadian (Freedman 1982:317; Gelb 1987:70) although no final decision as to the place of Eblaite among the Semitic languages can be yet made at such a relatively early date (Freedman 1982:317f.; Gelb 1987:73).

We are still largely dependent, therefore, on considerations based on the Ugaritic texts, the Tell Amarna letters, and the Hebrew Bible. The disappointingly meagre selection of inscriptions from later second millenium BC Canaan is still of little help, but we should not disregard inferences drawn from Hebrew's Northwest Semitic neighbours, especially Phoenician.

This chapter is in two parts. The first section will present the thesis that the origin of Hebrew is to be sought in the continuation of a pre-existing 'Canaanite' literary prestige language. The second section will argue that this thesis best explains the origin of Biblical Hebrew in terms of the vexed question of the historical origins of Israel.

1.12 Ugaritic

There is some dispute as to the place of Ugaritic among the Northwest Semitic languages. Some scholars would like to classify it along with Hebrew and Phoenician as a 'Canaanite' dialect (Harris 1939:11), while others wish to

deny any close affinity (Goetze 1941). It cannot be denied that Ugaritic shares some important features in common with Hebrew and Phoenician (Sekine 1973:215). However, we must give full weight to the consideration that Ugaritic does not share specifically 'Canaanite' innovations, especially *â* > *ô* (Goetze 1941:133), even though it is roughly contemporary with the Amarna texts (Sekine 1973:209). The particular significance of Ugaritic for the question of the origins of Hebrew is that, although Ugaritic is distinct from Hebrew as a language, there is a close resemblance between the two in the matter of poetic style (Rabin 1971:1149). A virtual identity of many rhetorical devices, locutions and poetic diction has been observed (Gevirtz 1963:162; Cassuto 1942–3).

Amongst these poetic features, most has been made of the style of using parallelism and word pairs, which is held in common between Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew poetry. More recently the perspective on the word pairs has been widened. Enough word pairs may be identified in the Phoenician sources, despite their basically non-literary nature, to place Phoenician in a special category with Ugaritic and Hebrew. To a lesser extent Aramaic and Akkadian are involved (Avishur 1975). We are dealing with a phenomenon that has spread far across the Near East – but the epicentre is in Ugarit and Canaan. We are primarily interested in the case where two words (or expressions) are found in use in both Ugaritic and Hebrew. For example, the pairing *ytm* 'fatherless' with *'lmnh* 'widow' is used in the poetic rhetoric of Phoenicia, Israel and Ugarit.

Thus Phoenician:

ytm bn 'lmnt "orphan, son of a widow"

Hebrew:

kol 'almānāh wĕyātōm lō' tĕ'annūn (Ex 22:21)
"You shall not afflict any widow or orphan"

Ugaritic:

ydn dn almnt ytpṭ tpṭ ytm
"Judging the cause of the widow,
adjudicating the case of the fatherless"
(Avishur 1975:31f.).

Some of the pairs can be explained as natural developments in any of the languages concerned, such as the pairing heavens/earth. Such lists as that of Dahood, where he finds 608 pairs, contain much that is disputed (Dahood 1972c:89ff.). Nevertheless, the volume of evidence is generally considered to point beyond coincidence, to a common literary tradition shared by Ugarit, Phoenicia, and Israel.

If we propose, however, that the literary tradition of Ugarit has been borrowed directly by Israel, we run into difficulties. Firstly, Ugarit is at some geographical remove from Israel. Secondly, and more importantly, Ugarit was destroyed c1200 BC, that is, in the period before Phoenician, Hebrew or

Aramaic are in evidence (Jobling 1975:684). A limited influence of Ugaritic on the south could be suggested on the basis of findings of tablets in the variant Ugaritic mirror-abecedary from such sites as Mt Tabor, Taanach or Beth Shemesh, even though these reflect a different dialect to the bulk of the Ugaritic texts (Gordon 1967:16). On the other hand, it is possible to suggest influence from the Canaanite area to the more northern Ugarit. The Ugaritic alphabet has often been assumed to depend on an older South Canaanite model. Although the execution of the signs in cuneiform is quite different, the order of the letters is the same as the later Phoenician alphabet. Within this later sequence of twenty two Phoenician letters, the Ugaritic alphabet adds five more phonemes which had merged before the first attestation of Phoenician. The argument that the Ugaritic alphabet is dependent on a Southern model is based on the fact that a further three letters *'i*,*'u*, and *ṡ* seem to have been added by the scribes of Ugarit at the end of this sequence. It would seem that after taking over an existing alphabetic sequence of twenty seven letters, these three extra letters reflect something new invented at Ugarit (Gordon 1950a). Against this, it should be noted that the priority of the Ugaritic alphabet has been argued, on the basis that by far the earliest abecedary is Ugaritic.

The existence of both longer and shorter forms of the cuneiform alphabet is held to seriously weaken the theory that Ugaritic was based on an earlier paradigm (Wansbrough 1983:539). The shorter Ugaritic alphabet seems to be an adaptation of the Ugaritic system for a dialect similar to later attested Phoenician. However, we consider it very strange that the Ugaritic innovation of using three *alephs* as *matres lectionis* made no impact at all on the later linear systems that are supposed to have followed the original Ugaritic sequence of letters. On this evidence, we would rather revert to the theory that sees both the Ugaritic and later Phoenician sequences as based on a common, as yet unidentified, forerunner. At the very least, however, we can say that it was Ugaritic that was influenced from outside. This influence would most likely have been from the south in view of the geographical locations of the earliest alphabetic writing. In this connection, we would also mention Albright's often repeated opinion that the Ugaritic epics actually originated in Phoenicia. He argued this on the basis of the place names in the epics, and claimed that the names of the deities mentioned in these texts tended to link more closely with the southern Canaanite area than did the actual Ugaritic ritual texts (Albright and Moran 1948:239 n.b).

A special literary relationship between Ugarit, Phoenicia and Israel seems evident. Three possible explanations may be suggested. The first is that Ugarit directly influenced its southern neighbours. On geographical and chronological grounds alone this is the least plausible. The second is that Ugaritic influence was mediated via Phoenicia. Considering the Phoenician cultural influence over early Israel (2.12), we cannot, as yet, rule out this possibility. Thirdly, the fact that it is primarily in the literary sphere that close contacts are seen between Ugarit and the south would seem to indicate that Ugarit was influenced by a

literary tradition which was not native to it. Other considerations have been argued in support of this thesis. In the same way, we would suggest, the Israelites took over, in major respects, a pre-existent literary prestige language which they found already established in Canaan.

1.13 Diversity in Pre-Conquest Canaan

Before we pass on to discuss the Canaanite of the Amarna Letters, we would do well to point out the likelihood that there were not only 'Canaanite' speakers in the land on the eve of the arrival of the Israelites. The Bible itself makes this quite clear. Take, for instance, the list in Genesis 15:19–21:

"The Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites".

Although little is remembered in the Old Testament about the distinctive characteristics of each of the peoples (and this list is not exhaustive), the tradition seems sound (Gibson 1961). Although it is dangerous to automatically equate ethnic groups and linguistic groups, it is at least plausible to suggest that this diversity of peoples would have been reflected in a diversity of native languages. We know from recent discoveries that some of these peoples were Semitic (eg the Amorites), while others were not (eg the Hittites). An analysis of personal names in our pre-Israelite sources has led to the detection of Indo-Aryans, who spoke a language akin to Vedic Sanskrit, in Syria and Palestine during this period. Indeed the majority of the non-Semitic rulers mentioned in the Amarna Letters have names of this type (Albright and Lambdin 1970:128). To this list of numerous Semitic and non-Semitic languages in pre-Israelite Canaan, we should also add the languages of two of the great powers of the time, Egyptian and Akkadian, which are also documented in Palestine in this period. Finally, we should not forget the arrival of the Aegean people we call the Philistines, at approximately the same time as the appearance of Israel in Canaan. We can see that there was an array of peoples and languages in pre-Israelite Canaan, not just one Semitic ethnic group called 'the Canaanites'.

1.14 Amarna Canaanite

The Amarna Letters, written in the fourteenth century BC, mostly from the vassal states of Syria-Palestine to the Egyptian Pharaoh, appear at first glance to be composed in literary Akkadian, the international *lingua franca* of the age. To a greater or lesser extent this is true, depending on the origin of the letters. Thus the letters *from* Pharaoh to his subjects are in basically correct Middle Babylonian (Rainey 1975b:396), whereas the letters from the vassals frequently gloss Akkadian words with words from their own local language. It has been

suggested that these glosses were not for the benefit of the receiving scribes but rather that the scribe first wrote in the Canaanite word for an Akkadian word of which he was not sure, then wrote in the Akkadian word later (Brovender 1971:1562). If this is not the case – the majority of scholars do not accept this theory – we must draw the conclusion that the receiving scribes in the Egyptian 'foreign office' were expected to recognize the Canaanite words being used. It would come as no surprise to find West Semites or at least West Semitic experts in the Egyptian foreign service. What does come as a surprise, in view of the multiplicity of minor states and ethnic groups in Canaan, is that some sort of standard vocabulary (and grammar) must have been in use, since it is presupposed by most scholars that the purpose of the glosses was to bring out the specific nuance of an Akkadian word or ideogramme. If each petty state had its own language and vocabulary, adding local glosses to Akkadian words would have been largely futile.

Beyond the glosses, however, scholars have been able to delineate the local language of the scribes even as it surfaces in the supposedly Akkadian texts. Moran, one of the leaders in this field, cautioned this type of research by pointing out that the documents are in Akkadian, no matter how 'bad' that Akkadian may seem to be (Moran 1960:17). However, since that time, scholars have questioned how it is possible in such official texts, that, for instance, the Canaanite verbal system, rather than the Akkadian, is represented so consistently (Blau 1971b:137). The answer to the peculiar character of the Amarna texts is not simply that the scribes were 'bad' at Akkadian. The evidence is better explained if we assume that the scribes had consciously evolved a hybrid language, a sort of pidgin Akkadian. Some Syro-Palestinian centres, such as Jerusalem, Tyre and possibly Sidon, preferred more Akkadianized forms (Rainey 1975b:396), but all to a greater or lesser degree used a hybrid system as a sort of shortcut, or for special clarity. The versatility of the system rests on the ability of the scribe at any moment to supplement the basic Akkadian system with an element from the West Semitic one. Thus, while the vocabulary is basically Akkadian, verbal forms would be given a specific nuance by completing an Akkadian base form with West Semitic afformatives (Rainey 1975b:424).

Whatever the precise reason for the evolution of this system, significant progress has been made in delineating the local language that lies behind the Akkadian of the Amarna texts. Given the ethnic diversity of pre-Israelite Canaan we have discussed above, we would expect this diversity to be reflected in a diversity of local languages and dialects underlying the Akkadian. However, the striking fact that emerges about this local language is its uniformity throughout the whole area (Rabin 1973:21; Albright 1943a:29). Letters from Jebusite Jerusalem, with its ruler bearing a Hurrian name, can be compared with letters from Phoenician Byblos. More than that, this language shares a number of features only attested in Hebrew and Phoenician (Böhl 1909:26; Rabin 1973:19). Most especially we should mention the so-called Canaanite

shift $\acute{a} > \acute{o}$ (Harris 1939:43ff.). As far as the evidence goes, it seems that the basic form and salient features of Biblical Hebrew were already established in *pre-Israelite* Canaan as a 'literary prestige language' (the phrase is Rabin's). That is, the language which was used as a vehicle for communication in the ethnic and linguistic patchwork of pre-Israelite Canaan was very similar to that still used in Israel and Phoenicia at a later date.

It has been suggested that this 'Canaanite' dialect was based on the dialects of the prestigious commercial sea-towns Byblos, Tyre and Sidon (Rabin 1973:22). We would prefer to stress the closely bound nature of language and script in the Ancient Near East (Michalowski 1987:174), and to take the origins of this common language back a stage further. It is interesting, for example, to note the almost exclusive distinction between use of the alphabetic script for the West Semitic language at Ugarit, and the use of the Akkadian language with Mesopotamian cuneiform at the same place. The appearance of a very few Ugaritic texts in Akkadian cuneiform (Segert 1984:16) serves only to highlight the distinction. Similarly, nearly all of the Amarna letters are sent between correspondents whose native language is not Akkadian. But, with the use of the Mesopotamian cuneiform script comes use of the Akkadian language. Again, the fact that we have seen the scribes finding ways to utilize the much more familiar features of their local literary language should not obscure the fact that they are doing so within the confines of the alien Akkadian language, rather than merely doing away with Akkadian. We would suggest, therefore, that the use of the alphabetic script (in its various forms) was attached to the use of a specific form of language. It is common in the Ancient Near East for a prestigious form of language to be tied not only to a specific script, but also to a canonical corpus of literature (Michalowski 1987:169). We suggest the hypothesis that the spread of the alphabet was accompanied by the spread of a style of language (or a body of canonical literature) which had its own poetic style (parallelism), basic grammar, and canonical vocabulary (due to the use of parallel word pairs).

We must emphasize, of course, that the existence of this early alphabetic literature remains merely hypothesis in view, not least, of the uncertainties involved in the whole question of the origins of the alphabet. We have already touched on the question, only to conclude that both the Ugaritic and Phoenician alphabets are descendents of an unspecified ancestor. It is to be noted, however, that a recent study has argued for an early Second Millenium BC date for the origin of the alphabet under Middle Egyptian influence (Sass 1991:24ff.). This would mean that our Ugaritic and Amarna evidence is comparatively late. Such an early date for alphabetic origins would at least allow us to account for both the obvious similarities and apparent differences between Ugaritic and Amarna Canaanite. We are hampered from knowing the precise relationship between the two forms of West Semitic by the different ways in which the two are evidenced. As mentioned above, however, isoglosses such as $\acute{a} > \acute{o}$ allow us to say at least that Ugaritic and Amarna Canaanite were not

identical. We propose the following two stage history of these dialects with full recognition of the great gaps in our linguistic knowledge of this period. The basic similarity between the two dialects stems from the fact that both derive from the literary tradition based on the alphabetic script. The differences are due to local specializations of this literary tradition over what may have been a considerable length of time. Ugaritic and Amarna Canaanite are northern and southern variations of the same basic literary tradition. This further explains the literary relationship between Ugaritic and the First Millenium southern dialects, most notably Phoenician and Hebrew. It is not a direct relationship, but rather the existence of the corpus of Ugaritic literature leads us to expect an analogous tradition in the southern region, which is reflected in the Amarna letters.

The advantage of such a prestige language for Canaan is obvious, since it was established above all local dialects as the *lingua franca* of Syria-Palestine. While Akkadian operated as a prestige language on the international level, the 'Canaanite' language existed for local communication, and as a vehicle for literature. This is not the only example known of the co-existence of a regional standard language with a supra-regional standard (Hock 1986:464f.). Despite the obvious limitations imposed by the way the evidence is attested enough work has been done to indicate that Amarna Canaanite also shares the stylistic features so clearly held in common between Ugarit, Phoenicia and Israel. This is what would have been expected, considering that the link between Ugarit and Israel was precisely this pre-Israelite prestige language. Thus the parallel pair 'rejoice the heart/brighten the eyes' is found in Psalm 19:9, as well as Amarna letters 142:7–10; 144:14–18 (Gevirtz 1963:3).

1.15 Inscriptions

At the present state of knowledge few conclusions can be drawn solely on the basis of the pre-Israelite inscriptions. These are disappointingly meagre, comprising small inscriptions in various scripts, whose interpretations are a matter of dispute. The trend of scholarship seems to be toward a Canaanite interpretation of most of the sources, although it is safe to say that the presupposition that a text is Canaanite has of necessity preceded its interpretation. An example of the difficulties involved in the field are the interpretations of the Lachish Prism Inscription. Albright, on the presupposition that it was Canaanite, read *'l ḏ gt* 'El, Lord of the Winepress' (Albright 1966:3–5). A more recent study has concluded that the inscription is actually Egyptian and reads *pṯḥ nfr* 'Ptah the Gracious', or the like (Hestrin-Sass-Ophel 1982). We cannot build on our theory from evidence which is, as yet, so uncertain.

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