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*Who Are The
"Canaanites"?*

Why Ask?

By Basem L. Ra'ad

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In the steps to Damascus Gate in east Jerusalem, I see an elderly Palestinian woman wearing a hand-embroidered dress, likely of her own making, sitting on the stone pavement, baskets of fruit in front of her. She has carried her load from her village past checkpoints, or perhaps around them, to sell her harvest. To advertise her tiny pears, she calls out, "Pears, Pears, Ba'l Pears." The people walking by understand: the pears are small, not mass-produced in irrigated orchards, but picked from the wild. Most people today prefer plump, perfect looking fruits and vegetables, though less tasty. Ba'l fruits and vegetables grow on rain moisture: imperfect and blemished, smaller in size, but the flavor is concentrated and special — one can smell the aroma from a distance. I buy a kilo, then ask: "What does it mean that your pears are *ba'l*?" She explains their special quality, without articulating what the term represents in the ancient memory of a Cana'anite god and his attributes.

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About This Issue

Basem L. Ra'ad, a professor at Al-Quds University, Jerusalem, is the author of "Hidden Histories: Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean." For readers wishing further documentation on the author's research, his book, reviewed on page 14, is available through AMEU. (See page 16 to order by check, or go to our redesigned website www.ameu.org, to order online.)

The embroidery design running throughout the article is from "Traditional Palestinian Costume" by Hanan Munayyer. It shows the back panel of a dress from Emmuas, the biblical village on the road to Jerusalem that was destroyed by Israel in 1967.

We are pleased to welcome three new members to our National Council: Kathleen Christison, former CIA analyst and current author/columnist; Nancy Lapp, curator emeritus of American Schools of Oriental Research; and George Mendenhall, professor emeritus of ancient and biblical studies at the University of Michigan. We are honored by their public support.

Also on page 16, we acknowledge with profound gratitude the bequest received from the estate of Rita McGaughey, a steadfast friend of AMEU, whose remembrance insures the continuation of our work.

John F. Mahoney
 Executive Director

(Continued from Page 2.)

I am satisfied. For her, as for others in the region, this word and many such expressions, place names, and customs have retained thousands-of-years-old associations—not fossilized remnants but subaltern, functional folk traditions, conveying a host of past inventories that merit rediscovery. They show the people's ancientness, a continuity they don't have to pretend or fabricate, though they may not always be aware of it.

To explicate some of this hidden history, I trace here "Canaan"/"Canaanite" as a metaphor, as a model, as a theme. My purpose is to expose underlying preconceptions in common thinking, and to approximate a more accurate picture of regional history, culture and religion, based on crucial discoveries.

The notional "Canaan" is different from the real Canaan—a land of long-lasting cultural contributions that radiated across the Mediterranean. Canaan, along with Mesopotamia and Egypt, produced impressive cultural materials, invented the alphabet, even the mythological system which later religions both condemned and adapted. Today, exploring imaginary and real Canaan leads us to essential recognitions about Palestine as well, the claims surrounding it, and its potential as a center for new knowledge

Idealized Constructions



The region of Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean has been like a palimpsest, much paved over, residing below the surface or veiled by invention. This region (I prefer "Eastern Mediterranean" instead of the colonial "Middle East") is often called "the cradle of civilization." Yet that world of civilization is not at all the same as the conceived "biblical world"—the latter image having shadowed understandings both in the public mind and in scholarly work.

History is partial and problematic, often biased, written by those who are victorious or have the tools to write and preserve it. Distortions, however, have become strangely more acute in our region. It is a

severe irony that the region has now become embroiled in the very question of what is true and what is false, and what is knowledge. Today vested interests and political investments, by design, are keeping alive what was earlier formulated by ignorance.

How might we unravel this history, unlearn what is dominant, and search for alternatives to reclaim hidden truths and deepen awareness? Our understanding of the past bears on our perceptions and actions. To neglect this history leaves a vacuum to be filled with distortion and appropriation. Unwary "Palestine" (otherwise called "Holy Land" or "Canaan") is not just the site where fabrications have materialized; it is where we should retrieve truths.

For example, in disinheriting the Palestinians, Zionists argue that Jews have an entitlement to ancient ancestry (and monotheism). What new discoveries refute this claim?

Others argue that Palestinians are "Arabs" and (neglecting Christian Palestinians) "Muslims" and therefore can go elsewhere. How accurate is this contention?

In controlling sacred sites like the mosque in Hebron or the Western Wall in east Jerusalem, Israelis claim their authenticity and connection to them. How valid is that?

By re-examining religious origins, cultural practices, languages, place names, identity construction, and other subjects, the logics of incendiary justifications and monopolies become even more demonstrably bizarre.

What political, cultural and religious biases and misconceptions have become embedded over millennia? Western perceptions have been formed by complex factors: 1,700 years of idealized constructions about a "Holy Land"; enmity between Europe and Muslim empires (first Arab, then Ottoman); various kinds of crusades (starting in the 11th century); assumptions in a paradigm called "Western civilization" that evolved during the 16th and 17th centuries; employment of biblical models in furthering colonizing projects; sacred geography of 19th-century fundamentalists; writings by travelers, pilgrims, orientalist; colonization by Western powers;

the region's division into "countries"; and now the Zionist project and its colonizing activities.

Profitable for such complex constructs is having a demonizing model for perceiving other people and their land. Most famous—or infamous—is that of "Canaan," the ideal place, whose people—various "Canaanites"—are unworthy demonic pagans to be dispossessed, even exterminated.

To remind readers of the biblical story, "Canaanites" are arbitrarily supposed to descend from "Canaan," son of "Ham," one of the sons of "Noah." (I place scare quotes around these names because their transcription is erroneous, missing gutturals and accurate vowels, best preserved in the Arabic.) Because "Ham" happened to see Noah's nakedness, "Canaan" was cursed by "Noah" to be "a slave of slaves to his brothers" (Gen. 9, 25).

What does this mean for the descendants of "Canaan"? Listen to Deuteronomy 20: 16-17: "In the cities of these people the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Per'zzites, the Hivites and the Jeb'usites, as the Lord your God has commanded."

This cursing prepares for the "conquest of Canaan" and continues down to our own day, as seen in the North American colonies and their neighbor to the north. According to D.V. Lucas in his "Canaan and Canada" (1904), what God's providence has given to Canadians is "nearly five hundred times greater than was bestowed upon His chosen people." Indeed, of the inhabitants killed in Canada, exults Lucas ". . . the early taking off of these children [of the wicked Canaanites] reveal[s] the mercy of God rather than His unrighteous wrath . . . [it] left them eternally innocent. Their removal before they were able to perpetuate the sins of their fathers, sins the most beastly or the most devilish, was a blessing for us who came after."

Some fundamentalist travelers and missionary writers in the 19th century applied similar sentiments to the Palestinians. A notable example was the millennialist wife of the British consul, Mrs. E. A. Finn, who wrote "Palestinian Peasantry" in order to demonstrate that the villagers have the customs and manners of the pagan "Canaanites," and so (as her daughter argued in an introduction in 1923) deserve

to be controlled rather than get the independence they were demanding. It is not far-fetched to imagine how such preconceptions infuse present ideologies and political actions.

National Myths



In "The Bible and Colonialism" (1997) Michael Prior, a British Catholic priest, exposes the deployment of biblical accounts (particularly Exodus and the "Conquest of Canaan") to justify colonial conquests and the construct of national myths in the Americas, apartheid South Africa and Israel. While the model camouflages itself as religion and belief in god-given stories, it has many investments and self-interests that make it profitable. It is a useful civil theology, an imperialistic one.

This apparently potent model began the creation of the United States and has ended in what is now the State of Israel. State creation by dispossession of native populations lies deep in the heart of mutual identification, realized concretization of the same narratives.

The U.S. identifies with Old Testament narratives and covenants, details of which are copied into a national story about the ordeals of the "pilgrim fathers" (as many have pointed out from Perry Miller to John Davis). Puritan colonists overlaid their sacred topography on the land. Their "errand into the wilderness" became a national story fulfilling America's colonizing project, seeing it as a new "Israel" destined to establish a commonwealth in a new "Canaan." Their condition in Europe became the imagined "enslavement" in Egypt, the ocean voyage a desert "exodus," the land of "Canaan," fat and desirable, whose natives, or "Indians," were pagan idolaters—"Canaanites," Philistines, Hittites and other enemies of God.

In a story that prepared for "Thanksgiving," in 1620, Bradford likened the corn taken from Indian stores by scouts to the grapes carried back from other people's property by two spies in the biblical story (Numbers 13-14; Deuteronomy 1: 19-46; Joshua 2).

In delivering a sermon on charity, John Winthrop spoke of "the city upon a hill" (ironically from

Jesus's sermon to the meek, used since in political speeches), while calling those to be excluded "Canaanites."

In Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 attack on slavery in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," slave owners and clergy employ the curse against "Canaan" to justify slavery, while Eliza runs across the Ohio River ("like Jordan") to the "Canaan of her liberty" (chapters 7, 12).

"Conquest of Canaan" is not about Joshua, the Jordan River crossing and walls of Jericho (which lack archaeological corroboration), but the title of an "epic" poem written in the eighteenth century and a novel published in the U.S. in 1905. An early colonial town is named "Salem" (Ur-Salem/Jerusalem, ironically named after a pagan god). Other biblical place names dot the U.S. landscape: Bethlehem, Jericho, Jordan, Joshua's Path, Mount Sinai, Canaan, East Canaan, New Canaan, Babylon, Palestine, among others. According to Burke O. Long's "Imagining the Holy Land," U.S. religious imagination later transferred its "cultural myth" to fantasized reality in exhibits and parks reproducing Palestine and Bible lands, whereas travel, texts, Bible maps, and research eventually led this geopiety to establish dedicated institutions in Palestine.

Mark Twain in "Innocents Abroad" wants us to "unlearn" this typological bunch of grapes—a Sunday-school image he sees as sentimentalizing entitlement. It is a large target of Twain's irony, along with sacred geographers and Joshua, whom he dubs "the Genius of Destruction." Even before archaeological discoveries debunked biblical historicity, Twain had outgrown earlier colonial justifications, and saw the dangers in a national story based on biblical precedents to justify illegal and immoral actions.

Yet, today, the two spies carrying grapes illustrate the Israeli Ministry of Tourism logo. Palestine is fundamentally a colonial cauldron for Zionism, a dispossession of an indigenous people as others were dispossessed in the Americas, in Polynesia, in Australia and New Zealand. In this case, the dispossession is camouflaged as a religious entitlement—plus some different claims of nativity.

Earlier Western sacred geography and its images are, as U.S. writer Hilton Obenzinger says in "American Palestine," a "prehistory" for present

Zionism. The Zionist movement exploits this traveling mythology, reprinting old travel narratives, from John Mandeville's hoax account to obscure 19th-century sacred geographers. One project is "America-Holy Land Studies" and another is a collection of anti-Arab sentiments entitled "Famous Travellers to the Holy Land" (compiled by Linda Osband). The Zionist system, pretending to Western democratic values (and to religious authority too), employs old demonizing appellations such as "Philistines," even "Canaanites," while appealing to comparative terminology like "frontier" and "pioneer" to mimic the U.S. experience.

Demonologies



ilification and demonization of "Canaanite" is traversable and transferrable. During the crusades, for example, "Canaanites" were replaced by "Saracens" (Muslims/"Arabs"), while in colonial America, the imagined "Canaanites" were Native Americans and then African slaves—the former to be destroyed, the latter to work the land.

Biases against Canaanites are multi-directional and multi-sourced. Genesis and other Old Testament books (similarly the Qur'an) condemn them as idolaters. Somewhat inconsistently, in Matthew, Christ initially dismisses and belittles a "Canaanite woman" (15: 21–28)—though the woman is "Greek" of local birth in Mark (7: 26).

Despite their formative influence on Greek civilization, the Canaanites ("Phoenicians" in Greek) suffer animosity in later periods of ancient Greek nationalism. Since the Carthaginians were economic competitors and so enemies of the expanding Roman Empire, they were portrayed as dishonest traders and decadent child killers.

Similarly, other ancient civilizations receive stereotypical labels implicated in biblical stories: Babylonian (money-oriented keepers of temple prostitutes); Assyrian and Hittite (brutal empires); "Phoenician" (cheap commercialists). The word "Philistine" still implies crudity and lack of culture, in dictionaries, in general speech, and famously in Matthew Arnold's "Culture and Anarchy." Present-

day dictionaries have yet to designate such words as offensive. "Tower of Babel" throws up many allusions associated with a curse and "confusion" of tongues. An educated writer ventures to call rival pedantic critics "whores of Babylon" or art work or food taste "Philistine."

Hollywood films exploit such notions, pitting these ancient cultures against presumed Old Testament virtues. The problem runs deeper than is documented in Jack G. Shaheen's "Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People." Often, messages are subliminal, as in "Magnolia" where biblical frogs rain down and "Eyes Wide Shut" where the secret society recalls temple prostitution. "Hannibal" is the name of Dr. Lecter, a modern cannibal. Spielberg's "Prince of Egypt" is a Zionist example of how biblical notions are popularized in films for children, making the Exodus story milder by comparison.

Are the Palestinians "Arabs," since they speak Arabic? This allows dismissing their entitlement by assuming they are nomads who migrated from the Arabian Peninsula or "Arab" countries to which they should return.

Or are they the Philistines who fought with the ancient Israelites, thus acquiring a bad reputation in biblical and Western imaginings?

Or are Palestinians the cursed and pagan Canaanites, who cannot be trusted to rule themselves, and whose lands and lives Yahweh decreed could be taken by ancient Israelites who presumably are connected to present-day Jews.

In a speech, Israeli ex-prime minister Yitzhak Shamir referred to the Palestinians as "Canaanites," as did Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, the second president of Israel, and others. This association, however, now causes anxiety for some Israelis, since it can lead the less biased to conclude that Palestinians have prior occupancy rights.

Real Canaan and Its Region



The real Canaan is far different from what is generally portrayed. Rather than the imaginary entity that derives its meaning from biblical stories, Canaan was a real region in what is now Greater Syria where a culture thrived for several millennia and radiated influence across the Mediter-

anean basin and beyond. The name probably derives from the word *kana'a*, referring to regional people who were partly known for their trademark purple cloth, for which they used a dye extracted from seashells.

Perhaps the people in the larger Canaan did not always identify as a nation or unified entity, being a grouping of city-states and communities where imperial power was not indigenous (a positive quality in many respects), though not different in culture or language. In Carthage, now Tunis, peasants identified themselves as Canaanites as late as the fourth century CE, as mentioned by Augustine, centuries after Romans destroyed the city.

Canaan produced remarkable material remains we still see today, as illustrated in a volume entitled "The Phoenicians" (ed. Sabatino Moscati). Its mythology influenced the Greek pantheon and the three monotheistic religions. Recent discoveries, such as those in 1928 at the ancient and renowned Canaanite city-state of Ugarit, shatter many old notions and turn biblical studies upside down, revealing multiple antecedents for biblical myths and stories.

In Canaan the first alphabet was invented, a revolutionary writing system that evolved into all the scripts in the West and East. For its inception, the alphabet benefited from its intermediary position by adapting the idea of pictographs.

The alphabet took form by using pictures of common objects and their initial sounds for 28 letters sufficient to represent language in writing. The signs were derived from aspects fundamental in civilization, natural forces, and parts of the human body.

The first letter reproduced the head of a bull, associated with godly power. Thus "aleph," which comes from *alif* meaning a tamed animal, denoted domestication. This first sign stood for three long vowels *ā-ū-ē*. A in Greek and Latin scripts is an evolution from that first shape, rotated sideways then upside down.

B (*beit*), meaning "house" in Canaanite (it and other signs still mean the same in Arabic), took the shape of a square, then acquired stylization with time, dictated by medium and direction of writing.

L has not really changed much, except in direction of writing, and it, too, is similar to the current *lam* in Arabic.

K (from *kf*, palm) had four fingers, later stylized into a three-fingered palm, further simplified and rotated to produce the "K" of today.

M started by using a sign typifying sea waves (related to *ym*, meaning sea), while R originally had the shape of a human head in profile (from *ras*, head), evidenced by the fact that Greek *rho* is shaped like a P.

From Cana'an much has been taken, much of which still needs to be recognized. To continue to demonize the Cana'anites (or the Philistines or Babylonians), as religious books do, while appropriating fundamental aspects of their creativity and material culture without recognition, is an act of utmost in-

It originates in nature—the mountains, deserts, and seas, weather and seasons, stars, moon, sun, rocks, animals, and vegetation—a landscape that human beings faced in the primitive state and tried to understand and tame. The original mythologies were created to help human beings feel more protected and explain mysteries in a strange, unpredictable, often hostile environment. In today's artificial landscape, from which it is not as possible to extract mythic sustenance, it is tempting to hang on to old myths.

Fabulous ancient mythologies evolved in settled areas around the globe—in Mesopotamia, the Nile Valley, the Indus Valley, and in the Americas.

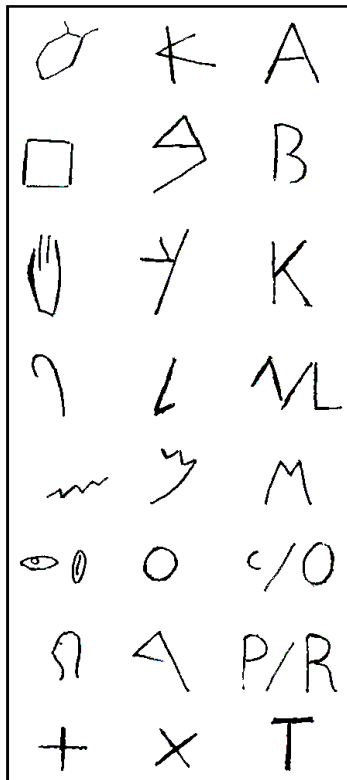
A particularly central mythology evolved in what is called Greater Syria, which is made up today of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine (the last is now Israel and the other occupied territories, Gaza and the West Bank).

This is the Greater Cana'an: green and barren areas, the solid desert and the sown terraces, small rivers, hills and a few mountains, well-treed, caves, springs, coastal plains, the Mediterranean, mild weather, various fruits, olives, and grain agriculture. These and other peculiarities and distinctions were more conducive to the development of city states, contiguous with tribal and nomadic groups, as opposed to monolithic entities and imperial systems elsewhere.

In Palestine, in particular, partially barren hills descend eastward to a depression where the Jordan River runs into the Dead Sea. This is an iconographic landscape that has everything except green—or rather is everything because it lacks green. In the hills and plains toward the coast, the land is more fertile and green, and in pockets around villages and towns agriculture is prolific. To the south lies the desert.

The mythology that grew out of this larger "Canaan" has elements the other two mythological systems in Egypt and Mesopotamia could not develop, though there is interdependence among them.

The sun is more powerful in Egypt. The sun god Re, source of all light, warmth and growth, is the creator of the great Nile River that floods Egypt and makes it fruitful. In rain-dependent Greater Syria,



Evolution of the alphabet signs: ABKLMORT
From the original signs to the Greek and Roman.

—Source: "Hidden Histories."

gratitude. As you read this very sentence you are reading in Cana'anite.

Religious Sources Unraveled



he monotheistic religions that billions believe in today are direct descendants of the Cana'anite mythological system. "A mythology reflects its region," wrote the U.S. poet Wallace Stevens.

the sun is more of an enemy that burns the ground in summer and so is represented as the death god Mōt, powerful and threatening but to be overcome by the fertility god Baʿl (“bʿl”), who becomes a most important deity.

This regional pantheon eventually developed, more definitely by the second millennium BCE, into about seventy gods. Importantly, it had at its head a father god ʾĪl (written “El” in scholarship) and a mother goddess (ʾAsherah). Often, just as ʾĪl/El is used in personal names (Isma-ʾil/Ishmael, meaning “ʾĪl/El hears”; Isra-el, or rather Yisraʾil, a name for Jacob which probably means “ʾĪl/El rules;” Dani-el; Micha-el; and so on), other names and cities derive from other patron gods, as in “Hannibal” (really Hani-baʿl, one who pleases Baʿl), Baalbek, Ur-Salem/Jerusalem, ʾAnata, or Beit-Lahem/Bethlehem.

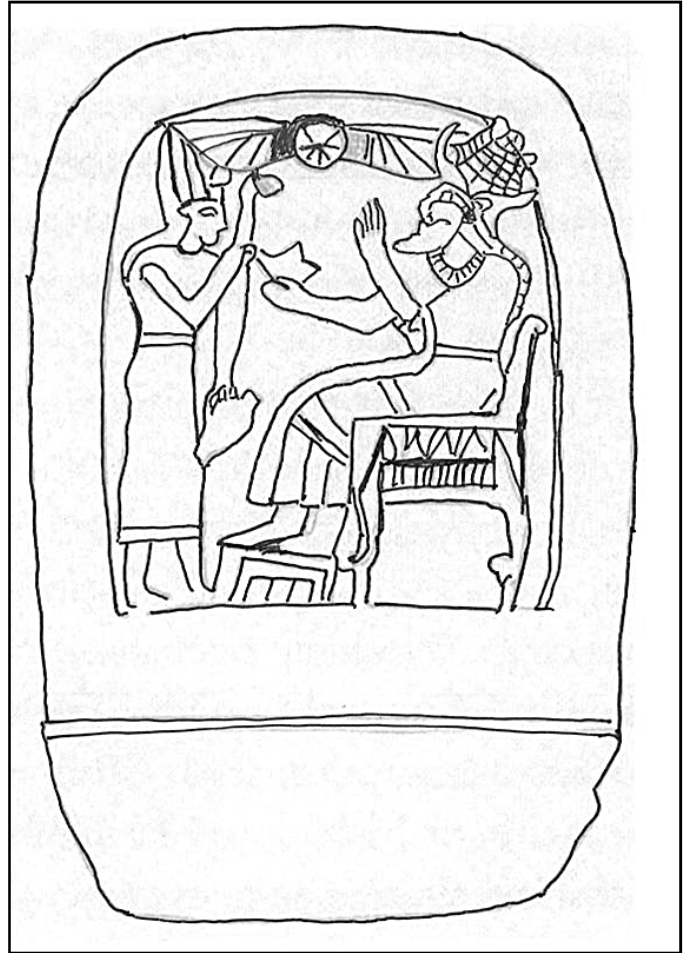
Not only did landscape features produce mythological elements, in their unique combination of separateness and connection they also resulted in monolatry, or one god being worshipped more than others without denying other gods. Where seasonal rain was essential for agriculture in hilly regions, people worshipped Baʿl and his sister ʾAnāt or ʾAshtār, whereas in dryer or desert areas to the south the preference may have been Yaw/Yau/Yahweh, or other gods or goddesses.

The Bible is a late reflection of these accumulated mythologies in a region that featured earlier one-god religions, as suggested in the work of Karen Armstrong and David Leeming, among others.

It is possible that Jesus called on ʾĪl/El rather than Yahweh in the sentence rendered in Aramaic on the cross, and Islam seems to have returned to Abraham’s god ʾĪl/El in the name Allah.

It is ironic that the Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament, reached a Western audience unaware of such cultural antecedents and in whose environment such a mythology could not have emerged, and who yet developed an ingrained attraction to it, along with a belief that Yahweh was the one true god.

Throughout the 19th-century, however, discoveries of antecedents came to light. These were older narratives or events that occurred more or less in the same way as later ones.



Stele of king paying homage to ʾĪl (EL), Ugarit, 13th-century BCE., displayed at the Louvre in Paris, France.

—Source: “Hidden Histories.”

Among the greatest finds was that by George Smith, an assistant in the British Museum’s Department of Oriental Antiquities who, in 1872, announced that he had translated a flood account from a tablet from Nineveh that was an almost exact duplicate of the Flood story—written 2,000 years earlier! This tablet turned out to be part of the Epic of Gilgamesh. Other antecedents followed, such as creation stories, and even most recently a “covenant.” Nevertheless, biblical scholars still attempt to privilege the Bible as “unique.”

The composition of the pantheon was not very clear until relatively recently. The most important findings were the second millennium BCE city of Ugarit, discovered in 1928, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, uncovered accidentally in 1947 by a Syrian farmer and a Palestinian shepherd boy.

Further, inscriptions such as those from Kuntilet `Ajrūd and Khirbet el-Qōm (about the eighth century BCE) leave no doubt as to the existence of syncretistic cults which incorporated various beliefs in southern Palestine, where Yahweh was worshipped along with ʾĪl, Baʿl, and `Asherah. The Kuntilet `Ajrūd discovery unmoors traditional narratives so much that some Zionist-inclined scholars have attempted to remove the name of `Asherah from the inscriptions. Ancient editors as well had, according to Judith M. Hadley, “attempted to eliminate the evidence of her [‘Asherah’s] worship among the Israelites.”

The obvious and unavoidable reference to “sons of God” (Genesis 6: 1–4) is present in old and new translations. Other crucial passages are Exodus 6: 2–3 (where the god’s name changes), and Psalm 82 (which indicates a council of gods: “Yahweh takes his stand in the Council of El to deliver judgment among the gods”). The implications of these are diluted by evasive commentaries, biblical scholarship, and various translations. E. C. B MacLaurin of the Department of Semitic Studies at the University of Sydney remarks on the “attempt in official religion to conceal the fact that El and YAHWEH were once worshipped as separate deities.” Yahweh is only one of ʾĪl’s several sons in a pantheon.

This has come to certain light since discovery of the Qumran or Dead Sea Scrolls, dating to the second century BCE. Until then, the major manuscript authority for the Hebrew Bible was the Masoretic text (Leningrad Codex, about 1000 years old). The only older tradition was the Septuagint, a translation into Greek in the second century BCE. The Masoretic and, in English, variations or revisions of the King James Version (KJV) are still the main source for most versions, except the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB).

One crucial passage in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Deuteronomy 32: 8–9, demonstrates that a scribe or scribal committee fabricated a change in order to suppress polytheism. Contrary to other versions, the NJB and Qumran-based translations make it clear that ʾĪl/El, the Most High, is the father god who distributes the world and its peoples among his sons – one of whom is Yahweh, who gets as his followers the Israelites descended from Jacob/Ya`qūb.

As reflected in the KJV and later revisions, however, the fabricated alteration had replaced “sons (or

children) of God/El” with “sons of Israel,” thus appropriating God (both ʾĪl and Yahweh) to the Israelites, disinheriting other sons of ʾĪl/El, and erasing polytheistic suggestions. (See commentary by Julie A. Duncan, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, in “Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls.”)

What further dilutes the effect of this passage is insistence in most versions to keep “Lord” (“adonai,” meaning “lord” or “master”) instead of the accurate name “Yahweh,” even to re-instate “sons of Israel,” thus making distinctions between ʾĪl and Yahweh impossible to see.

Ugaritic cycles a thousand years earlier speak of *yw* (Yahweh) as one of ʾĪl’s sons. The Greek pantheon is, with natural modifications, largely derived from the Canaanite pantheon (ʾĪl/El=Kronos, Baʿl=Zeus, and so on; see fragments from Philo of Byblos and B. C. Dietrich’s “The Origins of Greek Religion”).

The Qur’anic Allah is most likely a return to Abraham’s ʾĪl (El), a link emphasized in the Qur’an itself. Ugaritic texts (at the northwestern edge of Canaan, a thousand years before the Bible and more than 2000 years before the Qur’an) give ʾĪl titles like “ar rahmān” (beneficent) and “al latīf” (kind), some of Allah’s 99 names. Scholars like Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz conclude Ugaritic is essentially “Canaanite” in idiom and “more like Arabic” in phonology. An early fifteenth-century Arabic dictionary, *Al Fayrūz `Abādī’s al qamūs al muḥīṭ*, incredibly defines “ʾĪl,” under the letter “lam,” as “Allah [God] the Almighty.”

Appropriation Psychology



at Sataf, a Palestinian village just outside Jerusalem, one of hundreds whose farming population was evicted in the ethnic cleansing implemented by Zionist forces in 1948, Israelis are invited to pay a fee to farm their own terrace “as their ancestors did before them.” What a way to concretize an ideology. Even invention of terrace agriculture is claimed by the colonizers, though it developed several millennia prior to any possible “Israelites.”

Paradoxically, denial of Palestinian labor and the cultural appropriations by Zionism take on the

unique nature of wanting to assume native status, a callous attitude inherited from Western sacred geographers who maintained the land was theirs.

This “Canaan” has been confiscated more than any other part of the world—its heritage, its history, its very existence. Palestinian and regional foods, as well as the intricate and colorful embroidery by women of dresses, shawls and cushions are taken over by Israelis as their own.

The wife of the Zionist military leader Moshe Dayan opened a shop in London where she sold Palestinians dresses as examples of Israel’s heritage—an appropriation perpetuated in books like “Arabesque: Decorative Needlework from the Holy Land” by Ziva Amir.

In 1980, flight attendants on Israel’s national airline, El Al, wore as their official uniform the Palestinian dress from Ramallah.

And, in 2007, in volume four of “World Book Encyclopedia,” Israel registered the bridal dress from Bethlehem as part of its cultural inheritance. (Later, under pressure from Palestinian groups, the Encyclopedia expunged the claim.)

The whole of Palestine has been subjected to Zionist ownership. All its flora and fauna are “biblical” and thus Israeli “inheritance,” with west Jerusalem flaunting a “biblical zoo.” A Jewish-American journalist can say she enjoys figs as “fruit of her ancestors.” Flax is made, anachronistically, to date back to “5000 BC in the Land of Israel.” Israeli contractors pull out old stones from Palestinian areas to use in building, or employ Palestinian stonemasons, to lend local authenticity or age to their presence. They live in old (and desirable) “Arab” houses, with no apparent sense of guilt. Many books written by Israelis or Western Jews have pictures on the cover and inside of Palestinians, their houses, towns and landscapes, without noting the builders or original inhabitants. Here, the invisibility is complete.

Meanwhile, Israeli colonists on the West Bank continue to attack Palestinian farmers and regularly uproot Palestinian olive trees. They want to be native so much they take over resources and land to which they are not natural. In areas around colonies and the Separation Wall, the army protects and participates with those engaged in uprooting both people

and trees.

In Zionist scholarship, ancient languages are rife with takeovers. Despite demonization of ancient peoples, languages are useful for confiscation—to create false connections and exaggerated antiquity. “Square Hebrew” script is the late square Aramaic that did not develop until many centuries after the imagined periods of a Moses or David. It becomes thus necessary to try to backdate the existence of Hebrew by assuming inscriptions are “ancient Hebrew”—whereas in fact the scripts are “Phoenician” or early Aramaic.

It is an intended confusion of scripts. One such inscription is the “Gezer calendar,” from the 11th century BCE. Zionist scholars, now some standard encyclopedias, classify this text as “ancient Hebrew,” whereas impartial observers note it is “Phoenician,” with letters showing affinities to Moabite. One Jewish writer, Leonard Shlain, provides an ingenious theory of how Yahweh gave the alphabet to his chosen males first, bypassing Ugarit and demeaning “Phoenicians” as incapable of this invention.

An article (Seymour Gitin, Trude Dothan, and Joseph Naveh, “A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron”) on a Philistine inscription appropriates even the “enemy” by speaking of “Hebreo-Philistine.” To give ascendancy to Hebrew, it seems a rule to place “Hebrew” first in appropriative hyphenations (e.g., “Hebrew-Aramaic”). Ugaritic words from 3,400 years ago are said to be similar to Hebrew, whereas balanced scholarship (including “The World’s Writing Systems”) concludes that Ugaritic, in phonology (and, according to my count, vocabulary), is exactly like present Arabic.

A blatant confusion of scripts to promote some political or religious agenda can be seen in a special stone plaque erected in 1985 within the premises of Pater Noster Church on the Mount of Olives, in east Jerusalem. It places Aramaic and Hebrew next to each other and makes them look the same. Israeli tour guides then declare to visitors: “Look, Hebrew and Aramaic are exactly the same, and so there is no difference if it is said that Christ spoke Aramaic.”

Such appropriations extend to other “enemy” languages and peoples as well. The Israeli currency, the shekel, was widely known to be a Babylonian

invention. Yet, some standard dictionaries and encyclopedias define the word as “Hebrew” or “Jewish” (e.g., “Oxford Advanced Learner’s”), thus depriving Babylon of the privilege of inventing such financial trappings of civilization—even as it is subjected to other prejudices. Stripping the region of its accomplishments continues in Western scholarship too: some scholars maintain that the true alphabet is “Greco-Roman”; others have baldly claimed the Sumerian/Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh as the first work of Western literature (e.g., X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia, “An Introduction to Poetry”).

Place Names: Which Original?



f Ugaritic and Canaanite languages are, in phonology and vocabulary, most similar to present Arabic, with thousands-of-years place names in the region retained, why should ancient toponyms in

Palestine be any different?

Arabic city and other names assumed to be more recent, like ‘Asqalān and ‘Akka, are much closer to the original Canaanite found in Egyptian hieroglyphic dating back 4000 years, and even later in Tal el ‘Amarneh cuneiform correspondence. Arabic consonants and stipulated vowels are much closer to the original than any other renderings. Similarly, the Philistine city rendered in Western scholarship as “Ekron” can only be transcribed from the inscriptions as ‘Aqrūn.

To explain the discrepancy in these and other names involves a number of linguistic issues concerning Arabic and Hebrew, including vowel shifts in Hebrew guessing (such as $\bar{a}-o$, $\bar{a}-a$, $a-e$, etc.) and consonant sounds (such as q/k , b/v and p/f).

With b/v and p/f , the confusion in Hebrew was caused by the letters looking the same, later distinguished by diacritical marks. According to Edward Lipinski, vowels such as o/\bar{o} and e/\bar{e} in Hebrew “do not belong to the common Semitic phonemes.” In contrast \bar{a} , \bar{u} , and \bar{i} are the proto-Semitic long vowels, available in Arabic.

That applies even more to consonants, especially gutturals. Alan S. Kaye (in “The World’s Major Languages”) and other scholars confirm the importance

of Arabic: “Arabic preserves the Proto-Semitic phonology almost perfectly.” Arabic not only preserves older languages; it is their natural and continuous descendant and storehouse, which makes it a travesty to try to shrink its importance.

Arabic names are continuous and natural forms as they evolved on the ground, as even Zionist scholars have to admit. One Zionist writer, Shmuel Ahiv-tuv, entitles his book “Canaanite Toponyms in Ancient Egyptian Documents.” And Yael Elitzur, a recent Israeli writer on toponymy, concedes the role of the “autochthonous inhabitants” in continuing the preservation of names, though who these undefined indigenous people are remains too sensitive for Elitzur to name directly—viz. the Palestinians.

This is why Zionist scholars are somewhat critical of the German orientalist Georg Kampffmeyer for ascribing influence to the “Syrian tongue.”

Some foreign names (such as “Neopolis,” Arabized to “Nablus”) were indeed adapted to the “Arab tongue.” On the other hand, the Arabic-Canaanite correspondence is almost exact. This would be natural because proto-Canaanite, Ugaritic and Arabic have the same basic sound system (reflected in 28 alphabet signs in Arabic and Canaanite and 30 signs in Ugaritic, which distinguishes the three *alefs*). In contrast, Hebrew is largely the result of a transmission process through tradition when the language was dead or fossilized, used only in scholarly and rabbinical practices.

What is unusual about Zionist place-naming in Palestine is that people who were not natives of Palestine assumed nativity for themselves while denying native status to the indigenous inhabitants, the very ones who coined the names or continued them, and from whom Zionists often take place-names in order to translate them. Thus colonial imposition is made to look like legitimate national recovery.

Take the cities of ‘Asqalān and ‘Akka which the Zionists renamed Ashkelon and Acco.

This was purported to be a return to the oldest names reaching back to bible times. In fact, they came about in Jewish and Western usage through a transcription tradition that distorted many of their sounds. Today they are placed on the colonizers’ map for the purpose of erasing, scraping or chipping

away at the birthright of the indigenous people.

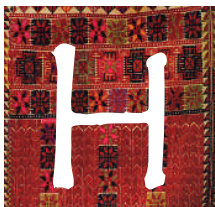
Zionists claim that the Arabic forms are of more recent coinage, coming after the Arab/Muslim “conquest” in 638CE, which changed or “distorted” the original names—as if Arabic were a totally foreign language alien to its region.

Ironically, however, ‘Asqalān and ‘Akka, the Arabic names said to be more recent, are much closer to the original names found in hieroglyphic that date back some 4,000 years, as recorded in Egyptian sources, and a few hundred years later in cuneiform in the Tal el ‘Amarnah correspondence.

They both represent a better preservation of the original than the biblical writings or Western renderings.

Yet, despite a few alternative voices, official Zionist renaming goes on at a frenetic pace, most recently intensified by Knesset legislation. In any peace negotiation or reconciliation program, however, such practices of disinheritance cannot be allowed to continue.

Hidden Histories



How could one search for what is left of indigenous Palestinian culture, its ancientness and genuineness, in an environment contaminated by savagery and distraction in the present?

Palestinian native life as perceived by outsider observers is characterized by invisibility. Many travelers, obsessed by the topomania of Bible-thinking, could not avoid the presence of Palestinian villagers and farmers. But instead of giving them credit for their labor, they merely used them as illustrations of ancient life in “biblical times” in travel descriptions or today on book covers and postcards. Unable to identify with them as continuous inhabitants, they observed, used, and denied them at the same time.

Still, whether through villagers or Bedouins, the Palestinian population remains the only reflection and reminder of the way things were in the past. This is the conclusion of recent DNA studies, old ethnography by various observers, even by early Zionists, and objective historians; it is also evidenced in

what remains of fast-disappearing customs.

These connections to the ancient past are muddled by present politics and identity construction, while invented or false links acquire an obsessive reality. In creating a particular Jewish identity, the Zionists invent the past and make misleading links with religious narratives they believe in (or not) about the idealized “Hebrews” and “Israelites.” As Shlomo Sand, professor of history at Tel Aviv University, recently re-affirmed in “Invention of the Jewish People,” there were too many conversions in the last two millennia to warrant making such connections or thinking of “Diaspora.” In the 1940s, 50s and 60s a “Canaanite Movement” (now largely defunct) tried to distance itself from Jewish religious heritage and “exilic history” by identifying with a cultural past instead.

On the other hand, while Palestinian and other regional populations are obviously descended from ancient peoples, they associate their own presence with Christian or Muslim conquests—accepting dominant discourse and unknowingly abbreviating their own cultural history.

I want to end my essay by affirming the genuine ancient culture of Palestine, which has continued despite changes in people’s religious affiliation from pagan, Jewish or Christian, and Muslim.

In the 1920s, Tawfik Canaan and other Palestinian scholars produced a few studies of Palestinian customs. His conclusion (in a somewhat improperly titled “Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine”) is as follows: “Even the great revolutions produced by the three monotheistic religions, whose cradle lay in or near Palestine, were not able to suppress all primitive beliefs.”

Palestinian anthropologists have since noted remnants of sacred trees associated with *walis* or holy men and the barely surviving practice of human burial in caves, as well as evidence of how the veneer of a Christian calendar and Muslim practices (often conflated, with Muslims adopting Christian symbolism and vice versa) are overlaid on Canaanite and other ancient symbols, rituals, and seasonal practices.

Rituals and amulets still survive to protect children and oneself against “the evil eye.” People still

engage in popular medicine with “prescriptions” by herbalists. There may be close similarities between women’s traditional dresses and what ancients are wearing in Egyptian wall paintings. How many thousands of years old are such regional habits and customs? How does one find more corroboration before they disappear?

Such conflation of ancient and modern beliefs applies more formally to sites now deemed sacred to Christianity, Islam and Judaism. All were invented in the fourth century by the Byzantine emperor Constantine, his mother Helena and his bishops, or much later. As I document in my book, Constantine specifically ordered his bishops to build basilicas at various pagan sites, including the one in Hebron claimed to be Ibrahīm’s/Abraham’s burial place. (Later a mosque was built there, more than half of which has now been converted to a synagogue by the Israelis.) His purpose, as is Israel’s today, was to appropriate the older traditions to the new religion and to enforce imperial control. The Western (Wailing) Wall was not a place of Jewish worship until the Ottoman conquest of 1518 CE, as admitted even by the 1971 edition of “The Encyclopedia Judaica.” Further, the Wall is not any remnant of a temple, but stones from a Roman fortress.

Another memory of the ancient past came to me inadvertently as I was traveling from the “Allenby” Bridge to Jerusalem. I was sitting in the back seat with a man and his wife. The man was working his prayer beads—made up of 33 beads which, when repeated three times, complete the 99 names of Allah.

Suddenly, he exclaims, “*ya latif*” (literally “Oh, kind and pleasant one”).

I assumed he meant something like “May God protect us!” or “Oh, what a terrible situation.” Not sure, though, I turned and asked, “What do you mean by *ya latif*?”

His answer was simple: “I am calling out one of the names of Allah.”

It was then I recalled the myths from Ugarit, the city in northwest Syria now Ras Shamra dating to 3,200–3,800 years ago, where this very adjective describes the quality of the chief god Īl (El)

If I seem to have focused much on ancient people in our region, or their gods and remains, it is not because I think all Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians, Jordanians, and Iraqis today are descendants of the Cana’anites, Philistines, Arameans, Assyrians, Babylonians, Moabites, or other ancient peoples whatever they may have called themselves or are called by others—though most surely are.

Rather, it is because in both West and East, recognition of the region’s contributions is inadequate, and in some cases wholly absent. Incorporating that past again into our consciousness and understanding is therefore an act of historical and present-day justice. As tenacious inhabitants of the land and carriers of its knowledge, today’s Palestinians are, in many senses, the ancestral Cana’anites.

As such, I offer “Cana’anite” as a metaphor. In a world where too many peoples have been devalued, demonized and dispossessed, these ancient people could possibly show us, with their rich history and our recognition of it, the ways of restoring fairness and understanding. ■



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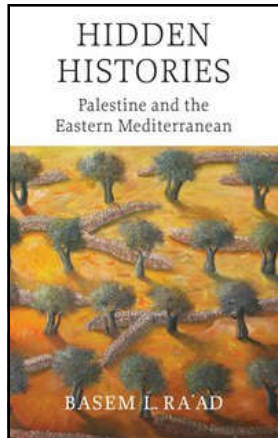
BOOK REVIEW

Hidden Histories

Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean

by Basem L. Ra'ad

Reviewed by Jane Adas



Paper, 2010, 272 pp.

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Prof. Basem L. Ra'ad of Al-Quds University in Jerusalem has written a book guaranteed to challenge what we in the West think we know. Because of Judeo-Christian assumptions and the politics of Zionism, the West has resisted dealing with the implications of archeological and textual discoveries over the last century and a half that call into question the Bible as a historical document.

Clay tablets discovered in the 19th century bearing the Epic of Gilgamesh contain the story of a flood almost identical to the one in Genesis, but written 2,000 years before the Bible was put together. The ruins of Ugarit, uncovered by a Syrian farmer in 1928, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, found by a shepherd boy in 1947, reveal that Yahweh (usually translated as "Lord" in the Old Testament) was one of many sons of the chief god Il/El (translated as "God" or "Most High"). In the Dead Sea Scrolls' Deuteronomy (32: 8-9), the Most High divides the people into nations according to the number of the sons of God and assigns one of them, Yahweh, to the Israelites. Cana'anite mythology includes prototypes of the Christ figure, such as virgin birth and resurrection after death.

The Ugaritic writing system is very close to ancient Cana'anite and to present-day Arabic, suggesting that the latter, rather than being a foreign import to the region with the Muslim conquest, is "the living storehouse and present reincarnation of all the

other ancient languages in a now Arabized region" (p. 96). On the other hand, Ra'ad claims there is no evidence for ancient Hebrew, only "an appropriation of square Aramaic which developed in later periods" (p. 43). Nor is there archeological evidence of Joshua's conquest of the "promised land" nor of Israelites sojourning in Egypt.

Cana'anite civilization flourished for several millennia in the region that is today greater Syria. It gave the world its first phonetic alphabet and its mythology influenced the Greek pantheon, where Ba'al became Zeus, as well as the three monotheistic religions. In the Old Testament, however, Canaan is an idealized place where people favored by God are given the right to take the land from its unworthy pagan inhabitants by any means possible. Such thinking underlies many colonizing projects, as in the Americas and South Africa.

What makes Zionist colonization unique is its claim of nativity and return to a promised land based on a supposed identity stretching continuously over 4000 years. Ra'ad, however, argues that distinctions must be made between Hebrews (an ancient designation from 'abiru - people who lived nomadic lives), Israelites (tribes presumably descended from Jacob), Jews of 2000 years ago (from Judea), and Jews of today. "For present-day Jews to claim these sorts of connections would be like Muslims from Indonesia, 2000 years from now, saying they descend from the prophet's line and claiming Mecca and Medina as their ancestral homeland" (114).

Zionism appropriates what is useful or convenient from Palestinian culture, such as food, embroidery, and sacred sites, and even claims that Israelites invented the terrace farming so typical of the landscape, while trying to make the Palestinians themselves invisible. "Zionism aims to dispossess and uproot the native Palestinians completely and to install itself as the native culture" (142). They are abetted in this by western belief, especially the fundamentalist brand, in Biblical "history."

Ra'ad carries his impressive erudition lightly. He even has a chapter on the "Cats of Jerusalem." He introduces his Epilogue with, "This is not my last chapter. It is the beginning of another book." Let us hope so, and as soon as possible, please.

Jane Adas covers the tri-state area for The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, and is on the Board of Directors of Americans for Middle East Understanding.

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She was a longtime AMEU supporter. Not just monetarily. Her moral force was that of a happy warrior, pushing for simple fairness. That she remembered AMEU in her will makes us grateful, certainly. But also proud that she thought so highly of our work.

Our condolences go out to her two sisters and numerous nieces and nephews.

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