A SHORT HISTORY OF EARLY HEBREW: CASES, ARTICLES, ALPHABETS AND SOME EARLY TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses some aspects of the early history of Hebrew, in the light of the view still held by many conservative or evangelical scholars that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Important questions to be answered are what alphabet could have been used at about 1200 B.C.E., what was the state of Northwest Semitic languages at that stage and how did Hebrew evolve from the older language strata. Important indications are the developments regarding cases, articles, vowel letters and the loss of certain consonants. For the discussion a number of Ugaritic, Hebrew, Aramaic and Phoenician texts are discussed. The language of the last part of the second millennium and the language of the Pentateuch clearly come from different eras.

INTRODUCTION

It is still maintained by some conservative Old Testament scholars that Moses was the author, or substantial author, of the first five books of the Old Testament, even though the possibility of later additions is accepted as well. This view can, for example, be found in two introductions to the Old Testament widely used at present. Hill and Walton (2000:64) are careful in stating their position. About Genesis they say that they are inclined to view Moses as the author. They regard Exodus as substantially the literary product of Moses (2000:83). Dillard and Longman (1994:47) talk about the substantial Mosaic authorship, while accepting the possibility of earlier sources and later additions.

If the idea of a substantial Mosaic authorship is accepted, a number of questions must be raised:

- At what time should this literary activity be dated?
- What language did he use?
- What alphabet did he use?

These questions are frequently not even raised by scholars accepting the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Since the documents as they were transmitted in the Hebrew Bible are written in Hebrew, it seems to be likely that the

assumption is that they were written in Hebrew, existing in the current form from before the time of the united monarchy. It is not the aim of this paper to go into detail with regard to a possible dating of the time and work of Moses. Just to provide a framework, diagram 1.4 of Hill and Walton (2000:56) can be taken as a useful starting-point. In this diagram they give four different dating systems, two with an early exodus, one with a late exodus, and a reconstructionist system. If Moses is to be regarded as the author, or substantial author, of the Pentateuch, the writing of (the major part of) these books, must be dated before the conquest. The two systems accepting an early exodus put the beginning of the conquest at 1406 B.C.E., whereas the proponents of the late exodus and the reconstructionist system put it at 1230. The early exodus results in a date of 1050 for the united kingdom, while the late exodus and the reconstructionist system would put it at 1025. Be that as it may, all these systems would result in a *terminus ad quem* for the work of Moses of not later than about the middle of the thirteenth century. The questions to be answered are then the following:

- What is known about the state and history of the family of Northwest Semitic languages from the middle of the thirteenth century until the time of the united kingdom?
- What is the situation with regard to alphabetic writing during this time?
- What can be deduced about the early form of Biblical Hebrew at this time?

In discussing these and related issues, a number of texts will be used as illustration.

NORTHWEST SEMITIC LANGUAGES

The division and classification of the Semitic languages have not reached a consensus, although many issues are not in dispute. Bennet (1998:20-21) states that seven branches of Semitic languages can be distinguished, namely Akkadian (with Assyrian and Babylonian as two sub-groups), Aramaic (including *inter alia* Syriac and Mandaic), Canaanite (with *inter alia* Ugaritic, Hebrew and Phoenician), North Arabian (Arabic, Safaitic), Ethiopic, Old South Arabian and Modern South Arabian. He says that as far as the division in major

groups is concerned, two main schemes appear. In both, East Semitic (Akkadian) is distinguished. Both distinguish in West Semitic two groups. The one groups Aramaic and Canaanite together as Northwest Semitic, with Ethiopic, Arabic, and Old and Modern South Arabian as the different languages in the second group. In the other classification West Semitic would have a Southern branch (with Ethiopic and Old and Modern South Arabian) and a Central branch (with Aramaic, Canaanite and Arabic). The main difference between the two schemes is the placement of Arabic.

Lipinski (2001) divides the languages into four groups, taking the long historical development of the languages into consideration. His four groups are North, East, West and South Semitic (2001:50). North Semitic consists of languages that were written in the third and second millenniums, such as Paleosyrian (e.g., Eblaitic), Amorite and Ugaritic. East Semitic consists of the different Akkadian dialects and West Semitic of Canaanite, Aramaic and Arabic, with South Arabian and Ethiopic as part of South Semitic. Lipinski's division is related to the second scheme of Bennet, with the addition of North Semitic for some of the older languages from before the first millennium B.C.E.

The first scheme has been proposed by *inter alia* Moscati (1969). He accepts the division into North-East, North-West and South-West Semitic (1969:4). What is, however, very important in his division of the languages is his treatment of the languages of the second millennium B.C.E. as a separate group within the Northwest Semitic languages (Moscati 1969:8-9). In this respect these languages do coincide to a certain extent with the North Semitic group of Lipinski, that also predates the first millennium. He includes Amorite and Ugaritic in this group, as well as the texts regarded as part of the Paleosyrian group of Lipinski, such as the proto-Sinaitic inscriptions and inscriptions from Byblos and Lachish. He refers to the "Canaanite" glosses in the Tell Amarna letters as well.

The main difference between Lipinski and Moscati is that Moscati regards this latter group as part of Northwest Semitic, on account of the many similarities between these languages and Aramaic, Canaanite and Phoenician. For the discussion of this paper the exact placement of this group is not that

important, except that whatever the division, the many agreements between this group from the second millennium and the Northwest Semitic languages from the first millennium shed light on the development of Hebrew as a distinct dialect of Canaanite. The distinction between Canaanite and Aramaic only becomes clear at the beginning of the first millennium. The period of the thirteenth century falls in the time before the development of the different languages in Northwest Semitic, specifically before the clear distinction between Canaanite and Aramaic. If Moses used a Northwest Semitic language, it should have been more closely related to Ugaritic and the other languages of the second millennium.

In his discussion of the relationship between the different languages that form part of the Northwest Semitic group, Blau (2010) distinguishes three different models used to describe the relationship, namely a family-tree model, a wave model and a list model. In the family-tree model, Amorite, Ugaritic, Canaanite and Aramaic are seen as branches of the Northwest Semitic group, while Canaanite consists of Old Canaanite (Amarna), Phoenician, Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite and Hebrew (Blau 2010:17). Because of problems implicit in the family-tree model, Blau discusses the wave model (2010:19-23). This model does not accept a linear development of the languages along the lines of the family-tree model. The wave model does not accept that when languages develop and become separate, they lose touch with one another. This may cause a late innovation to spread from one language to another through linguistic contact (Blau 2010:20). Because the different Semitic languages where spoken in the same broad geographical area, contact between them occurred throughout history (Blau 2010:21). Blau says that the position of Ugaritic remains problematic in the family-tree model. On the one hand it has close affinities with Hebrew, but it has features not shared with Canaanite, such as the shift from a long *a* to *o*. According to him, Ugaritic must be regarded as a separate language from Canaanite (Blau 2010:21). It is quite possible that the speakers of the languages in the Northwest Semitic group split off from the West-Semitic group, moving into the Fertile Crescent and that through contact with other languages, the Northwest Semitic group developed (Blau 2010:22). He accepts

that a model for the development of the different Semitic languages has to keep the probability of a common stock in mind, but also mutual contact and parallel development (Blau 2010:23). He thus proposes a list model, where the different languages are listed in the three main groups of languages, without the idea of a linear development (Blau 2010:23). What Blau does not consider is the proposal of Moscati to distinguish between the languages in the Northwest Semitic group in the second and the first millennium B.C. If one accepts this, you cannot put the different languages on the same historical level, but one must keep the historical development within Northwest Semitic languages in mind.

As far as the period since the onset of the first millennium is concerned, important work was done by Garr, in his discussion of the development of the languages in Syria-Palestine from 1000 B.C.E. up to 586 (Garr 1985). This is important as it sheds light on the situation of the different languages and dialects at the end of the period from the conquest until the establishment of the united kingdom. He uses a wide range of factors related to phonology, morphology and syntax to describe the differences and correspondences between the languages. He discusses 19 phonological phenomena, 25 morphological phenomena and 13 syntactical phenomena, with a summary in a table (Garr 1985:206-214). His description of the continuum of all these languages or dialects is very enlightening (Garr 1985:231). On the one side he places Standard Phoenician, with Aramaic on the other side. Old Byblian is close to Standard Phoenician, but with some ancient features. On the Aramaic side, the same is true of Samalian. On the continuum he starts with Standard Phoenician on the left, followed closely to the right by Ammonite, Edomite, Hebrew and Moabite. Aramaic is put on the far right, with the language of Deir Alla between Aramaic and Moabite. He does not discuss the features of Ugaritic, but they will be discussed in conjunction with the examples used from Ugarit.

ALPHABETIC WRITING AND EARLY HEBREW

The study of the development of the Northwest Semitic alphabet is still ongoing. Since the groundbreaking work on Semitic writing in general by

Driver (1948/1976) and on Early Hebrew orthography by Cross and Freedman (1952) new texts and new studies have continued to throw new light on the development of the alphabet used for Early Hebrew and other Northwest Semitic languages from the end of the second millennium B.C.E. In a recent edition of the *Biblical Archaeology Review* two articles related to the present study were published. One deals with the origin of the alphabet (Goldwasser 2010) and the other with a new text that could throw light on the early history of the Hebrew alphabet (Shanks 2010). Future finds could indeed bring new information to light that could aid the reconstruction of the development of the alphabet. It is interesting to note that Goldwasser wants to link the invention of the first alphabet to the Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions, with Canaanites as the inventors (Goldwasser 2010:42-43) and he dates this invention to the time of Amenhep III (1853-1808 B.C.E.). Driver (1976:141) already regarded these inscriptions as the missing link between the Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Phoenician alphabet. This is quite clear from his Figure 8, where he gives examples of the alphabet from the Egyptian hieroglyphs up to the Hebrew alphabet (Driver 1976:142-143).

In their work of 1952, Cross and Freedman studied all the early Phoenician, Aramaic, Moabite and Hebrew inscriptions available to them. This work laid the foundation for most of the work done in this regard since that time. They see the development of the consonantal alphabet as being under direct or indirect Egyptian influence and that it probably was developed in Phoenicia proper (Cross and Freedman 1952:9). The Phoenician alphabet in its early stages did not indicate contacted diphthongs and did not use any *matres lectionis*. There is also an absence of historical spellings (Cross and Freedman 1952:19). This alphabet was borrowed by the other languages and dialects. This alphabet was borrowed by the Aramaeans probably between the twelfth and tenth centuries B.C.E. (Cross and Freedman 1952:31).

In the development of the Hebrew alphabet, they distinguish two phases. The first one is up to the Gezer Calendar, at the end of the tenth century B.C.E., with the second phase from there onwards (Cross and Freedman 1952:45). For this paper the first phase is especially important. The Gezer Calendar will be

discussed in the final section. Cross and Freedman indicate that before the ninth century, the Hebrew alphabet was purely consonantal (1952:56). Vowel letters were first introduced in Aramaic, probably by the tenth century B.C.E. (Cross and Freedman 1952:58-59). Cross (1967) presents a good overview of the development of the Hebrew alphabet as well. At this stage he was not certain whether the Hebrew script developed from the Proto-Canaanite script from the thirteenth and twelfth century onwards, or whether this development was replaced by the Phoenician linear script in the eleventh and tenth centuries. Isserlin (2001:222) says that up to the ninth century there was little distinction between the script used in Syria, Phoenicia and Palestine. Lipinski (2001:93) has a nice table indicating the development of the different scripts used for Semitic languages, with an attempt to date all the developments. He sees the Hebrew and Aramaic alphabets as both developing from the Phoenician alphabet, which can be traced back to the Proto-Canaanite alphabet.

A recent survey of the origins and development of alphabetic writing is presented by Rollston (2010:11-18). The merger of consonants that reduced the Northwest Semitic alphabet to twenty two characters took place during the Late Bronze Age (Rollston 2010:18). The slant of the writing became standardized during this period at the end of the second millennium, and the direction of the writing became consistently right to left (Rollston 2010:19). This resulted in the transition of early alphabetic writing to what is known as early Phoenician, and this transition was completed at the middle of the eleventh century B.C. (Rollston 2010:19). The earliest inscriptions in this script date from the late eleventh century till the early ninth century (Rollston 2010:20). These include the Ahiram and Yehimilk inscriptions, discussed below.

A recent inscription that is very important for this discussion is the abecedary found at Tel Zayit. The inscription was found on July 15, 2005, at Tel Zayit, and represents the script use in the southern part of Canaan at the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E. (Tappy and McCarter 2008:ix). Tel Zayit is just north of Lachish. The inscription can be dated to the tenth century at the latest (Tappy 2008:1-4). The town was in the liminal zone between Judah and Philistia during the tenth century (Tappy 2008:37). The paleographic detail

of this inscription is discussed by McCarter (2008). He says that this inscription is important because it comes from the time when the Old Canaanite scripts of the second millennium were gone and the distinctive Hebrew script of the ninth century has not emerged fully (McCarter 2008:45). The influence of the Phoenician script in this time resulted in the alphabet being restricted to 22 signs, though Hebrew had 23 phonemes, by using the same sign for the s*in* and *shin* (McCarter 2008:45). On account of the distinct characteristics of this inscription, McCarter wants to call it a Proto-Hebrew script (McCarter 2008:49). He bases his theory mainly on the elongated forms of some letters in this inscription and in the Gezer Calendar (McCarter 2008:57).

Rollston (2008) disagrees with this theory of McCarter, and regards the script of this inscription as Phoenician. He discusses McCarter's view in detail and argues that the features mentioned by McCarter do not make a convincing case for not calling the writing Phoenician. Be this as it may, it is clear that this inscription is very important for the development of the Hebrew script, showing that any script that could have been used before the twelfth century for a document such as the Pentateuch could not have been written in the standard Hebrew script which only developed from the tenth century onwards.

A final interesting feature of the Tel Zayit inscription is the order of the consonants, as indicated by Sanders (2008:102). It has the *wāw* before the *hê*, the *zayin* before the *chet* and the *pe* before the *ayin*. The last order appears in other abecedary as well, and the *chet zayin* in Isbet Sartah as well. The *wāw-hê* order is, however, unique. Sanders says that this order has more in common with pre-Israelite orders than with Israelite orders (2008:102). This again points to the Tel Zayit inscription as being in a transitory phase. The order of the Hebrew alphabet, and the reasons for that order, has been discussed in detail by Schart (2003), but this is not important for the present paper.

EARLY BIBLICAL HEBREW?

The history of the Hebrew language has frequently been discussed, for example by Kutscher (1982) and Sáenz-Badillos (1993), to name just two extensive works. Recently special attention has been given to the relationship between

Standard Biblical Hebrew and Late Biblical Hebrew, such as in the anthology edited by Young (2003). In this discussion the Hebrew inscriptions played a significant role. It is not necessary to go into much detail about this in this discussion. Kutscher (1982:12) distinguishes three phases in Biblical Hebrew, namely Archaic, Standard and Late Biblical Hebrew. Archaic Biblical Hebrew is for him represented by the poetry of the Pentateuch and the early prophets. He discusses some of the features of this Archaic Hebrew (1982:79-80), such as the *hê* used for the suffix of the third person masculine singular and *mo* for third person plural. These forms include some archaic verbal and nominal forms as well, the use of the imperfect for all "tenses", *ze* or *zu* as a relative and some words that only occur in poetry. He thinks that the Canaanite glosses in the Amarna letters from the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries may represent the language spoken by the Israelites before the conquest (Kutscher 1982:77), but does not indicate how that language developed or was preserved in Egypt, where the Israelites probably spoke Egyptian.

Sáenz-Badillos (1993:34) mentions a few features of these Canaanite glosses that are important for this study, namely the reduction of diphthongs, the use of the vowel *e*, case endings, a *qal* passive, a *hiqtil* causative conjugation and a verbal system with retention of short unstressed final vowels and a perfect, jussive, indicative and a kind of subjunctive (on *–a*). He does not want to address the questions about the language of the patriarchs or the language of the Israelites by the time of the conquest.

In the following part of this paper a number of texts will be discussed that may shed some light on the subject of this paper. These texts include one short Ugaritic text (Ugaritica 5 number 6, cf. De Moor 1970), to illustrate the features of that language. For Hebrew the Gezer Calendar and the Siloam Tunnel inscriptions will be discussed, for Aramaic Zakir and Tell Dan and for Phoenician Ahiram and Yehimilk.

As far as the Ugaritic alphabet is concerned, it is well-known that it had three signs for the *aleph*, linked to a pronunciation as *a*, *i* and *u*. Gordon (1965:11) refers to six abecedaries in the Ugaritic texts, showing that the alphabet was learned in the following order:

a b g ḫ d h w z ḥ ṭ y k š l m ḏ n ẕ s ᶜ p ṣ q r ṯ ǵ t i u ś

This alphabet consists of 30 letters, whereas the alphabet used for Phoenician, Hebrew and Aramaic has 22 letters. All the different developments that resulted in the decrease in the number of letters will not be discussed here. A very complete discussion is presented by Blau (2010:25-48).

UGARITICA 5 NUMBER 6

This text has been discussed in detail by De Moor (1970). The three *alephs* in use in the Ugaritic alphabet are an important aid for reconstructing the phonemes of that language. In this text the following words can be noted: *'adn* (1), *'ilm* (2), *wyš'al* (3), *mal'akk* (11), *wm['a]kl* (15), *waṯr* and *'in* (16). In these instances the vocalization of the words with the *alephs* can be easily reconstructed on account of the Hebrew equivalents. Not one of these instances represents the final letter of a noun, but from other instances it is quite clear that Ugaritic had three cases for nouns, namely nominative, accusative and genitive on *u*, *a* and *i* respectively in the singular. An example of this is the well-known word for a throne, *ks'*. In the text 51 V 108 (numbering of Gordon 1965) it appears in the nominative as *ksu*. In 49 V 4 the genitive appears after a preposition: *lksi*. The accusative appears in 49 VI 28: *ksa*. Interesting in this regard is the particle *'in* in line 16. This is a contracted form of the negative particle known in Hebrew as well, and was probably pronounced as *'en* on account of the contraction. The same contraction occurs in *rḥ* in line 7. Look also at *bbt* in line 8 for another example.

Consonants retained here, but lost in Hebrew include ǵ (in line 1: *kymgǵy*) and ṯ (in line 3: *mṯpṭ*). An article does not appear in Ugaritic at all. What can also be noted is the use of the imperfect as a narrative tense (line 1: *ymgǵy*; also in line 3: *wyš'al*). What is also interesting to note is the form *wyᶜny.nn* in line 13. The verb is well-known in Hebrew, but here it retains the original final *y*, before the so-called energic suffix, that is separated from the verb itself by a word divider. Also noteworthy is the use of the preposition *l* instead of the genitive at the beginning of line 15 (*ldg*).

For the purpose of the development of the Northwest Semitic languages, a number of features mentioned above must be taken into consideration. These are the use of cases in nouns, the lack of an article, the contraction of diphthongs and the use of the imperfect as a narrative tense in the past.

GEZER CALENDAR

This calendar is usually dated in the tenth century, making it a contemporary of the Tel Zayit inscription. It was discovered in 1908. For a discussion, see Gibson (1971:1-4), Sanders (2008:100-102) and Donner and Röllig (1964:181-182). The script used for this text has been discussed already. As far as the language used is concerned, it has a number of very interesting features. Because it is, however, a list, it does not have many features that are important for this paper.

In line 1, the form ירחו must be regarded as an old construct ending of the dual, to be pronounced *–ew*. There are no examples of vowel letters in the old Hebrew inscriptions. The use of the dual is noteworthy, as in Biblical Hebrew the dual is only used for items occurring naturally in pairs. The noun for gathering (אסף) is well-known in Biblical Hebrew. In Exodus 23:15 it has the definite article, while here it is without the article. This is probably not significant. The verb for making hay (flax pulling, עצד) does not occur in Biblical Hebrew, but a cognate noun means an axe.

Note that for the plural noun at the end of line 4 (שערם) no *yôd* is used as a vowel letter for the long î of the plural. What is also very interesting to note, is the contraction of קץ, contrary to the Biblical Hebrew form of קיץ.

In this text the possibility of an old case ending is noteworthy, as well the fact that vowel letters are not used and the example of contraction of a diphthong.

SILOAM TUNNEL

The inscription found in the Siloam tunnel is much younger than the Gezer Calendar, and is used to illustrate the development in Hebrew over a period of more than 200 years. For a discussion, see Gibson (1971:21-23) and Donner

and Röllig (1964:186-188). The language of this inscription is closer to Standard Biblical Hebrew, but there are still a number of unique features.

The first (reconstructed) verb is תמת. This is a perfect third person feminine form of a geminate verb. The ending in *t* is strange, as the normal form in Standard Biblical Hebrew would be תמה. Although this is a reconstructed form, the ending in *t* is supported by the verb היתּ in line 3. The normal form for this verb in SBH would have been היתה. The ending in *t* is the older form, and the one retained in Aramaic. The article appears regularly in this inscription. There are examples of contraction of *aw* to *o* not taking place in line 1 and 5. At the end of line 1 the *yôd* as vowel letter does not appear in two plurals (reconstructed, החצבם and מנפם). There are more examples of this, twice in line 2, in line 3, twice in line 4, etc. In line 2 a *wāw* as vowel letter does also not appear in *qol* and also not in *yom* in line 3. Line 2 probably has an example of an imperfect with *wāw conversive* (וישמע). Note also the suffix at רעו, instead of רעהו. Although there are some examples of older forms, the language is much closer to Standard Biblical Hebrew.

The third person feminine perfect in *t* is noteworthy, as well as the regular use of the article. Vowel letters are not used, the imperfect with *wāw conversive* appears. There is one example of an older form of a pronominal suffix as well.

ZAKIR

This inscription is fairly long, in three sections with a total of 47 lines. It dates from the early ninth century and is therefore a bit younger than the Gezer Calendar, but also older than the Siloam Tunnel inscription. The inscription is discussed by Gibson (1975:6-17). The following remarks can be made about the language of this inscription.

The article is consistently used, with an example of a noun in the singular in line A1 (נצבא) and a noun in the plural in line A9 (מלכיא). The relative is *zi*, and not *di*, as for example in the book of Daniel. Vowel letters are not used, as can be seen from examples in i.a. line A2 (אש) and the absolute plural in line A5 (מלכן). Because of the fact that vowels letters are not used, the places where a *wāw* and a *yôd* are used as consonants at the end of syllables must be seen as

having diphthongs, for example in the name of the God Baalshamayn (A2) and in the *haph^{c}el* in line A4 (הוחד). Note the use of two genitives after one noun in the construct, for the king of Hamath and Lu'ath (A1). Note the use of the *haph^{c}el* in lines A3, 4 and 10. Note also the use of the word divider between a noun and a pronominal suffix in line A9, the assimilation of a *nun* in line A11 (ואשא) and the use of the imperfect as a narrative tense twice in line A11 (ואשא and ויענני). Gibson (1975:15) says that this may be a rare remnant of an earlier *yaktul* form with a past meaning. This verbal form does still occur in Akkadian. In line 6 the word for 6 is spelled with a *shin* in the middle, against the t of later Aramaic.

Vowel letters are not used, but the article is used consistently. Contraction of diphthongs does not occur. The imperfect is used as a narrative tense as well.

TELL DAN

This inscription has been dated to the ninth or eighth century, and is more or less from the same time as Zakir. The excavators dated it to the middle of the ninth century. The inscription is famous for the reference to *bytdwd* in line 9, with a heated debate whether that is a reference to the House of David or not. This is not the place to enter into that debate (cf. e.g., Schniedewind 1996:80-81). For this discussion the version of the text in Schniedewind (1996) was used.

In line 1 the verb (גזר) is a perfect used for a narrative in the past. However, in line 3 (וישכב), and 6 (ואקתל) an imperfect with *wāw* is used in this way (cf. Schniedewind 1996:81-82). The verb יסק shows the well-known assimilation of the *l* to the *s*. Look also at יהך in line 3. The reconstruction of line 2 has a *hitpe^{c}el* infinitive with ב used to indicate time (בהתלחמה). Contraction has not taken place, as can be seen from examples in line 2 (עלוה) and 3 (אבהוה), though reconstructed. In line 4 ויהלך should be ויהמלך, a *haph^{c}el* "to make king". In verse 4 ארק (land) appears with the ק. At the end of line 4 the rare *nota accusativi* אית appears; also in line 7, 8. Look at קתל with a ת, not ט, in line 6. The *yôd* as vowel letter does not appear in מלכן in line 6. In line 9 and 10 a noun is separated from a pronominal suffix by a word divider.

These notes demonstrate the Old Aramaic character of this inscription, showing that the division between Canaanite and Aramaic was settled at this time, as can be seen from the Zakir inscription as well. The use of the article is important in this regard, as well as other typical Aramaic features, as indicated above.

AHIRAM

This inscription is the oldest clearly legible one in Phoenician. The inscription on a coffin dates from the latter part of the eleventh century, making it earlier than any of the Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions discussed above. This text is discussed by Gibson (1982:12-16). For the coffin the well-known word **ארן** is used. As it does not have a vowel letter, it is not sure whether the a-o shift has already occurred. It does not have an article. There are no articles in this inscription, probably confirming the early date. *Z* is used for the relative, as in some older Hebrew texts. In line 1 *h* is used as pronominal suffix to a noun and a verb. **בעלם** in line 1 may be an abbreviation for **עלם בית**. Again there is no vowel letter in **עלם**. In line 2 the masculine plural is on *m*, as in Hebrew, not Aramaic, and it does not have a vowel letter *yôd*. In line 2 the verb **עלי** is spelled with the original *yôd* at the end (probably *'alaya*), not the later *h*. **ויגל** in line 2 is an imperfect with *wāw conversive*, with the final consonant (probably *yôd*) dropped, as in later Hebrew. The next two verbs are both with infix *t* (**תחתסף** and **תהתפך**), something occurring in earlier Ugaritic (and later Arabic), but not in Hebrew. This again indicates the date of this inscription. **ימח** in line 2 is a *nip^{c}al* jussive, for a wish.

The age of this inscription makes it very important. It is clearly Canaanite (Phoenician) and not Aramaic, but still a language in transition from the stage represented by Ugaritic. The lack of the definite article is important in this regard.

YEHIMILK

This inscription comes from the middle of the tenth century, the same time as the Tel Zayit ostracon. The inscription contains a number of features very

similar to the previous one, but also a number of new features. The text is discussed by Gibson (1982:17-19).

The relative *z* is used here just as in the previous inscription (line 1). The word בת at the beginning of line 1 shows the contraction of the diphthong ay. This happens with the name בעלשמם as well in line 3.The pronoun האת at the beginning of line 2 (*hu'at*) is related to the Ugaritic form *hwt*. The next verb is a *pi^{c}el* of a verb חוי, with the *y* at the end, not the later *h*. It means "to restore". The last word in line 2 has the definite article, the earliest occurrence of this in Phoenician (הבתם). In the remainder of the inscription it is omitted at places where one would expect it. Gibson calls the form יארך in line 3 a *yip^{c}il* jussive, but it can just as well be regarded as the normal form of the *ap^{c}el*, or equal to the Hebrew *hip^{c}il*. The vowel letter *yôd* for the plural is not used (קדשם, line 5). ימת in line 5 is a feminine plural of יום. Both the masculine and feminine occur in Phoenician. The feminine appears in Hebrew as well, but rarely. The *w* is not used as a vowel letter for the *o* here. In the last line there are two words where one would expect a *yôd* at the end (לפן and אל). It must be the case with אל, as a noun in the construct plural on account of the plural adjective קדשם at the end.

This inscription attests to the further development of Phoenician, in many respects in the same direction as Hebrew. The use of the article is one important feature in this text.

CONCLUSION

The discussion above and the texts studied show something of the development that took place in the Northwest Semitic languages from the last part of the second millennium B.C.E. and the early first millennium. This development includes the loss of cases from about the tenth century, the development of the different articles in Aramaic and Canaanite from about the same time onwards and the differentiation between Canaanite and Aramaic with regard to the development of a system of less consonants than in Ugaritic, with the different developments in the two families, as indicated above. From this it is quite clear that the state of the language before the tenth century is not found in the largest

part of the Hebrew of the Pentateuch, with perhaps the exception of some very early poems. The language of the last part of the second millennium and the language of the Pentateuch clearly come from different eras. The same is true of the script used in the Old Testament and the period of about 1200 B.C. That time is almost two hundred years before the rise of the oldest Phoenician alphabet, from which the ancient Hebrew script developed.

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