

ABHANDLUNGEN
DES DEUTSCHEN PALÄSTINA-VEREINS

Herausgegeben von
HERBERT NIEHR und DIETER VIEWEGER

BAND 37

2008

HARRASSOWITZ VERLAG · WIESBADEN
IN KOMMISSION

“From Ebla to Stellenbosch”

Syro-Palestinian Religions and the Hebrew Bible

Edited by
Izak Cornelius and Louis Jonker

2008

HARRASSOWITZ VERLAG · WIESBADEN
IN KOMMISSION

Table of Contents

List of Contributors	VI
Preface	VII
IZAK CORNELIUS	
From Ebla to Stellenbosch	1
HERBERT NIEHR	
Phoenician Cults in Palestine after 586 B.C.E.	13
CHRISTIAN FREVEL	
Gifts to the Gods? Votives as Communication Markers in Sanctuaries and other Places in the Bronze and Iron Ages in Palestine/Israel	25
JAQUELINE S. DU TOIT	
“These loving fathers”: Infanticide and the Politics of Memory	49
ALEC BASSON	
Death as Deliverance in Job 3:11–26	66
ERHARD BLUM	
Israels Prophetie im altorientalischen Kontext. Anmerkungen zu neueren religions- geschichtlichen Thesen	81
LOUIS JONKER	
The Disappearing Neḥushtan: The Chronicler’s Reinterpretation of Hezekiah’s Reformation Measures	116
HERMANN-JOSEF STIPP	
Who is Responsible for the Deluge? Changing Outlooks in the Ancient Near East and the Bible	141
DIRK HUMAN	
Psalm 82: God Presides in a Deflated Pantheon to Remain the Sole Just Ruler	154
Addenda: Map of Syro-Palestine	
Figures (referred to in the articles of CORNELIUS, NIEHR and FREVEL)	
Tafel: Wandinschrift vom <i>Tell Dēr Allā</i> (Kombination I)	

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen
Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet
über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet
at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

For further information about our publishing program consult our
website <http://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de>

© Deutscher Verein zur Erforschung Palästinas e.V., 2008
This work, including all of its parts, is protected by copyright.
Any use beyond the limits of copyright law without the permission
of the publisher is forbidden and subject to penalty. This applies
particularly to reproductions, translations, microfilms and storage
and processing in electronic systems.
Printed on permanent/durable paper.
Typesetting: NORBERT RABE, Tübingen
Printing and binding: Memminger MedienCentrum Druckerei und Verlags-AG
Printed in Germany

ISSN 0173-1904
ISBN 978-3-447-05776-9

From Ebla to Stellenbosch

By Izak Cornelius
(University of Stellenbosch)

Summary

This introductory chapter paints the broad landscape of Syro-Palestinian religions by looking at selected cities and religious sites with the emphasis on the visual or iconography: Ebla, Emar, Ugarit, *Qatna*, Byblos, Hazor, the Philistine cities, *Horvat Qitmīt* and *Ain Hāsēvā*, *Tell Dēr Allā*, Arad and *Kuntillet Aḡrūd*. Some conclusions are drawn concerning the new picture of ancient Syro-Palestinian and especially ancient Israelite/Hebrew religion which has been emerging from the information gleaned from the sites under discussion: a diversity of religions functioning on different societal levels and developing and changing over time; and a pre-exilic polytheistic Israel which included a goddess and an iconic cult.

1. Introduction

The aim of this introductory chapter is to “paint” the broad landscape of Syro-Palestinian religions, and this “artistic” metaphor I am going to apply in the almost literal sense of the word with my emphasis on the visual or iconography. I shall be taking you on a tour of selected cities and religious sites – from the north of Syria down into Sinai, covering nearly three millennia of religious development and meeting different peoples and cultures, goddesses and gods. Limited by time, the choice of sites is highly subjective and incomplete; and for the chosen few I can only provide *selected* information and case studies, with references to the bibliography and only include *some* pictures¹. This is our itinerary of the selected sites: Ebla, Emar, Ugarit, *Qatna*, Byblos, Hazor, Philistine cities, *Horvat Qitmīt* and *Ain Hāsēvā*, *Tell Dēr Allā*, Arad and finally *Kuntillet Aḡrūd*.

Compared to Egyptian religion, it is difficult to give a balanced and continuous picture of Syro-Palestinian religion, which is like a jigsaw puzzle with bits and pieces, but as a result of new discoveries a clearer picture is slowly emerging².

I decided not to go back to the beginning, leaving out the enigmatic clay statues from *Ain Gazāl* in Jordan (7000–5500 B.C.E.) – deities or ancestors?³. Then I struggled with

¹ The paper at the Kolleg is published here as it was delivered, with slight changes and the addition of an *updated* bibliography. The paper included seventy images in MS Powerpoint. In this publication only references are given, with a few selected illustrations.

² For overviews see for Palestine/Israel: COLLINS 2004; DEVER/GITIN (*ed.*) 2003 Part II; NIEHR 2001; SMITH 2004a; 2004b; STOLZ 1997; ZEVIT 2001; for Syria HAIDER *et al.* (*ed.*) 1996, 13–136; HUTTER 1996, 116–182 and WRIGHT 2004 and for the broader region NIEHR 1998 and 2003 and now KRATZ/SPIECKERMANN (*ed.*) 2006. As far as the iconography of religions is concerned: CORNELIUS 2004b; KEEL/UEHLINGER 2001; LEWIS 2005; UEHLINGER 1997 and 2004 and now the *IPIAO* series of SCHROER/KEEL 2005. For archaeology and religion in general cf. NAKHAI 2001 and for the temples ALBERS 2004; WERNER 1994 and ZWICKEL 1994. Cf. for the different sites the entries in AKKERMANS/SCHWARTZ 2003; LEHMANN 2002; MEYERS (*ed.*) 1997 and STERN (*ed.*) 1993; also NUNN 2000 and ZEVIT 2001, Chap. 3.

³ SCHROER/KEEL 2005, 62–63.96: Katalog 45 with literature.

the question of where to end – and you will notice that I am not really going to deal with the period after the first destruction of Jerusalem in the 6th century B.C.E.⁴ In any case, for the exilic period we have another source – the Hebrew Bible!

2. From Ebla to Phoenicia

We start in the north of Syria and 25th century B.C.E. Syrian Ebla (*Tell Mardih*)⁵. The massive tell of 60ha. has an acropolis and a lower city⁶. In the archives were found thousands of clay tablets, some also informing us on religious practices: temples, offerings, feasts, incantations. The four city gates were named after gods: Dagan, Baal, Rashpu (Reshef) and Haddu. Other well-known West-Semitic deities we can list are Kamish (later Chemosh), and Malik (later Milcom). Decorated basins (0.6m high) from the beginning of the 2nd millennium were found in the cella of temple D and in temple B, and depict banquet scenes⁷.

We travel east to the land of Ashtata to Emar (*Tell Meskene*) on the Middle Euphrates ca. 1340–1190 B.C.E. with its 1500 (400 religious) texts⁸. Rituals describe the festival of the installation of the priestess of the storm god, but also of the goddess Astarte⁹. Here temples dedicated to Baal and Astarte were found. A 12.9cm terracotta relief depicts a horned enthroned deity holding some objects – perhaps it was used in the household cult or as a votive¹⁰. A seal impression on a clay tablet shows a menacing god, holding a bull, which links it with some weather god¹¹.

Then we go to the northern Mediterranean coast to the royal city of Ugarit (*Rās eš-Šamra*), a tell of 20ha. – including the finds at the harbour Minet el-Beida and Ras Ibn Hani – it is still the richest source on Syro-Palestinian religion with about 1000 texts, religious buildings and effigies from the period 1500–1185¹². Whereas the well-known narrative myths and legends inform us on matters such as the weal and woe and rise of Baal, the rituals, prayers, votives and sacrifices describe the actual daily *practice* of religion. The pantheon of deities is known: the chief deity El, the young protagonist Baal, the chief goddess Athirat, the sun goddess Shapsh, Baal's companion Anat, and Yam – Baal's adversary to name a few¹³. There are four temples: the ones dedicated to El (others say Dagan) and Baal on the acropolis, the Rhyta-temple and the royal temple¹⁴. The cult of the dead, including the royal one, can be constructed from the tombs, but we also have ritual texts to link it with, which is unique¹⁵. There is a treasure trove of

iconography with depictions of various deities¹⁶, for Baal the “Baal au foudre” (Fig. 1) and Mami stela, a bronze statuette covered with gold of an enthroned blessing figure of El, a stela of a seated blessing figure (another El or perhaps even Baal?), a calcite statuette of an armless deified king; bronzes of a blessing goddess (the elusive Athirat?). A horned-winged goddess on a bull on a cylinder seal is traditionally called Anat, but perhaps Athirat as the mistress of the animals is not impossible?¹⁷. Objects related to the cult are the beautiful golden bowl and patera, which might have been used in the cult of Baal¹⁸.

We go down to *Qatna (el-Mišrefe)* on the Orontes, an old site¹⁹, but with recent discoveries made by archaeologists (including a team from Tübingen)²⁰. Of particular importance are the 18th-century B.C.E. tombs, which (as in Ugarit) were accessible from the royal palace; and physical evidence of the royal ancestral cult: statues of the ancestors, a sarcophagus, with the bones of the deceased kings, even the benches on which the living sat when they dined with the dead in the *kispu* feast²¹.

But we have to move on and leave Syria and head for ancient *Phoenicia*, at the same time crossing over into the 1st millennium or the Iron Age. The problem with Phoenician religion is that we have no detailed contemporary mythology as, for example, in the case of Ugarit²². Texts are mostly dedications on stelae or inscriptions as on the sarcophagi of Tabnit and Eshmunazzar²³, where the goddess Astarte is mentioned²⁴. She was the chief goddess of this region and her consort was Baal. At the ancient city of Byblos French archaeologists excavated temples for the god Reshef, the lady Baalat and the temple of the obelisks, all dating from the Middle Bronze Age²⁵. From the beginning of the 1st millennium dates the sarcophagus of Ahiram king of Byblos – important for the Phoenician text on it, but there are also the king on the cherub throne and worshippers²⁶. Another goddess of Byblos is the “lady of Byblos” (*ba'alat Gubla*) who is depicted on the stela of king Yehawmilk from the 5th century²⁷.

3. From Hazor to Sinai

We venture southward into Palestine to Late Bronze Hazor²⁸. There we find the 13th-century temple in Area H looking north, with the detail of the “Holy of Holies” and the cultic objects found in it – vessels, libation table and basalt altar. From the same area

⁴ See the essay by NIEHR in this volume and NUNN 2000.

⁵ MATTHIAE 1977; XELLA/POMPONIO 1998.

⁶ GERSTER/WARTKE 2003, Abb. 84–87.

⁷ ZIFFER 2005, 145–147, Figs. 16–17.

⁸ CHAVALAS (ed.) 1996.

⁹ COS 1.22–27.

¹⁰ KOHLMAYER/STROMMINGER (ed.) 1982, 157. Wrongly described as coming from Ugarit in KINET (ed.) 2002, 55.

¹¹ CORNELIUS 1994, Pl. BR4.

¹² For an overview of the culture and religion cf. CORNELIUS/NIEHR 2004 (with many photographs and bibliographies).

¹³ CORNELIUS/NIEHR 2004, 43.

¹⁴ CORNELIUS/NIEHR 2004, 63–68.

¹⁵ CORNELIUS/NIEHR 2004, 79–86.

¹⁶ CORNELIUS/NIEHR 2004, Abb. 67–96.

¹⁷ CORNELIUS 2004a, 30–31.

¹⁸ CORNELIUS/NIEHR 2004, 74 with Abb. 41 and 118–119b.

¹⁹ MESSNIL DU BUISSON 1935.

²⁰ PRÄLZNER 2006; cf. at <http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/uni/qvo/highlights/h23-syrien.html> and <http://www.qatna.org/index.html>.

²¹ Cf. NIEHR 2006a and the popular overview of LANGE 2005 and at <http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0502/feature6/index.html>.

²² Cf. LIPINSKI 1995.

²³ KAI 13–14 = COS 2.56–57.

²⁴ BONNET 1996.

²⁵ DUNAND 1968.

²⁶ ANEP 456–459; cf. now NIEHR 2006b; text KAI 1 = COS 2.55.

²⁷ ANEP 477; KAI 10 = COS 2.32.

²⁸ YADIN *et al.* 1958–89; 1972; 1975; cf. KEEL/UEHLINGER 2001, 56–60, Abb. 44–47.