

University of Surrey

University Lecture

**Libraries, Languages and
the Interpretation of
the Past**

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LIBRARIES ...

INTERPRETATION ...

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LIBRARIES, LANGUAGES AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PAST

Mr W.G. Simpson

Vice-Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen. I make no apology for beginning with a slide of the University Library because, when I was invited to give a University Lecture I felt duty bound as Librarian to talk about University Libraries and their problems, which are very real and very pressing. It seemed too good an opportunity to miss given a largish and fairly captive audience. I was assured, however, by colleagues and friends that they would not come if I insisted on going on at great length about matters of finance and policy on what is intended to be an enjoyable and, I hope, stimulating occasion and have bowed to their wishes in agreeing to devote the major part of my lecture to my area of academic interest, the languages and cultures of the ancient Near East.

I must still insist, though, on getting in a word for libraries since, without them, my lecture today would have been impossible for two reasons. The first is that it is the written records of the ancient Near East, many of them preserved in ancient libraries and archives such as those of Ebla, Nuzu and Mari which make our understanding of man's earliest literate civilizations so much richer than that of say the megalith builders of Western Europe, who were roughly contemporary. The second is that like all researchers in the humanities I am compelled to depend on libraries as my laboratory. Without them serious research in my field could not be carried out.

Indeed, in preparing this lecture, I have become particularly aware of the effects of the lack of adequate local library facilities in one's own field. Let me explain. Before I came to Surrey I had always studied or worked at universities where my subject was taught and researched and which had good and even outstanding collections in Near Eastern Studies. Here, through no fault of the University, which understandably and no doubt correctly has decided that Near Eastern Studies are not an appropriate discipline for a technological university to pursue, our library collections in my field are non-existent and I am compelled to rely on the resources of others, whether through inter-library loan or by visiting their libraries. Either process is time consuming, frustrating and sometimes costly. Sadly, in my field, this situation will increasingly apply

even to those universities which have traditionally supported orientalist collections for, since the late 1970s orientalist provision has declined dramatically even in modern material because of inadequate funding. This is exemplified by the fact that the British Library, our major national resource, has had to reduce its coverage of Japanese official publications by 80% at a time when the demand by industry for information based on these sources is growing rapidly.¹ At Surrey we would like to buy *Japanese Technical Abstracts*, a major new monthly publication which abstracts in English all major Japanese scientific and technical periodicals, but we cannot afford to do so.

This decline in Library support for oriental studies must be seen in the context of a publishing explosion in many countries and most notably the People's Republic of China. Even level funding in recent years would have been inadequate to keep pace with this explosion and reduced funding has been disastrous. It may be argued that shortcomings in individual libraries can be overcome by the pooling of resources so that individual local collections are seen as part of a single national resource. This is a sensible approach but sadly is also frustrated by lack of funds. The *Union Catalogue of Asian Publications*, to which over twenty libraries originally contributed, was a major finding tool which enabled libraries to locate orientalist items quickly and effectively for their users. Sadly, in 1985, it also became a victim of funding cuts after twenty years of existence.

Orientalism may be seen as marginal and, indeed, is marginal at Surrey. I have used it as an example because it is my field and therefore the one in which I personally rather than professionally feel the effects of inadequate library provision most keenly. It is also an area of increasing political importance with the resurgence of the Islamic countries and of vast economic and industrial importance because of the burgeoning industrial societies of the Far East. More than this it is a paradigm of what is happening to a greater or less extent in all subject areas.

I hope that you will forgive me here, for I intend for a few minutes to talk of the recent history and of what appear to be the immediate prospects of the university library system in this country.

The purchasing power of university libraries has fallen dramatically since 1980/81. Statistics available up to 1983/84 clearly show the damaging trend, for which there are several reasons:²

1. Loss of income in real terms following the loss suffered by the universities themselves. The annual report of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals shows a fall of net income in real terms of 17% between 1979/80 and 1984/85.
2. The table shows that although universities tried to protect their libraries, the library share of university expenditure fell overall by 6% between 1980/81 and 1983/84. Such evidence as is available suggests that this share has diminished further since 1984.

	Total Univ. Expenditure £000	Total Library Expenditure £000	Library Share %	Fall in Library share %
1980/81	1,555,551	64,485	4.15	
1983/84	1,975,957	77,103	3.90	6

Source: *University Statistics*, Vol. 3.

3. This is compounded by a continuing high rate of inflation in monograph and, especially, periodical prices. This rate is much higher than for most other university costs and is certainly well above the general rate of inflation. Periodical prices, as the table shows, are a clear example as well as being difficult to deal with because the periodicals themselves simply carry on coming until the supplier is told to stop.

Average Periodical Prices, 1981 - 86

	£	% change
1981	52.41	
1982	64.00	+ 22.0
1983	72.82	+ 13.8
1984	84.73	+ 16.4
1985	100.81	+ 19.0
1986	110.18	+ 9.3

Source: *Library Association Record* from figures supplied by Blackwell's.

4. The generally weak position of sterling in recent years, especially against the US dollar. This again creates particular difficulties in relation to the purchase of periodicals, since 65% -70% of university library periodicals come from overseas.

5. Surrey and other technological university libraries have been hit particularly hard because prices for material in science and technology have risen considerably faster than other prices.

The result of all these factors working together is the picture of inadequate stock and reduced services which is to some degree apparent in every university library in Britain. The figures give an idea of the range of reductions involved:

Reductions: Acquisitions and Staff, 1979/80 - 1984/85

	Periodicals	Monographs	Academic Related Staff	Clerical Staff
Percentage of Libraries Cutting	75%	77%	79%	75%
Predominant Range of Cuts	4% - 13%	19% - 27%	12% - 19%	9% - 16%

Source: *SCONUL Survey of Funding Cuts*

These figures are even worse when seen in the context of the increased volume of publication over the past seven years. We are buying less as more becomes available.

So what of the future? Prediction is hampered by the lack of recent statistics but a document³ produced by the Standing Conference of National and University Libraries suggests that in financial terms libraries are entering a period similar to that between 1981 and 1984 when we were faced with high inflation in the price of material at a time when our incomes were diminishing in real terms. Recent figures for Library costs suggest that inflation is slowing down:

Index of Library Costs: Books, Periodicals, Binding.

	Index	% Change
May 1981	108.3	
July 1982	127.2	+ 17.5
July 1983	144.6	+ 13.7
July 1984	168.7	+ 16.7
July 1985	184.0	+ 9.1

Source: *Index of University Costs, 1981-85*

from these we see an increase of only 9.1% for 1984/85. It remains to be seen if this trend will continue, though past evidence back to 1974 at least, suggests that it will not, as does more recent evidence for 1985/86 and for the current year.

Obviously all kinds of scenarios are possible but the best evidence available is the experience of library funding and the fall in purchasing power between 1981 and 1984. Both are shown in the following table in relation to spending on books, periodicals and binding:

Expenditure on Books, Periodicals and Binding in Cash Terms and Real Terms

	Expenditure Actual £m	Expenditure at 1980/81 Prices £m	% of 1980/81 Expenditure in Real Terms
1980/81	23.6	23.6	100
1981/82	24.2	20.6	87
1982/83	27.1	20.3	86
1983/84	30.2	19.3	82

Source: *SCONUL Annual Report, 1986*

Here the significant figures are those in columns 2 and 3, which show a reduction in purchasing power over three years of nearly 20%. If SCONUL is right and we are now entering a similar period the implications are alarming since all of the supposed fat we were able to lose in the early 80s has now gone. It really does seem to be a case of "If you can keep your head when all around you are losing theirs, you don't understand the situation", (with apologies to Kipling). It goes without saying, of course, that at Surrey we shall endeavour both to understand the situation and to keep our heads.

What then will we do? We shall adopt a number of measures, none of which either singly or in unison with the others, will solve the problem as effectively as would adequate funding. But they will, with the additional funding we are to have from the UGC over the next three years, enable us at least to contain the worst effects of the combination of diminishing resources and high inflation. Our response will include further development and expansion of the co-operative arrangements we have built up with neighbouring institutions to share resources in books and periodicals.

cals and so maximise the effectiveness of all our collections. It will include constructive thinking about the nature of our collections in the light of the demands made upon them with greater emphasis on present and future needs at the expense of historical patterns - particularly in relation to periodicals. In some cases it may involve a shift in policy from one of holding to one of access. And it will, of course, include full exploitation of electronic means of information provision, though there are limitations and dangers here to which I shall refer later. Ultimately we may find that, given our limited resources, we are pursuing irreconcilable objectives: as a traditional library for our undergraduates and as an information centre for our academic staff, postgraduates and commercial users. If this happens then certain fascinating questions about the nature and *raison d'être* not just of the Library but of the whole University confront us. I shall not go into these today because they would form a lecture in themselves.

I promised at the start of this lecture that it would not be entirely devoted to the University Library but in a sense the whole lecture is concerned with libraries and their contents. The lecture is only possible because at various times and in various places over the past four or five thousand years people have bothered to preserve historical and administrative documents and literary and religious texts on clay tablets, on stone, on papyrus, on parchment and on paper. Some of these texts have been cherished and passed on because of the religious traditions they embody. Others have survived fortuitously because they were on durable materials like stone and clay or because they were lost in conditions, such as the sands of Egypt, where they could be preserved until rediscovered. All have come down to us because they were believed at some time to be worth keeping, even temporarily, for future reference. Those who preserved them sometimes deliberately and sometimes unwittingly created the first libraries and in so doing gave us the knowledge of a world which preceded and in some ways is very different from our own, but which underlies and sometimes explains much that we take for granted today.

I should like, before I launch into the main body of my lecture, to describe briefly one of these libraries or archives, and to give you some idea of its content. Other sites will be referred to but **Ebla** is the most recent spectacular discovery and excavation in the Near East. The site is the modern Tell Mardikh, forty km south west of Aleppo in Syria. The name Ebla was previously known from cuneiform texts but it was only

after the excavation of the site and the decipherment of the language, which is an archaic form of West Semitic, closely akin to Biblical Hebrew that it was realised that Ebla had been the centre of a major empire covering Syria and Palestine in the middle to late third millennium BC. Ebla contained a huge palace archive, holding about fifteen thousand inscribed clay tablets. These were stored as if in a modern library on wooden shelves, filed on end for efficient use of space and for ease of retrieval. They were baked in the fire which destroyed the palace about 2250 BC and are all, because of this, in perfect condition and a monument to the empire of whose destruction the fire was a part. The archive contained mainly administrative material relating to economics and trade in a range of commodities such as textiles, timber and copper but there are also royal decrees, diplomatic correspondence and a few literary texts including creation and flood stories, and even Eblaite/Sumerian dictionaries. Eblaite personal names are of particular interest in relation to the Old Testament for reasons which will become clear later.

It is about the Old Testament that I intend to talk specifically this evening because this is the collection, one might almost say library, of oriental writings which has had the most impact on the world we live in. And the Old Testament is oriental in a way that the New Testament is not. It is written in two Semitic languages, Hebrew and Aramaic, where the New Testament is written in Indo-European Greek. Its cultural background is that of the world of the ancient Near East, of which the Hebrews were in every sense a part, whereas that of the New Testament is part Semitic and part Hellenistic, with the setting moving from Palestine in the Gospels and the early part of Acts, to the wider Graeco - Roman world in later Acts and the Epistles. I believe that the Old Testament and the world in which it came into being are worthy of serious study for their own sake out of simple intellectual curiosity but also because of their impact on our world, and this, I assume, is what will concern us most in this University.

I do not propose to talk about the religious message of the Old Testament except incidentally since I understand that University Lectures are not intended as occasions for sermons. The two extreme views of this message may be illustrated on the one hand by those in our society who talk of "The idiocy of basing our code of ethics on the traditions of a Bronze Age tribe" and on the other by the professor who always began his first year Hebrew class with the words "Gentlemen, this is the language which God spoke". My own view, for what it is worth, approximates more closely to that of the professor.

What then do we owe to the Hebrews and to the Old Testament? The first and most obvious thing for religious believers, whether we are Jews, Christians or Muslims, is our religion, for it was the Hebrews among all the peoples of the ancient Near East who came to recognise that God is one, that he stands behind and sustains all creation and that he acts in it as the God of History. The Old Testament creation narratives are almost agnostic in their simple assertion that God created all things *ex nihilo*, when compared with, say, the Babylonian creation story *Enuma Elish*. This is really the story of how Marduk became chief god of the Babylonian pantheon and, after detailed accounts of genealogies and battles among the gods, devotes about one sixth of its total length to the story of the creation. The Hebrew prophets constantly assert that God is interested and active in the affairs of his people and the stories of the patriarchs are full of accounts of his special provision. It has been said that Judaism and Christianity are simply two different understandings of the message of the Old Testament and Islam might be seen as a reinterpretation of that message. Spiritually we are all Semites.

But what of the non-believer? Has the Old Testament still an importance if its religious message is not accepted? It has, in two senses. The first is in its ethical and social concern which may be seen, depending on our point of view, as stemming either from a divine imperative or from the social cohesiveness of a small people struggling for survival in a harsh and hostile world. By this concern I understand not only the Ten Commandments, important though they are, but the whole range of legislation in books such as Leviticus and Deuteronomy and in the teachings of the prophets. Concern is expressed for the widow and the orphan, for the poor, for slaves ("You shall not deliver an escaped slave back to his master"),⁴ and for animals ("You shall not plough with an ox and an ass").⁵ A man's tools of trade could not be taken on pledge and a newly married man was exempted from military service for a year to enable him to set up home and start a family. Much of this is arguably more enlightened than the state of affairs today.

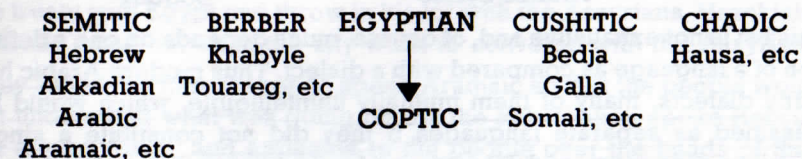
We also owe much of our sense of the importance of history to the Hebrews. This may seem a strange statement to make given the supernatural elements in history as told by the Old Testament and acceptance or rejection of these will, of course, be a matter of faith since they are not open to verification. I am talking, however, of history as more than simply a string of events; rather as a reasoned and objective account of human actions and motives. In this sense we see in the Old Testament,

beyond the triumphalism and glorification of absolute monarchy found elsewhere in the ancient Near East, a recognition that even heroes such as David can be weak and flawed like other men. And what is more they are condemned then forgiven openly for it in their own time. I intend later to look in more detail at the historical background to the Old Testament as it relates to the ancient Near East and to show that even on a conventional understanding of history as a straight telling of events the earliest narratives, passed on orally long before they were written, suggest a consistent and accurate historical tradition.

So who were the Hebrews? Where did they come from and how did they become the people we recognise in the Old Testament, the ancestors of today's Jews? The first and most obvious thing that can be said about them is that they were a Semitic people, along with the Canaanites, the Phoenicians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians and, of course, the Arabs. And here we must remember that the ancient Near East was not like the Near East today, which, apart from the tiny Hebrew enclave of Israel and the northern states of Turkey and Iran, is solidly Arabic speaking and almost entirely Muslim. Rather it was a hotchpotch of cities, small states and empires, with constantly shifting boundaries and a multitude of languages and religions, from Egyptian in the south to Indo-European Hittite and languages such as Hurrian, Sumerian and Elamite, without known affinities, in the north.

Egyptian, as well as the interest and fascination provided by its scripts, is interesting linguistically. It has clear affinities with Semitic but cannot be classed as a Semitic language. It forms a separate branch of the larger linguistic grouping which used to be called Hamito-Semitic but is now most often called Afroasiatic. The family appears to have five (some claim six) branches, which can be represented as shown in the table:

AFROASIATIC



The table does not attempt to show degrees of relationship within Afroasiatic, though it appears that Semitic and Berber are particularly close to the extent that some have argued that Berber is simply an archaic form of Semitic, and that the two Sub-Saharan groups, Cushitic

and Chadic have closer affinities with each other than with other branches. Egyptian, despite the age of its records, appears isolated though clearly related and this isolation shows especially in the grammar of the verb. An indication of the relationship of Egyptian to Semitic can be seen in this comparison of vocabulary:

EGYPTIAN AND SEMITIC VOCABULARY

Egyptian	Arabic	Hebrew	English
ḥb	libb	lēb	heart
ns (las*)	lisān	lāšōn	tongue
ḳ3b	ḳarb	ḳereb	intestine
k3m	karm	kerem	vineyard
rḥt	raḥṣa	rāḥṣ	wash

The central area between Egyptian and the northern languages, modern Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and the Arabian peninsula were, with the exception of enclaves such as the Philistines of whom more later, almost totally Semitic. The generally recognised classification of Semitic divides the languages into four branches, as shown:

THE SEMITIC LANGUAGES

Northern Peripheral	Northern Central	Southern Central	Southern Peripheral
Akkadian	Amorite	Arabic*	Sabaeen
	Eblaite		Minaean
	Ugaritic		Ge'ez (Ethiopic)
	Hebrew*		Amharic*
	Moabite		Tigre*
	Phoenician-Punic		Tigrina*
	Aramic-Syriac*		Mehri*
			Soqotri*

This list is not exhaustive and, of course, much depends on one's definition of a language as compared with a dialect. Thus modern Arabic has many dialects, many of them mutually unintelligible, which would be classified as separate languages if they did not constitute a single linguistic continuum, and if it were not for the phenomenon of diglossia. Yet it is probable that languages such as Hebrew, Moabite and Phoenician were mutually intelligible, at least to the extent that the Scandinavian

* Languages spoken today

languages are, though they are regarded as separate languages for historical and cultural reasons. I would stress, though, that contrary to popular belief, Aramaic was not a corrupt form of Hebrew but a distinct though related language with its own history and literary tradition. For a time it was, in fact, a major world language with surviving records in a number of different dialects. It is still spoken today in several modern forms by small, mostly bilingual communities in Turkey, Syria and Iraq. As well as being the spoken language of Palestine at the time of Christ and having, therefore, a profound effect on the earliest formulation of the Christian message to the extent that scholars have spent considerable effort in reconstructing the Aramaic which underlies the words of Jesus recorded for us in the Greek of the Gospels, Aramaic is the language of parts of the Old Testament, notably in the books of Ezra and Daniel. These are books which deal with the life of the Hebrews under the second Babylonian Empire so it is perhaps not surprising that much of their content is written in the everyday language of the Empire rather than in the Hebrew which was becoming increasingly the language of scholarship and religion.

The following passage is from chapter 2 of Daniel, where the language switches from Hebrew to Aramaic in verse 4. The words are

Wayedhabberū hakkasdīm lammelekh 'arāmīth:

Malkā le'olmīn ḥeyī 'emar ḥelmā le'abhdhākḥ ūphishrā neḥawwē

"Then the Chaldaean spoke to the King in Aramaic: 'O King, live forever. Tell the dream to your servants and we will show the interpretation!'"

It is interesting to note also in the Old Testament that in the story in 2 Kings 18 when the envoy, the Rab-shakeh, of the Assyrian King came to Jerusalem in an attempt to persuade King Hezekiah of Judah to abandon his treaty with Egypt and throw in his lot with the Assyrians, Hezekiah's officials came out on to the city walls to converse with the Assyrians.

They asked the Rab-shakeh to speak Aramaic so that the people would not understand what was going on but the Rab-shakeh spoke Hebrew "in a loud voice" and appealed to the people over the heads of their rulers. This story is interesting for several reasons. It shows us that human nature doesn't change much and that the rulers were as anxious 2,700 years ago as today that the ruled should not know too much of what is going on. It shows too that Hebrew and Aramaic were quite distinct and mutually unintelligible in 700 BC, and that the Hebrews at the time,

unlike later, were not generally able to understand or speak Aramaic.

But what of the people who were, linguistically at least, the close relatives of the Hebrews, the speakers of the other Canaanite dialects such as Moabite, Phoenician and Punic? Virtually all that is known to us of Moabite, the language of the land of Moab to the east of the Dead Sea, from which Ruth, the ancestress of David came, is derived from the great inscription of King Mesha known as the Moabite stone. It dates from about 830 BC. The inscription is interesting because, as well as showing the linguistic affinity of Moabite with Hebrew, it gives us a vivid picture of how one of Israel's closest neighbours saw her. It also gives us the opposite side of the Old Testament picture for it tells how the Moabites appealed to their god Chemosh because they were oppressed by Israel and how Chemosh delivered them. The theological language is not very different from that of the Old Testament with one important exception to which I shall come.

The inscription tells us "Omri, King of Israel, oppressed Moab for many days, for Chemosh was angry with his land... and Omri had taken possession of the land of Medeba and Israel dwelt in it his days and half the days of his son, forty years". It tells of the destruction of an Israelite city and all its inhabitants as an offering to Chemosh and in this reminds us strongly of the Israelite occupation of Canaan and their use of the *herem*, the ban, by which every living thing in a conquered city was destroyed. The Israelites then occupied the city of Jahez on the Moabite border and counter attacked, but, we are told, Chemosh forced them to give up and withdraw to Israel. It is all a mirror image of some of the more bloodthirsty parts of the Old Testament, suggesting that the Moabites were not very different from the Hebrews in customs and organisation as well as language. Interestingly the same events are recounted from the Israelite standpoint in 2 Kings 3:4-27 with the prophet Elisha playing a significant part. What is clear from a comparison of the two accounts is that though Israel enjoyed considerable success in the campaign they ultimately withdrew so that Moab was successful in gaining its independence.

This success was at a price for we are told that Mesha of Moab sacrificed his eldest son at a crucial point in the campaign and that it was this which prompted the Israelite withdrawal. This one event shows the fundamental religious difference between Moab and Israel despite the surface similarities. *In extremis* the Moabites were prepared to practise human

sacrifice. There are hints of this among the Hebrews at a very early period in the stories of Abraham and Isaac,⁶ and in that of Jephthah's daughter in Judges⁷ but in historical times such an idea filled the orthodox Hebrews with horror. 2 Kings 3:27 tells us that when the King of Moab offered his eldest son as a burnt offering upon the wall there came a great wrath (*Qeṣeph gādḥōl*) upon or against Israel which prompted their withdrawal. Clearly what they had witnessed had a profound psychological effect on the Hebrews.

The other well recorded close relatives of Hebrew are Phoenician and its offshoot Punic, the language of Carthage, Rome's great enemy, which stands in much the same relationship to Phoenician as does Afrikaans to Dutch. The relationship of Punic to Hebrew is clear even in the native name of Carthage.

Qart-ḥadasht (New town) — *Qeret-ḥadāshāh*

Likewise the chief magistrates of Carthage were known as *suffetes* by the Romans. Taking away the Latin -ES ending we are left with the form

suffet — *shōphēt*

which is the title of the Old Testament Judges such as Samson, Gideon and Deborah. It is interesting that Hannibal (whose name is etymologically akin to Hebrew names such as Hananiah and Hananel), the scourge of the Romans, bore the same title as Samson, the scourge of the Philistines. We might also speculate on what would have happened if the Carthaginians had defeated the Romans in the Punic Wars. It is conceivable that much of Western Europe would now have spoken a Semitic language closely akin to Hebrew.

The comparison between Hebrew and Canaanite religion is of great interest both for the similarities and for the differences between them. These have been touched upon in what was said about the Moabite Stone. Certainly from the Old Testament point of view the system of formal worship and sacrifice offered to YHWH is virtually identical to that offered to Baal and other deities among the Canaanite peoples. The account of Elijah's contest with the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel loses its whole point if the sacrificial rite is not the same on both sides. The Old Testament describes the offering of both the *zēbah* "communion offer-

ing" and the *ʿōlāh* "burnt offering" to Canaanite gods and does not object to the form of the offering but to the deities to which it is offered.⁸

From this we can conclude that the Hebrew and Canaanite systems were functionally very similar, though theologically they had developed along very different lines in that, for example, Canaanite sacrifice does not appear to have attached any significance to the blood of the victim. There is also, of course, the important difference over human sacrifice, especially that of young children, which was widely practised at different times among various Canaanite peoples, most notably the Phoenicians and Carthaginians, though we have seen it also *in extremis* among the Moabites. Human sacrifice was not unknown among the Hebrews even in historical times and Kings Ahaz and Manasseh both sacrificed their sons by burning at times of national crisis. But this was not to YHWH and these acts were recorded with revulsion and horror by the authors of the Old Testament who represented the authentic religious tradition. Moreover, 2 Kings 23:10 tells us that King Josiah, as part of his reform of Hebrew life and religion, defiled *Topheth*, which appears to mean fire-place, so that no one might burn his son or daughter as an offering to Molech. Depending on the vocalization here, *MLK* may be read as the name of the god Moloch, as a general epithet Melekh, referring to a god-king or as *Molk*, which is a Carthaginian and probably Phoenician technical term for a type of sacrifice. Punic and neo-Punic inscriptions contain the expressions

MLK ʾMR (*molk ʾomor*) transcribed *Molchomor* in Latin, meaning "offering of lamb"

MLK ʾDM (*Molk ʾodom*) meaning "offering of man" (human sacrifice)

and the use of the term *molk* in the Old Testament would suggest the borrowing of a Phoenician practice in a time of national apostasy.

The feature which strongly distinguishes Hebrew and Canaanite rituals from those of other Semitic peoples, such as the Arabs and the peoples of Mesopotamia, is the practice of burning either all or part of the victim upon the altar. This rite is interesting because the Western Semites shared it with the Greeks, whose typical sacrifice, the *thusia* closely parallels the Hebrew *zēbah* in that part of the victim is burnt, part given to the priests and the rest is eaten in a sacred meal. The West Semitic

ʿōlāh, in which the whole of the victim is burnt on the altar, corresponds to the Greek holocaust, which was reserved for the worship of the gods of the underworld and for dead heroes. These are not the only parallels. The Greek *bōmos* "platform, altar" can be compared to the Hebrew *bāmāh* "high place", which served as an altar. It is probable that these similarities originated in a civilization which preceded the Canaanites, the Hebrews and the Greeks in the Eastern Mediterranean.

One interesting point about Hebrew ritual concerns the Passover, which is closely linked with the Exodus from Egypt and the nomadic life in the desert. The significant features of the Passover sacrifice are that the victim is not burnt, blood plays a very important part and the meal is eaten by the faithful. This ritual is closely paralleled by the practice among the nomads of Central Arabia in pre-Islamic times, where the victim was slaughtered, the blood was rubbed on an upright stone (as the blood of the paschal lamb was smeared on the lintel and doorposts) and the meat was then eaten. On the basis of this parallel it has been suggested that this was the ancient Hebrew type of ritual, that of a nomadic people, but that after the settlement in Canaan local practice in outward forms of worship was adopted. The ancient emphasis on the importance of the blood was, however, retained and survives transformed in the symbolism of the Christian Communion.

Before turning from the Hebrews' immediate neighbours in Canaan to consider the Old Testament in its wider Near Eastern context I must say a few words about that remarkable and enigmatic people, the Philistines. As Chairman of the University Arts Committee I feel a great deal of sympathy for the Philistines since I often feel like one myself. The real Philistines have had a bad press since Old Testament times and because of the misuse of their name in our own culture have come to be regarded generally as boorish and uncultivated. In fact, as well as giving their name to Palestine, they had a considerable impact on the ancient Near East.

We know from Egyptian records that the *Prst* reached Canaan in the time of Rameses II. They are not, however, named alone for his text of year 5 associates them with a people called Tjekker and that of year 8 connects them with other groups including the Danuna, the Sherden and the Tursha. In the records of Rameses' successor, Merneptah, they are also

associated with the Lukka and Akaiwasha. (In connection with Mernep-tah it is interesting that the first extra-biblical mention of Israel occurs in a stela from his reign.) Clearly the Philistines were one of a number of related peoples and the Philistines of the Old Testament probably included some of these other elements. We know for sure from the Egyptian Wenamun Papyrus that the Tjekker inhabited the area around Dor about 1090 BC.

All of these peoples were from the Aegean and Western Asia Minor and it is interesting that the type of feathered headdress that the Philistines are shown wearing in the war scenes from the temple of Medinet Habu in Egypt is found also in a hieroglyphic sign from the Phaistos disk. The Philistines and their allies, known collectively as Sea Peoples, played a significant role in the history of the Mediterranean world. They attacked Ugarit, caused problems for Egypt, brought an end to Hittite power in Asia Minor and displaced part of the population of Northern Syria. After their defeat by Rameses III the evidence of place names suggests that whilst some Sea Peoples such as the Philistines remained in the Near East, others sailed west to leave their imprint in the Western Mediterranean, the Sherden in Sardinia, the Tjekker in Sicily, the Tursha in the Etruscans. The Lukka appear to be connected with the Lycians of later date in Asia Minor and attempts have been made to connect the Akaiwasha/Ekwesh with the Achaeans, one of the Greek peoples, whose name in its archaic form was *Akhaiwoi*. The difficulty with such an identification is that the Ekwesh were circumcised.

Physically the settlement of the Philistines in South West Canaan is marked by a new range of decorated pottery, which appears to be derived from a Mycenaean original but to have incorporated Palestinian, Cypriot and Aegean influences also. Their technical skills lay in metallurgy, where they early mastered the use of iron. During their domination of the Hebrews during the period of the Judges and in the early monarchy they maintained a monopoly of metalworking, which is clearly referred to in I Samuel 13:19-20. This refers to the reign of Saul, Israel's first king, and tells us that:

There was no smith to be found throughout all the land Israel, for the Philistines said, 'Lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears'; but every one of the Israelites went to the Philistines to sharpen his ploughshare, his mattock, his axe or his sickle."

Socially the Philistines were distinguished from their Semitic neighbours by being uncircumcised and they were regarded as alien by the Old Testament because of this.

Such remains of the language of the Philistines as survive suggest, like their pottery and their dress, links with the world of the Aegean. The name of Achish, King of Gath, to whom David fled from Saul, has been compared with the Trojan Anchises in the Iliad. Parallels to Goliath have been suggested in the languages of Asia Minor. The term *seren*, which is applied in the Old Testament only to Philistine rulers and is presumably a native title, suggests parallels with Greek *turannos* and Luvian *tarwannas*. The Hebrew *Ḳōba* "helmet" has no Semitic etymology and may have entered the language from the Philistines, in which case it will be of Anatolian origin and cognate with Hittite *kupahhi* and Greek *kumbakhos* "crown of helmet".

Although our picture of the Philistines remains tantalisingly incomplete, the records of other cultures, which are better documented, have given us a broader view than that presented by the Old Testament, which is understandably negative. We see them as a vigorous, not uncultivated people, with affinities to the pre-Greek world of the Aegean and as part of a wider movement which, if nothing else, contributed considerably to the toponymy of the Mediterranean.

The interpretation of the records of other Near Eastern peoples has contributed significantly to our understanding of the literature of the Old Testament in clarifying grammatical points, explaining allusions and throwing light on words of uncertain meaning. The Book of Job is traditionally considered to be the most difficult of the Old Testament, whether for the English reader or for the Hebrew scholar. It is written in a compressed and archaic or archaising style of Hebrew which, in places, becomes obscure to the point where, in the past, editors and translators have resorted to extensive emendation or even guesswork to make sense of the text. Comparison with related languages, and especially with Ugaritic, which is an earlier and more archaic language belonging to the same branch of Semitic as Hebrew, has, however, thrown considerable light on some seemingly intractable problems. In the received or Massoretic text Job 4:20 reads:

*Mibbōqer lā^cerebh yukkattū
Mibbelī mēšīm lāneṣaḥ yō^bbhēdhū*

This is translated in the Authorised Version as

"They are destroyed from morning to evening; they perish forever without any regarding it".

This is unsatisfactory, though it was followed by other versions such as the Revised Standard Version. It is unsatisfactory because it assumes the ellipsis of the word *lēbh* (heart) after *mēsīm* to produce the expression "give attention to". The problem is that even if an ellipsis is assumed the causative verbal form apparently used in the text is not normally employed in this expression. Recognising the problem some scholars emended *mēsīm* to *šēm* "name" so that the second part of the couplet read

"They perish forever without a name".

This rendering made good sense but the emendation failed to account for the *m* of *mēsīm* which no longer had a place in the text.

We now know from Ugaritic that archaic West Semitic had an enclitic particle *-m* which was used to give emphasis to the word to which it was attached. By applying this discovery to our passage we can redivide the words to read

Mibbelī-m šēm lāneṣaḥ yō>bhēdhū

This gives the same meaning ("without a name they perish forever") with emphasis on *mibbelī* "without". It also preserves the integrity of the sacred consonantal text in that *m* is no longer removed. This is just one example of many where the discovery of enclitic *-mem* has clarified previously doubtful passages.

The poetic books such as Job and Psalms and the poetic sections of the prophets such as Isaiah are replete with the imagery of mythological figures such as Leviathan. Leviathan was clearly a great, many headed serpent of the sea, described by Isaiah as "the crooked serpent" and by both Psalm 74 and Isaiah in parallelism with "the dragon (Tannin) in the waters" and "the dragon in the sea". Psalm 74:14 says of God

"thou didst crush the heads of Leviathan"

and Isaiah 27:1 says that the Lord

"Will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon (Tannin) that is in the sea".

These passages are paralleled in a text from Ugarit where one deity says to another:

When you shall smite Lotan, the fleeing serpent (and) shall put an end to the tortuous serpent, Shalyat of the seven heads..."¹⁰

Here Lotan is clearly identical with Leviathan (the form of name appears to be a contraction), described as multi-headed (like the Greek Hydra) and as a coiled and fleeing serpent as in Psalms and Isaiah. Clearly the Old Testament writers are here either consciously recalling an earlier literature with which they were familiar or making use of a common stock of West Semitic literary motifs.

Ancient Egyptian has also contributed to our understanding of the Old Testament text. Psalm 10 contains the words *ḥlkh* and *ḥlk'ym* the second of which appears to be the plural of the first. The words occur only here in the Old Testament, have no obvious Hebrew derivation and the only possible Semitic cognate is the Arabic *ḥlk* "be dark, intensely black". This meaning does not, however, yield a sense which would fit the context of the Psalm which seems to require something like "hapless, poor, afflicted" as has been assumed by virtually all translators from the Greek Septuagint to the present day.

Curiously the root *ḥlk* does occur elsewhere with a meaning which gives the sense required by the text of Psalms¹¹. It occurs twice in Egyptian, first in an inscription of Seti I from about 1300BC and the second time in Papyrus *Anastasi I*, dating from the reign of Seti II about 1210 BC. It is written in the form of writing known as group writing, which was normally employed to represent the sound of foreign words which were unfamiliar to Egyptian ears. The transliteration of the hieroglyphic form of the word is *hrrg*. In group writing the combination *nr* is used to represent *l*, which was not found in the standard form of Egyptian and *g* represents Semitic *g*, *k* and *q*. What we have, therefore, is a loanword which is almost certainly of Canaanite origin, and whose pronunciation *ḥlg* or *ḥlk* corresponds to the Hebrew root found in Psalms. And here it must be remembered that Hebrew is also a Canaanite dialect, of somewhat later date than these examples, though the Psalms themselves frequently use archaic language.

But what of the meaning of *hrrg*? In Papyrus *Anastasi I* the word occurs in a context where, during a battle of wits, the scribe Hori is charging his rival Amenemope with mathematical incompetence. After accusing Amenemope of being unable to perform so simple a task as the appor-

tionment of soldiers' rations during a construction operation and insisting that he himself must teach him, Hori says

my ḏd.ḏ n.k ḥ3w-ḥr ḏḏt.k ḏḏ.ḏ wn.k ḥnrg.ḏ

"Come, I will declare to you more than you have said. I will cause you to be ḥnrg"

The sense here is that Hori intends to bring arguments to bear which Amenemope will not be able to answer. *ḥnrg* describes the state to which Amenemope will be reduced. We see from the context that it will not be a pleasant one and the determinatives used confirm this. Accordingly *ḥnrg.ḏ* (the *.ḏ* is a verbal ending) has been translated as "abashed, ashamed".

In the other inscription, of the ninth year of Seti I, the phrase

t3 nb ḥnrg m k3.f

occurs in a context where the military prowess of Seti is being extolled. *ḥnrg* appears to describe the state to which every country has been reduced by Seti's might and the passage may be translated

"Every land is humbled by his power"

These examples of the use of a Canaanite word in Egyptian suggest that its meaning was "abashed, ashamed, humbled" and the meaning "humble" fits very well into the context of Psalm X, where the words *ḥlkh* and *ḥlk'ym* are found in close connection with words such as *nāqī* "innocent", *dkh* "crushed" and *yāthōm* "orphan". The whole example is an interesting case of Near Eastern connections and of the explanation of a native, though archaic word, by its use as a loan-word in another language.

I should like to conclude this part of my lecture with a brief consideration of what are usually known as the patriarchal narratives, the accounts in Genesis of the early history of the Hebrews from the time of the call of Abraham from Ur in Mesopotamia to the period of the settlement in Egypt which preceded the Exodus. These accounts are regarded by specialists in various ways, some seeing them essentially as folklore whilst others believe that they embody an authentic historical tradition. What is beyond doubt is that the background against which the Old Testament sets the narratives is authentic for the period they purport to describe. Of course we do not find Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the rest

occurring in external records, but we would not expect this of a nomadic, pre-literate people whose records were oral. What we do find, however, is a rich web of circumstantial evidence in the libraries and archives of neighbouring literate peoples which suggests that the narratives are set in a world which existed in the first half of the second millennium BC - and this is the period when, on any reckoning of the biblical evidence, the patriarchs would have lived. Because of this we must either believe that considerable research and skill were used by the author of Genesis (whether it was Moses or the editorial committee working with scissors and paste on earlier material, which is so dear to much modern scholarship) to reconstruct an authentic world for their literary creations; or we must accept that the narratives as we have them represent the final, written form of a genuine oral historical tradition.

The evidence itself comes in several forms and from a number of sources. Personal names are of considerable significance because these change over time and those found, for example, in the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament, from roughly 1,000 BC on, are quite different from those of the patriarchal period. We do, however, have rich resources for comparison from Mari and Nuzu in Mesopotamia, from Ebla in North West Syria and from the Execration Texts in Egypt. From Ebla, whose language belonged to the same branch of Semitic as Hebrew, we find particularly interesting comparisons such as,

Ab-ra-mu — Abram (later Abraham)

E-sa-um — Esau

Ish-ma-ilu — Ishmael

Is-ra-ilu — Israel (later given as personal name to Jacob)

The peculiar spelling of the Eblaite forms is because the language was written in cuneiform script, which is syllabic, and each group of letters represents the transliteration of one cuneiform sign. The endings in *-u(m)* are nominative case endings, which anyone familiar with Classical Arabic will recognise, though they have been lost in Biblical Hebrew. Names of these varied types were common throughout the patriarchal period, as were names of the type Isaac (*Yiṣḥaq*) and Jacob (*Ya'aqōb*) which are similar in form to Ishmael and Israel, but omit the element *-el* — God. They were found as far south as Egypt, where they were used by the Semitic Hyksos (*ḥk3-ḥ3swt*), who also used names similar in form to Levi, Dan and Gad.

The social and legal customs of the patriarchs were not those of later Israel, but are paralleled in contemporary societies as shown by records from the archives of Nuzu. In Genesis 15 Abraham complains to God that he has no son to succeed him and that his servant, Eliezer of Damascus, will inherit his wealth. Later Sarah, Abraham's wife, who appeared incapable of having a child, gave her maid Hagar to him to produce a son for him and the offspring was Ishmael. Finally Sarah herself managed to conceive and bore Isaac. Hagar and Ishmael were sent away at Sarah's insistence and Isaac inherited Abraham's estate.

All of these situations have parallels in the documents of Nuzu and Mari, where we find servants adopted as heirs by childless men and infertile wives giving their female servants to their husbands to provide them with children. The custom at Nuzu and Mari was also that if the wife later bore a son he would be given the major share of the inheritance, but it was forbidden completely to disinherit or send away earlier sons. This, as well as human feeling, explains Abraham's distress when Sarah, after the birth of Isaac, insisted that he send Ishmael away. He was, in the eyes of society, flouting the law and all standards of decent behaviour.

The story of Esau's selling his birthright to Jacob also has clear parallels elsewhere in the early second millennium, for we read of a man from Nuzu who sold his birthright for three sheep - clearly a better deal than a mess of pottage, but still a very shortsighted act. Jacob was also anxious to obtain his father's deathbed blessing and, with the connivance of his mother, went to great lengths to persuade Isaac, his blind father, that he was Esau, his elder brother. The fuss over a blessing and the fury of Esau on discovering the deception are perhaps puzzling until it is realised that the deathbed blessing of a father was legally binding and could not be overturned. It made Jacob his father's legal heir in place of Esau.¹²

Taxation and economics also have their place in the society of the patriarchs. When Sarah died at Hebron, Abraham needed a place to bury her and wanted to buy a cave from Ephron the Hittite as a burial place. After much polite oriental bargaining, described in Genesis 23, Abraham found himself obliged to buy not just the cave but the piece of land on which it was situated. This was more than just a sharp piece of business by Ephron in selling the customer more than he really wanted. It was also a clever piece of tax avoidance. Under Hittite law the owner of a piece of land who sold part of it still remained liable for tax on the portion he had sold. By selling the whole piece of land Ephron got out of the tax liability as well.

The price of slaves, which is an indicator not often used today, also fixes the patriarchs in the first half of the second millennium BC. Joseph was sold by his brothers to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels. This was the correct price for the period to which the narrative relates, for in the Babylonian code of Hammurabi the price of a male slave was fixed at 1/3 mina, which is twenty shekels. Inflation then took over, for by the time of Moses a slave cost 30 shekels and during the Hebrew monarchy the price rose to 50 shekels.

So, having looked at a minute fraction of the kind of records that survive from the ancient Near East and seen how they have modified our understanding of the Old Testament, I should like now to look briefly at what lessons we can learn from them. I believe that there are several and the first is the importance of literacy which is essential if a culture is to be transmitted in any sort of meaningful way. Of course the artefacts of non-literate and pre-literate cultures survive and give us a good idea of their technical capabilities and achievements, but they tell us next to nothing about the inner life, the traditions, the religion, the ethics and social customs of the people who made them. It is no coincidence that we have been far more deeply influenced by the literary cultures of the ancient Near East than by those of our own ancestors in Western Europe. This is not because our ancestors were intellectually or even technologically inferior - structures such as Stonehenge are sufficient evidence of that. It is because, in the absence of writing, they had no way of communicating with us across time. We think of writing primarily in its spatial aspect, as a means of day to day communication between people who live in the same time. But this temporal aspect, which enables me to read the plays of Shakespeare written four hundred years ago, the book of Isaiah written two and a half thousand years ago or the Egyptian Pyramid Texts written four and a half thousand years ago, is the vital link in the transmission of any culture.

If a literate culture is to pass on anything of itself to posterity two things are essential of its records. These are accessibility and durability. For accessibility we are unwise if we rely exclusively on electronic media for archival purposes, since the electronic storage and retrieval of information requires a degree of technological sophistication which our own culture has only recently acquired. We have no guarantee that our civilisation will be any more permanent than its predecessors. History suggests that it will not, since even apparently long lived civilisations such as that of Ancient Egypt, had long periods of chaos and upheaval

which can be glossed over at a distance of several thousand years, but seemed permanent to those who lived through them. Nor can we be sure that the successors, if any, to our culture will be technologically as advanced. Here a comparison between the culture of the Roman Empire and that of the Dark Ages which succeeded it in Western Europe is instructive. A future, non-technological civilisation would be hard pressed to make anything of an archive of computer tapes and disks, and a cultural Renaissance based on the discovery of such an archive would be impossible.

The more obvious requirement for the preservation and transmission of records is durability. Our Near Eastern records survive either because of the material on which they were recorded or because of the conditions in which they were preserved. This combination of factors is as important to the survival of records today as it was in the past and suggests that at the very least those works we regard as having lasting significance should be produced and stored in such a way as to prevent their decay or destruction. Here again the use of electronic media for archival purposes has its risks and Lord Dainton, former Chairman of the British Library Board, speculated interestingly in a recent lecture on the effects of a powerful electromagnet in the vicinity of a library of computer tapes and disks. Even in the context of our technology the most appropriate means of recording our science, literature, art and philosophy remains the printed word, though using material such as acid-free paper, which has a shelf life of centuries rather than decades.

None of this is to deny the importance of technological advance. The electronic storage and retrieval of information is the most significant change in the transmission of the written word since Gutenberg's invention of printing from movable types in the fifteenth century. It has already made possible immense improvements in the dissemination of information and promises even more for the future. Its limitations, though, of accessibility and durability mean that what we pass on to posterity is still bound up, for better or worse, with the printed, written or inscribed -but always the physical word. In this nothing has changed since an unknown Sumerian scribe scratched out the ideogram that was the first real writing over five thousand years ago.

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