

# VOCALIZED CANAANITE: CUNEIFORM-WRITTEN CANAANITE WORDS IN THE AMARNA LETTERS

## Some Methodological Remarks

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### 1. Introduction

During the second millennium B.C., Akkadian was the *lingua franca* of the Ancient Near East. From most ancient times, a continuum of non-native local Akkadian varieties emerged in the vast peripheral areas of Mesopotamia and beyond, stretching from Anatolia in the north to Egypt in the south, thus including the entire Levant and beyond. Most, or even all of these varieties of the Akkadian *lingua franca* were used by just a small group of speakers. These were scribes of specific schools or scholarly traditions. In some cases it is possible that Akkadian may also have been used by diplomats, administrators, and other officials. This linguistic continuum, which never lost contact with Mesopotamia proper, kept absorbing contemporary features from the core Akkadian languages, Babylonian and Assyrian. Thus, although delayed, this *lingua franca* followed the line of innovations in contemporary Akkadian dialects of the core. Written by non-native speakers, the Akkadian *lingua franca* is further permeated with diverse elements borrowed from other linguistic systems, like those of Hittite, Hurrian, Egyptian, and notably the West Semitic dialects of the Levant. Such foreign features had been penetrating the linguistic continuum of what is now called Peripheral Akkadian throughout its many generations of usage. By and large, the Peripheral Akkadian dialects seem to have been mutually intelligible by all their users throughout the entire Near East during the 14th century.

However, the situation was quite different in the regions where Canaanite dialects were spoken, i.e., roughly the areas of today's Israel, western Jordan, southern Syria and Lebanon. These regions, cut off from direct access to the Mesopotamian schools after being annexed to the Egyptian Empire



during the reign of Thutmose III, developed a special dialect. This dialect, or rather, a continuum of linguistic varieties, is known to us mainly from the corpus of the cuneiform tablets discovered at Tell el-Amarna, or ancient Akhetaton, in Middle Egypt. A small number of texts which reflect similar linguistic entities are present among tablets excavated in sites in the Levant itself (cf. Edzard 1985), and are still being discovered in ongoing excavations (e.g. Horowitz 2000).

The bulk of the Amarna find consists of letters sent to the Egyptian pharaohs Amenophis III and his son Akhenaton during the 14th century B.C. The senders were kings of Babylonia, Assyria, Hatti, Mittanni and Alashiya, and minor princes and rulers of the Near East at that. Many of the letters were sent to the Egyptian pharaohs by rulers of Canaanite cities. The international and some of the vassal letters were written in varieties of Peripheral Akkadian. However, the majority of letters sent to the Egyptian monarch on behalf of his Canaanite vassals were written in a mixed language: its lexicon was almost entirely Akkadian, while the grammar was mostly Canaanite, the mother-tongue of the scribes who wrote these letters. It influenced its syntax and its morphology, and affected the phonology and semantics. This linguistic system has been termed Canaanite-Akkadian (Izre'el 1998a).

Canaanite-Akkadian, like any other linguistic system, served as a means of communication between the Canaanite and the Egyptian scribes and officials of that time. The Canaanite scribes must have understood the letters sent to their rulers on behalf of the Egyptian king. These letters were written in Egyptian Akkadian, a close variety of the northwestern Akkadian lingua franca of that time. The Egyptian scribes who received letters from Canaan could, on their part, understand the mixed language of these letters.

Thus, there was a significant difference between the languages of these parties: the structure of Egyptian Akkadian was closely related to that of other Akkadian dialects. The linguistic varieties used by the Canaanite scribes had many structural affinities similar or identical with contemporary Northwest Semitic dialects. The structural gap between any of the languages used by the Canaanite scribes and Egyptian Akkadian was sometimes very large. I am not at all confident of the mutual intelligibility of these languages had an Egyptian scribe encountered his fellow Canaanite scribe in face to face interaction. I also suspect that previous training was needed on both sides in order to understand each other's language, even in writing. Still, the Canaanite scribes thought of their language of correspondence as a dialect of Akkadian; not only of Egyptian-Akkadian, which they read from

the pharaoh's letters, but also of their active register, the mixed Canaanite-Akkadian dialect. This can be shown most clearly in the employment of cuneiform script, the use of Akkadian epistolary opening formulae, the usage of genuine and pure Akkadian formations within the letters, and especially the semantic lexical basis of that language and the bulk of its Akkadian nominal domain. To emphasize what has already been mentioned, the very use of Akkadian as the lexical component of this mixed language would identify the language as Akkadian in the eyes of its users. To illustrate the point, one might compare the terms used to define pidgin and creole languages, which consist of the name of the model language as their main component (e.g., Melanesian Pidgin English; Juba Arabic).

One manifestation of this perception is the scribes' use of glosses. The gloss phenomenon is one of the most famous features of the Amarna letters. The glosses are words that are inserted within the sequence of a text either to clarify or to replace an Akkadian word or a Sumerian logogram which might be wrongly interpreted when read in Egypt. The glosses are usually indigenous lexemes, mostly West Semitic, but also Hurrian or other local language, of unidentified origin. Glosses can sometimes be Egyptian, and Akkadian glosses (usually used for interpreting a Sumerogram) are not rare. One can even find glosses in Sumerian, serving as a reading aid for a logogram (e.g., *DUG.GA\TU.KA* "good", EA 136: 28; Moran 1992: 217 n5). Glosses were usually marked as such by a special cuneiform sign  or , here symbolized as a backslash "\" which is called a *Glossenkeil* ("a gloss-wedge").

## 2. Previous research

The existence of non-Akkadian words in the Amarna letters was already detected by the pioneers of Amarna research. Following the publication of what was to become the classic edition of the Amarna letters by Knudtzon in 1907, Böhl, who endeavored the first systematic linguistic evaluation of these texts, listed some glosses at the end of his 1909 grammar, titled *Die Sprache der Amarnabriefe mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Kanaanischen* (Böhl 1909: 89-90). In 1915, the second volume of Knudtzon's edition saw light, with an historical commentary to the individual letters by C. Weber and an elaborate glossary by Erich Ebeling. Being a most invaluable tool for the study of the Northwest Semitic dialects during the second millennium B.C. (they are taken to be the oldest vocalized Canaanite words yet attested), the Amarna glosses have been used time and again for comparisons in analyses of later Canaanite varieties, as in Bauer and Leander's historical grammar of Hebrew (1922) or Friedrich's Phoenician grammar

(1951 and subsequent editions). Data from the Amarna letters were further used by Zellig Harris in his very significant *Development of the Canaanite Dialects* (1939). A few other studies endeavored a more detailed evaluation of the linguistic features of the Canaanite glosses, notably Barker's dissertation from 1969 and Sivan's dissertation of 1978 (later published in English in 1984). Gianto (1995) has dealt with glosses from Byblos. The cultural functions of this phenomenon is much less studied. As yet, no comprehensive evaluation of the gloss phenomenon has been undertaken. A preliminary evaluation is Artzi's Hebrew paper from 1963. I myself have attempted to touch upon the socio-cultural aspect of the gloss phenomenon in a paper of 1995. The study of this phenomenon in its broad context may yield some very interesting results. Such a study may also benefit from comparative material (Artzi 1963; Kühne 1974-5; Boyd 1975; Huehnergard 1987; also Krecher 1969).

### 3. Variation and scribal traditions

The earliest extant direct data of ancient Canaanite, or other NWS dialects, come from first millennium B.C. inscriptions, written in consonantal script. Hence, the Amarna letters and their like are not only the earliest documents from which linguistic features of Canaanite can be deduced, but, having been written in syllabic cuneiform, they make a unique corpus from which data on the vocalization of Canaanite dialects can be extracted. The substratal features reflected in the mixed language of these texts can be reconstructed on evidence deduced from the letters after eliminating the non-Canaanite components. Subsequently, these features will be compared with their reconstructed cognates arrived at by diachronic analyses of extant data from Canaanite textual materials of the first millennium B.C. (Hebrew, Phoenician, and less documented dialects).

The Canaano-Akkadian texts are characterized by inherent variation. Variation may be geographically dependent. It may depend on the scribal tradition of different cities, but also on imported traditions or variant local ones. Geographic variation is therefore dependent upon scribal traditions and scribal education. It may appear as idiosyncrasies of a particular scribe, and may also occur anywhere in the entire corpus within one and the same text. Variation manifests itself in the form and meaning of both the Akkadian and the Canaanite components of the language, as well as in the employment of either component within the linguistic structure.

Scribal education has also, and perhaps primarily, affected the way scribes wrote, in terms of the shape of characters, and, which is much more important, in the syllabary and in the spelling habits. The Akkadian cuneiform

script consisted of syllabograms, logograms, and so-called determinatives, i.e., purely graphic semantic denominators and markers of quantification. The syllabary used in the Canaanite-Akkadian texts is mainly Babylonian, closer in structure and phonemic values to the Old and Middle Babylonian offshoots of Akkadian (from the first half of the second millennium B.C. to the 14th century B.C.), yet there are some indications that it is rooted in much earlier scribal traditions. In texts from some sites, direct influence of the Assyrian syllabary is attested. A local Syrian syllabary, which emerged in non-Semitic linguistic zones where Hurrian and Hittite were written, is manifested in varying degrees in many of the local Peripheral Akkadian traditions, including the Canaanite ones. This syllabary is known as the Hurro-Hittite or Hurro-Akkadian syllabary (cf. Izre'el 1991: §1.3).

As is well known, the cuneiform syllabograms are polyphonic. Most notably they do not distinguish between voiced, voiceless and ejective (i.e., the so-called emphatic) consonants in final position. Thus, a sign which is read *ab* can be read *ap* as well, and the sign read as *ig* can be interpreted as having *k* or *k*<sup>1</sup> instead of *g*. There are some signs where voicing or ejectiveness are not distinguished also when in non-final position, as in *bu=pu*. While this polyphony is basic and inherent to Akkadian writing during all its periods and throughout its entire geographical span, some traditions also did not distinguish voicing and ejectiveness in other positions. The Hurro-Hittite syllabary is even less clear in the distinction between consonants of similar or related articulation than the syllabary inherited or contemporaneously borrowed from genuine Mesopotamian scribal schools. Thus, scribes of most varieties will use the same sign for both /*ki*/ and /*ki*/, the scribe of Jerusalem will use the same sign for both /*te*/ and /*de*/, and in Amurru the same two-character string will be used for either *pāni* "face" or *bani* "good".

It would not be surprising to note that glosses were written according to the same tradition. Thus, the Jerusalem scribe spells the gloss for "field" with a TE sign, to be interpreted, according to the accepted enumeration of transliteration values, *de*<sub>4</sub>: *ša-de*<sub>4</sub>-*e* (EA 287: 56). This follows the scribal tradition of the Jerusalem scribe, which is, by the way, a northern one, as has been shown convincingly by Moran (1975). In this tradition, which consists of many Assyrian features, the sign TE is used for *de*<sub>4</sub> also in other words, notably in forms of *idû* "to know", e.g., *li-de*<sub>4</sub> "let him know" (EA 287: 11 etc.) (cf. Moran 1975: 151).

However, this is not always the case, at least not at first sight. Amarna scribes have almost overwhelmingly used the sign SA, to be transliterated

<sup>1</sup>I tend to return to the old indication of the emphatic velar. This notation is more neutral than *q*, which presupposes a pronunciation closer to the Arabic one.

as  $\check{s}a_{10}$ , for their spelling of the Akkadian word for "sky, heaven" (e.g., *SA-me-e*, EA 232: 1, from Acre, and many others, mostly from southern Palestine). Are we to learn from these divergent spellings that the word for "heaven" was pronounced differently by the scribes when they read the respective strings? I am not going to answer this question, at least not at this point, since the question as it is put is not very intelligent: before even trying to reach conclusions regarding variant pronunciations, we must take a closer look at the respective spelling systems, i.e., analyze all occurrences of /š/ in the respective texts, and perhaps even the overall system of sibilant spelling in these scribal traditions. We should also ask ourselves in what context these spellings of *šamû* occur. We will find that in the great majority of texts it occurs in one and the same phrase, which is also a formula, viz., *šamaš ištu šamê* "the sun from heaven", when it refers to the pharaoh. Thus, this esoteric spelling of *šamû* with a SA sign may have been adopted by the scribal tradition of Canaanite scribes along with the formula.

Now, there are two glosses of the word for "heaven" in the Amarna letters, and these are spelled not with the sign SA but with the sign which is usually used for the string for /ša/: *ša-me-ma* and *ša-mu-ma*. These two vocables are found as glosses not for the Akkadian *sa-me*, but for the Sumerogram AN(.ĤÁ).

EN-ia a-mur LUGAL

ki-i-ma <sup>d</sup>UTU iš-tu<sub>4</sub>

AN.ĤÁ : *ša-mu-ma*

My lord, look: The king

is like the sun from

heaven.

(EA 211: 15-17, unknown origin)

*šum-ma ni-tel-lí*

a-na AN \ *ša-me-ma šum-ma*

*nu-ra-ad i-na ir-šé-ti<sub>7</sub>*

ù SAG.DU-nu \ *ru-šu-nu*

*i-na qa-te-ka*

Whether we ascend to heaven,

whether we descend to earth –

our head is in your hands.

(EA 264: 15-19; Gath Carmel)

Note that the first example is found in a similar formula to the one discus-



sed above. The second is found in what can be suggested to be a Canaanite-Akkadian translation of a local proverb (Jirku 1933: 116; Böhl 1953: 275). This means that there is a complementary distribution between the respective spellings, which reflect the way in which this formula was taught to be written in different scribal schools, and not necessarily different pronunciations. Generally, rigid traditional spelling habits prevent the surfacing of phonetic or phonological features. In order to reach some conclusions regarding the phonemic system of the respective substrata we should make more elaborate and more comprehensive analyses than the ones made hitherto. Jerusalem poses an interesting case as regards to the use of sibilants (Harris 1939: 34; Shehadeh 1968: 160-165; Sivan 1984: 48-50). A case in point is the spelling of the very city name, Jerusalem. Unfortunately, all attestations of this name in the Amarna inventory comes from the scribe of Jerusalem himself, so that we have no room for comparison. It is spelled with a SA sign: (KUR) (URU) *ú-ru-ša<sub>10</sub>-lim(.KI)* (EA 287: 25,46,61,63; EA 289: 14,29; EA 290: 15). Other names from the Jerusalem letters also attest to the use of the sign SA whereas in other sources they are spelled with characters which reflect /š/; e.g., *la-ki-si* (EA 287: 15; EA 288: 43; cf. *la-ki-ša*, EA 328: 5, from Lachish itself). In the name of the Kašite people the scribe vacillates between a spelling with SI and a spelling with ŠI, even in one and the same text (EA 287: 72, 74, 33). There is no evidence for the quality of etymological /š/ in common nouns or other spellings, as all attest to the Akkadian series of /š/ signs, and thus may reflect conventional, rote usage learned at school. The rest of the evidence shows spelling of the two etymological phonemes /t/ and /š/ with the cuneiform /š/ series; cf. *ša-ak-mi* "(the city of) Shechem" (EA 289: 23) for etymological /t/; and the gloss *ša-de<sub>4</sub>-e* "field", already cited before, for etymological /š/.

Now, the data being so scanty, it is methodologically difficult to reach any sound conclusions from them. Therefore, Moran summarized the state of knowledge in these words:

With Goetze, one may dismiss vacillations (...) and anomalies (...) as a matter of "syllabary," i.e., an orthographic tradition which does not distinguish the sibilants and which, though to some extent perceptible almost everywhere in western peripheral Akkadian, is typical of "Reichsakkadisch." Or one may take the evidence at face value and accept a binary opposition of /t-š/ versus /š/, with the support of Egyptian transcriptions of Canaanite. This opposition, however, hardly obtained in the dialect of Jerusalem, for on the evidence of biblical Hebrew, at Jerusalem /t/ and /š/ never fell together. In either solution we

are once again probably confronted with the intrusiveness of the Jerusalem letters in their local setting. (Moran 1975: 152)

Moran inclines to the first solution, i.e., that the evidence points toward a syllabary vacillation. However, this conclusion leans mainly on the evidence of the vacillation between different spellings of the people's name *ka-ši/si*, whereas this vacillation may also point to a foreign sound that the scribe was not sure how to transcribe. Furthermore, Moran leans on the later evidence of Biblical Hebrew which is supposed to reflect the Hebrew dialect of Jerusalem. In this respect, one may note the following: the Hebrew of the Bible may well reflect the dialect of Jerusalem (at least the bulk of it<sup>2</sup>), but (1) it is a first millennium B.C. dialect, whereas the Amarna evidence is from the second millennium B.C., quite a few centuries earlier; and (2) it reflects a dialect of Hebrew, the roots of which may have been different from the local Canaanite dialect attested by the scribe of Jerusalem of the Amarna period. The question remains open, especially when one recalls that the scribe may not have originated himself in Jerusalem, but might have been imported from Syria. If so, does his spelling of glosses and proper names reflect a local pronunciation, or rather his own way of interpreting what he heard, having himself a different ear than the contemporary Jerusalemites?

Aside from the inability to distinguish, in many cases, voicing or ejective-ness, cuneiform syllabograms do not always distinguish between the vowels *e* and *i*. For example, there is no distinction in cuneiform writing between *le* or *li*. Again, this is a feature of all Akkadian periods and dialects. In other cases, the cuneiform syllabary may have the ability to make such a distinction, and we have different shapes of signs for *mi* and *me*, for *ši* and *še*, for *eš* and *iš*, for *ti* and *te*, and so on. Still, this potential is not always implemented, and some traditions, manifested in the writings of diverse scribes, use one sign for either *e*- or *i*-strings. Therefore, the scribal tradition which stands behind the writing of any individual scribe must be checked for this characteristic, as for all others. It must be emphasized that scribes from the same locale may differ in their education and hence in their use of signs, in their use of the syllabary, and in the use of language. For example, we have seen above a saying with the gloss *ša-me-ma*. This saying was spelled out in a letter to the pharaoh on behalf of Tagu, king of Gath Carmel. Is this transliteration of the sign ME justified, or should we transliterate *mi*? We cannot be sure, since even a glance at the spelling habits of this

<sup>2</sup>For other dialects reflected in the Hebrew bible see especially the work of Gary Rendsburg (Rendsburg 1990 and Rendsburg 2002 are the most comprehensive).



scribe shows that he uses *e*-syllabograms also where other scribes would use *i*-syllabograms. For example, *a-mur-me* "look" (EA 264: 5), with what is usually termed the enclitic *-mi*; *bu-i-te* "I asked for" (ll. 6, 20) with the 1st person suffix conjugation form which is usually written with a TI syllabogram (cf. *da-ag-la-ti*, "I looked", EA 266: 9, 10, by another scribe of Tagu, king of Gath Carmel); *er-še-te* for *eršeti*, with a genitive case ending, and so on. He does not write *e* for *i* when he uses the vocalic syllabograms (cf. *bu-i-te* above). Whether we are to interpret this evidence as reflecting a tradition of a specific scribal school or a genuine phonetic or phonological characteristics of the substrate dialect I do not know. If any conclusion can be reached at all regarding this matter, it will need much further research.

#### 4. Canaanite or not Canaanite?

We have discussed in some detail the nature of variation and its relationship to scribal traditions. Canaanite-Akkadian scribes show great variety in their use of their respective writing systems not only in the representation of phonemes, but also in indicating consonantal doubling and vocalic length. I have emphasized the need to study extensively the spelling habits and the scribal tradition not only of each locale but also of each of the scribes which served the Canaanite rulers of the respective cities. An intimate acquaintance with any individual tradition is needed not only in order to tell the features of a gloss or a Canaanite word that may occur in the flow of the text, but also in telling when is it that we encounter a Canaanite word. An illustrative case is the alleged gloss *\*ma<sup>c</sup>ōn* "dwelling place" in a letter from Byblos (EA 116: 11).





One problem with cuneiform writing is that it does not show word boundaries. The context as it appears in Knudtzon's classical edition is as follows:








*ji-di*

[ša]rru *i-nu-ma ma-ka-ti-ma a-un-nu*

*ù ša-ab-tu-še mārē<sup>1</sup> abdi-a-ši-ir[-t]a*

(EA 116: 10-12)

Knudtzon's transcription of the text is based on his own reading of the original tablet, and corrects a previous reading by Winckler, who preferred ZA over A and did not attempt a translation for this vocable (Winckler 1896: 186 with n. 1, 187 with n. \*). Abel's facsimile (Winckler and Abel 1889-1890: #61) shows A, yet Abel drew two distinct signs for Winckler's and Knudtzon's UN:  . UN usually has one vertical before the two double verticals:  or . As noted by Schroeder in his Amarna sign list (1915: II: 85 #122), EA 107: 22, also from Byblos, attests to this


unique form of UN as well. Knudtzon (1915: 502 n. b) notes that the sign A  may also be read as ZA , but he prefers A. This already calls our attention to a general problem with ancient texts, namely their age and physical condition. Cuneiform signs, which are combination of wedge-like singletons      sometimes show only subtle differences between them. When the clay surface is mutilated or the sign is broken in part, these subtle differences may cause confusion in the identification of signs.

In any case, Knudtzon interpreted this sign as A, and this has been accepted by all scholars ever since. Moran did not collate this tablet for his Amarna translations, and I know of no other collation made after Knudtzon. Knudtzon himself suggested to translate:

so wisse

[der Kö]nig, daß ich *verzweifelt* bin und *klage*;

[de]nn erobert haben es die Söhne Abdi-ašir[t]as,

Knudtzon is not sure about his translation, as the italicized words show. Knudtzon seems to take the string *a-un-nu* probably as a G prefix conjugation of the Akkadian verb *enēnu* "to pray". However, the attested form does not fit what we expect from Akkadian or Canaanite-Akkadian, neither in pattern nor in stem, as Akkadian attests to only *-t*-forms of this lemma, and G forms are only attested in lexical tests (CAD E: 162-3). Ebeling, who compiled the glossary to Knudtzon's edition, while still listing the word entries as interpreted by Knudtzon (s.v. *maḫû* and *anānu*), brought also another solution to this unhappy string, one that had been suggested by Kootz. The sign MA, hitherto taken as marking an enclitic particle attached to the form *ma-ḫa-ti*, is now suggested to be the first sign of the following vocable, therefore to be read *ma-a-un-nu*. This sign string is transcribed *māunnu* and is interpreted as a Canaanite word cognate to Hebrew  *mā'on* "dwelling".

This interpretation was not a happy one for Moran. Based on a thorough study of the Byblos letters from his dissertation, Moran was immersed well enough in the writing habits of the Byblian scribes to realize that the Canaanite cognate to Hebrew *mā'on* would not be spelled with a long *a*, since Hebrew pretonic lengthening was a late phenomenon and not shared by other Canaanite dialects (in Punic open-syllables *a* was "qualitatively long" [Krahmalkov 2001: 29], but, again, it is not to be expected, neither in this early period nor in that area). Rather, Moran says, an expected spelling for the cognate of Hebrew *mā'on* would be *ma-ḫu-(ú)-nu*.

Now, this alleged spelling is based on two main premises: (1) that the laryngeal will be reflected in the spelling with a *h*-series sign; (2) that long

Canaanite *o* may be reflected in the spelling with an *u*-sign. In addition, a long vowel may be reflected in plene writing, i.e., with an extra vocalic sign, in this case *ú*.

As for the first point, viz., the reflection of laryngeals in writing, one will recall the fact that Akkadian has lost all laryngeals and pharyngeals of its Semitic origin, as well as the fact that cuneiform writing, due to its Sumerian origin, was not apt to designate these consonants. Therefore, whenever there was a need to spell down such a consonant, scribes would use either the *h*-series signs or not mark it at all. The same applies for the fricative velar /*ǵ*/. Hebrew *māʿon* is derived from either the root  $\sqrt{^c n}$  or an etymological  $\sqrt{ǵ n}$  (cf. Baumgartner 1967-1990: 577b, 756a). /*c*/ may be either indicated in spelling by a sign of the *h*-series or not indicated at all; e.g., *a-pa-ru* (EA 141: 4), *ḥa-pa-ru* (143: 11) /*c*aparū/ "dust", both from Beirut; *i-zir-ta*(<sub>s</sub>) (EA 87: 13; 89: 18), *ḥi-zir-ta* (ZA 86: 101 l. 34) /*c*izirta/ "help", all three from Byblos. It can also be indicated by a syllable sequence of VC-VC (cf. Reiner 1966: §4.2.1), as against the common way of syllabic-signs sequence of CV-VC to indicate a single (closed) syllable; e.g., *na-az-a-ḫú* /*nazʿaḫū*/ "they have been summoned for help" (EA 366: 24; Southern Palestine [Gath?]). On the other hand, /*ǵ*/ will always be indicated in writing by a *h*-series sign (Sivan 1984: 51-52). The one occurrence where the city of Gaza is written with no such sign, a *ḥa* sign is perhaps to be restored and taken to be a scribal omission: URU.<*ḥa*>*az-za-ti* (EA 296: 32; Sivan loc. cit.).<sup>3</sup>

The second point is well established. We have enough evidence that Canaanite *o* is spelled with *u*-signs. While there are no good examples from Byblos itself,<sup>4</sup> there is ample evidence from all over Canaan to this spelling, as the notorious 1st person singular pronoun from Jerusalem *a-nu-ki* /*ʾanōki*/ (EA 287: 66, 69; cf. Sivan 1984: 29), or the word for "wall", *ḥu-mi-tu* /*ḥōmītu*/ in a letter from Beirut (EA 141: 13; cf. Sivan loc. cit.). As for the designation of length, one should note that there is only one instance of (long) *ō* reflected in writing by plene spelling in the Amarna letters, and this plene writing is found in a monosyllabic word: *ṣú-ú-nu* /*šōnu*/ (or /*dōnu*/) "sheep" (EA 263: 12 of unknown provenance; cf. Sivan 1984: 30).<sup>5, 6</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Not without taking into consideration Lipiński's wisdom in his warning against a profused use of this notion (cf. his contribution to this volume).

<sup>4</sup>A possible example from Byblos is the city name URU.*be-ru-ta* "Beirut" (EA 101: 25; EA 114: 13) (Sivan 1984: 30).

<sup>5</sup>Other occurrences of *ō* spelled with the sign *ú* are cases where the syllable opens with a consonant which is not reflected in writing (cf. Sivan 1984: 29-30). Cf. also forms like *ba-ṭi-i-ti* \**baṭiḥti* "I am confident" (147: 56; Tyre).

<sup>6</sup>There are only a handful of other occurrences of plene spelling which reflect long

In any case, according to Moran, the discussed string should be interpreted to be read

*ma-ka-ti-ma a UN-nu*

UN is interpreted as a Sumerogram for Akkadian *maššartu* "garrison", following its equation in another letter from Rib-Haddi of Byblos where UN is glossed by *maššarta* (EA 136: 18), and another occurrence of UN with the same meaning in another letter from Byblos (EA 114: 31). The sign A preceding the Sumerogram is read by Moran as *ana* "to", following some such similar abbreviations in the Byblos letters. "This reading," says Moran, "would give some explanation of the fem. suffix *-še*, though *maššartu* is usually treated ad sensum as a masc. pl." (Moran 1950: 72 n. 11).

This suggestion has not been adopted by Rainey in his two editions of his supplement to Knudtzon's classical edition (1970: 71, also 1978: 81; Sivan 1984: 242 followed). Rainey (and Sivan), rather, followed the two Akkadian dictionaries (*CAD* M2: 437a and *AHW*: 637a; cf. also *CDA*: 205a), and adhered to the Canaanistic solution. Rainey further suggested a new transliteration for the sign A as  $\textcircled{u}_4$ , to fit better the reading. He transcribed this vocable as *ma $\textcircled{u}$ nnu* (a transcription system which incorrectly reads the allegedly unspelled /*c*/ by writing it as / $\textcircled{u}$ /, as well as missing the polyvalence of *u*). Also, the value  $\textcircled{u}_4$  for A is rather doubtful and, in any case, has been assigned to A in only very rare cases and only in the late period (*AS<sup>4</sup>*: #311). Still, the cuneiform sign A may well serve as a signatum for a glottal stop in Akkadian in this environment, as in others (cf. Reiner 1966: §4.2.1). Rainey did eventually accept Moran's new interpretation, but not before Moran had reiterated his emendation and suggestion in his recent Amarna translation (1992: 192 n. 1). Moran himself, although holding on to his 1950 suggestion, has pointed out difficulties also in his own interpretation, which are not dismissible at all:

(1) in *EA*, *eli/muḥḥi* is expected rather than *ana*; (2) it is assumed that there is a sign omitted (...) [Moran still supports the possibility by giving the short list of similar occurrences in the Byblos letters; Sh.I.]; (3) the motivation for "our garrison" (i.e., *UN-nu*; Sh.I.) is not clear.

Now, Moran still rejects the reading of this string as including the alleged Canaanitism *ma<sup>c</sup>unnu* and forwards further arguments for not accepting it. He writes:

vowels in Canaanite words; e.g., *qē-c-šī* "summer (grain)" (131: 15; Byblos); *ša-de<sub>4</sub>-e* "field" (287: 56; Jerusalem); *sú-ṛu[-si-ma]* "horses" (263: 25, 28?; unknown provenance); *ha-na-ku-u-ka* "your retainers" (TT 6: 8; Ta'anakh).

Both *AHw*, pp. 591 and 637, and *CAD*, M1, pp. 140 and 437 (though on p. 333 UN is taken as *maššartu*) agree in reading *ma-ka<sub>4</sub>-ti ma-a-un-nu*, “I lack a dwelling.” The difficulties with this reading: (1) *ka<sub>4</sub>* [=QA; Sh.I.] occurs only once in the Byblos corpus (*ka<sub>4</sub>-bi-it*, *EA* 88:17 [one may add that *EA* 88 belongs to a different scribal tradition than the bulk of the Byblos letters — cf. Moran 1960: 17 n. 2; Youngblood 1961: 310; Sh.I.]); (2) of a third weak verb the form expected here is *makīti* (at Byblos, *qabīti*, *laqīti*, *šamīti*, and the same rule elsewhere; ...); (3) this assumes the sudden intrusion of Canaanite and necessitates postulating, against the available evidence (Hebrew), that <sup>c</sup> *\*mašōnu* was of feminine gender, in order to explain the suffix on *šabtū-še*; (4) in context, the statement makes little sense: (Moran 1992: 192 n. 1)

Moran, in contrast to Knudtzon, sees the two syntactical units as closely related and forming a notional unity. He translates as follows:

(...) may the king know that there was an attack on our garrison, and the sons of Abdi-Aširta seized it. (Moran 1992: 191)

The transliteration that stands behind his suggestion is as follows:

[ša]rru(LUGAL) *i-nu-ma ma-ka-ti-ma a-<na> maššartī(UN)-nu*  
*u ša-ab-tu-še mārū(DUMU.MEŠ) Iabdi(İR)-a-ši-ir[-t]/a*

Moran has overemphasized the question of what he describes “a sudden intrusion of Canaanite”, which can and does occur in the Amarna letters, Byblos included. I will show some examples below. He further argues that the context makes little sense, but –again– I don’t really see why: if Rib-Hadda leaves his dwelling, his home (perhaps implying his leaving the city), and subsequently loosing his authority — then Abdi Aširta’s sons will capture the city. Still, the other argument brought forth by Moran is strong enough. In addition to these arguments, one may bring forth still another linguistic and orthographic one, which although implied in Moran’s 1950 discussion, was not explicitly expressed. The spelling *ma-a-un-nu* includes overt consonant doubling.<sup>7</sup> Now, Akkadian in general, and Canaanite-Akkadian in particular, do not use ample overt designation of consonantal doubling. However, when there appears a *VC<sub>1</sub>* syllabic sign preceding a *C<sub>1</sub> V(C)* one, it

<sup>7</sup>Unless one takes the final syllable as representing a 1 pl. pronominal suffix, (“our dwelling”). This interpretation is unlikely, as one would expect a case marker in the boundary between the noun and the pronominal suffix (cf. Rainey 1996: I: 174-5; Izre’el 1998: 18-9).

must mean that  $C_1$  is doubled. (By talking about consonant doubling I am not necessarily talking about phonetic representation. More significantly, consonantal doubling in Akkadian and Canaanite-Akkadian has phonemic and morphophonemic functions.) This observation furthers some other observations regarding the pattern of the alleged word. Hebrew  $mā^c on$  is derived from a *media infirma* root ( $^c:n$ )<sup>8</sup> in a pattern that designates localities ( $*maR_1R_2āR_3$ ), like Hebrew  $māqom$  "place". Therefore,  $o$  in Hebrew reflects the so-called Canaanite shift and is thus an outcome of Proto-Hebrew  $\bar{a}$  and therefore must be always interpreted as long. While Akkadian cuneiform does designate Canaanite  $o$  via signs of the  $u$  series (see above), phonological rules would probably prevent a long vowel to occur before consonantal doubling, as is the case here. In addition, this doubling has no ready explanation in this alleged pattern. We should therefore interpret the  $un$  sign as representing a genuine  $u$ . Thus, a reading of this string as reflecting a Canaanite cognate to Hebrew  $mā^c on$  will have to surmise a different pattern for this noun, a pattern with a long  $a$  in the first syllable and a short  $u$  in the second syllable, as well as the doubling of the third radical, a rather rare formation in Semitic languages (cf. Hebrew  $ma^Ca arummæhem$  "their nakedness" (2 Chronicles 28:15)).<sup>9</sup> While not entirely excluded, this will take our alleged form away from supposing its formation in a pattern denoting localities.

One last word, in fact a warning, is due when discussing a possible cognacy of a vocable occurring in any of the Amarna tablets and Hebrew. As I have mentioned briefly above, we should always remember that 14<sup>th</sup> century Canaanite is not Biblical Hebrew, neither should it be regarded as a direct ancestor of Biblical Hebrew. This is true with regard to data from the Jerusalem Amarna letters, all the more so with regard to data from any other Canaanite locality. 14<sup>th</sup> century Canaanite-Akkadian as reflected in the Amarna tablets attest to many Canaanite or West Semitic substrata. After all, even Phoenician inscriptions from first-millennium Byblos attest to a different dialect than Phoenician inscriptions of other cities and regions.

Let us summarize the issues related to spelling as manifest in the endeavors to interpret the discussed string:

(1) Cuneiform writing does not separate between words, and thus signs can be attributed to strings on either side. This is why the sign MA could either

<sup>8</sup> Arabic *ġny*, *maġnan* (Baumgartner 1967-1990: 756 s.v.  $^c wn$ ) cannot be compared here.

<sup>9</sup>  $mah^a mudæhā$  "her precious things" (Lamentations 1:7) and  $mah^a lumot$  "blows" (Psalms 18:6, 19:29), sometimes interpreted as if including a doubling of the third radical (cf. Barth 1894: 255; Brockelmann 1908: 381), in fact do not belong to this pattern.



be attributed to *ma-ka-ti* or to *a-un-nu*.

(2) Cuneiform signs are polyphonic and can bear different, sometimes quite remote values. In our case here, the sign usually interpreted as *ka* (with a *qoph*) could be taken to be read *ka<sub>4</sub>* (i.e., with a *kaph*).

(3) Cuneiform signs have different values in different areas and periods, and must be interpreted according to their ascribed scribal traditions. Thus, Moran rejected the reading *ka<sub>4</sub>* instead of *ka*.

(4) Cuneiform signs can be interpreted as either syllabic or logograms. Therefore, UN can be read as a logogram for *maššartu*.

(5) When a sign is not inscribed carefully or the surface upon which it was inscribed has been damaged, there are a lot more options for reading and restoration than in alphabetic or consonantal, linear or pictographic script. In our case, there is no certainty as regards the form of the A sign.

(6) Non-Akkadian phonemes cannot be represented faithfully.

(7) Laryngeal and pharyngeal consonants can be indicated in spelling only indirectly; in many cases such consonants have no indication in spelling at all. This is the case with the alleged *c* or *g* of the suggested gloss, when Moran gave an alternative for its expected spelling.

(8) The cuneiform syllabary did not have a sign for *o*. In order to represent *o*, Canaanite scribes would use the cuneiform *u* series. In any case, *o* is unlikely to occur in a closed syllable. This is the case with the interpretation of the sign *un* in our string.

(9) Consonantal doubling is not always manifest in spelling in cuneiform writing, and it is less common in Amarna. However, when it does, it must be interpreted as reflecting genuine phonological or morphophonological doubling. Therefore, if one is to suggest a reading of the string *ma-a-un-nu* as a Canaanism related to Hebrew *mā<sup>c</sup>on*, one is further obliged to postulate that the *nun* is doubled.

(10) Vocalic length is not always manifest in writing. However, when plene writing occurs, one must attend to its meaning, which in some cases represents genuine phonological length. This is what stands behind the expected reading of an alleged vocable *ma<sup>c</sup>ōn* as put forth by Moran.

One may well argue that this is an especially difficult case, since usually purely Canaanite vocables occur following a *Glossenkeil*. This impression is only part of the truth, however. There are other Canaanite words which occur in the flow of the text rather than translating another vocable or marked by a *Glossenkeil*. In fact, there are some dozens of them. Some are glosses not marked by a *Glossenkeil*, translating a Sumerian logogram; many other non-Akkadian words occur in the flow of the text. The most famous of these is the Canaanite 1st person pronoun /*ʔanōki*/ of the Je-

rusalem letters (EA 287: 66, 69). Also among these cases the situation is not also clear-cut. In some cases it seems clear that these are Canaanite words which had entered the linguistic system of Canaano-Akkadian. One example of these words is /<sup>c</sup>izirta/ (or /<sup>c</sup>idirta/ "help", already mentioned above), which occurs three times in the Byblos letters (EA 87: 13; EA 89: 18; ZA 86: p. 101 l. 34) and must therefore be regarded not as an incidental intrusion of a Canaanite word but a borrowing into Canaano-Akkadian. Now, the decision whether a word that appears in the flow of the text is indeed Canaanite or Northwest Semitic is not always easy. At times it is even impossible. Noting the Semitic genetic affiliation of both components of the mixed language, some vocables are, indeed, identical in both Akkadian and Northwest Semitic, at least in writing. Some examples among glosses are

KA \pi-i "mouth" (EA 79: 12, Byblos; cf. EA 145: 9, Sidon; EA 195: 22, Kumidi)

— cf. Hebrew נֶפֶשׁ *pæ* "mouth", construct state נֶפֶשׁ *pi* (< *pī*)

[KU]Š? : *ma-aš-ka* "skin", "leather" (EA 86: 19, Byblos, in a broken context)

ŠIM.SAR.MEŠ \mu-ur-ra "myrrh" (EA 269: 16, Gezer; see context below)

An interesting case is

BA.UG<sub>5</sub> : *mu-tu-mi* (EA 362: 47, Byblos)

The gloss here has an enclitic *-mi* annexed to it. This is a Canaanite enclitic, but it can tell us nothing regarding the target language of the gloss complex, since this enclitic is the regular one used throughout this whole letter, and thus applied to Akkadian words as well (including the verb *qibīmi* in the opening formulae, which is significant indeed). Here the reading can be either *mūtu*, thus reflecting Akkadian, or *mōtu*, thus reflecting Canaanite. The vowel *o*, we will recall, is represented by the *u*-series in Canaano-Akkadian.

Let us return to the issue of Canaanite words in the text flow. I mentioned the gloss *mu-ur-ra* attested in a letter from Gezer, for which the language could have been either Akkadian or Canaanite. The context in which this gloss is found is as follows:

ù *yu-uš-ši-ra* LUGAL *be-li* ŠIM.SAR.MEŠ *mu-ur-ra a-na ri-pu-ú-ti*  
 and may the king, my lord, send me myrrh for healing.  
 (EA 269: 14-17)

As already suggested by Ebeling in his glossary to Knudtzon's edition, this is not an Akkadian word (Knudtzon 1915: II: 1548; so also *AHw*: 987b; *CDA* 305a), as there are no attestations of derivatives from this root at all in Akkadian. However, the form of this word is not clear, and one can either interpret it as an abstract noun, viz., "healing" or as a concrete noun, viz. "medications". The first option would be based on Hebrew רְפְאוֹת (Proverbs 3:8), while the second one would be based on the plural feminine רְפוּאוֹת (Böhl 1909: 88; Dhorme 1914: 352; cf. Izre'el 1978: 28-29). The spelling still causes a problem with regard to the representation of /<sup>ʕ</sup>/, and one can either attribute its non-representation to the writing system and scribal tradition, or suggest the previous deletion of the *aleph*. One can also raise the question whether this spelling does not reflect a previous borrowing of this Canaanite word into Canaano-Akkadian and its subsequent reformation on Akkadian bases, attracting the deletion of the *aleph* only in the target language and not in the donor substrate dialect.

Since our test case of the alleged gloss \**ma<sup>c</sup>ōnu* was drawn out of the Byblos corpus, let us return to Byblos once more to note that beside the already mentioned *izirtu*, there are other rote usages of local, Canaanite words, not as glosses but in the text flow. One of them is *kazbūtu* "lie" (EA 129: 37), which is further attested in the form *kizibtu* in another letter from Byblos found at Kāmid el-Loz (ZA 86: 101 l. 5). Very much like the case of *ripūti*, Akkadian does not attest derivatives of this root in this meaning. The Akkadian root *kzb* means, instead, "luxury" (*CAD* K: 614-5, 617). Furthermore, as in the case of *ripūti*, one may raise the question whether the form *kizibtu* is not construed on an Akkadian pattern, if the local dialect may have had only the form *kazbūtu*. This has indeed been suggested by Huehnergard (1996: 105). In support of the latter view, one may notice that in Amurru Akkadian, the root √*kzb* also shows productivity in verbal derivation (EA 62: 39, 43; cf. Izre'el 1991: I: 149). One can define nouns derived from this root as either borrowings into Canaano-Akkadian rather than an occasional insertion of a word, or, especially in the case of *kizibtu*, that the form itself is a genuine Canaano-Akkadian formation over a previously-borrowed Canaanite root. So, the decision whether a word is Canaanite is not always an easy one, be it within the flow of a text or when it occurs as a gloss.

## 5. Final note

I have tried to pinpoint some methodological issues that one needs to tackle when attempting to unveil ancient Canaanite words from their cuneiform disguise. The cuneiform syllabary represents a phonemic inventory which seems to be representative of the contemporary Akkadian superstratum and of the structural representation of Canaanite-Akkadian. Akkadian has gone through many phonological shifts in its consonantal inventory vis-à-vis Northwest Semitic languages. Also, the respective vocalic systems of Akkadian and the West Semitic dialects are different. Thus the Canaanite component is deficiently represented in the script, which suits, *mutatis mutandis*, the phonemic inventory of contemporary Akkadian. The Akkadian script was unable to represent pharyngeal and other consonants which may have been part of the Canaanite phonemic system (*h*, *h*, *c*, *ś*, and possibly also *d*, *t*, *g*, *z* and *q*), as well as the vowel *o*.

Aside from all these problems, the inherent variation represented in the writings of the Amarna Canaanite scribes and their different scribal traditions needs close scrutiny before one comes to determine the non-Akkadian component and then trying to analyze it for our needs. I do hope that I can be as meticulous in doing this job as this job requires, and serve the Semitological world duly when I submit the list of 14th century Canaanite entries to the new edition of DNSWI (cf. Izre'el 1998b).

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