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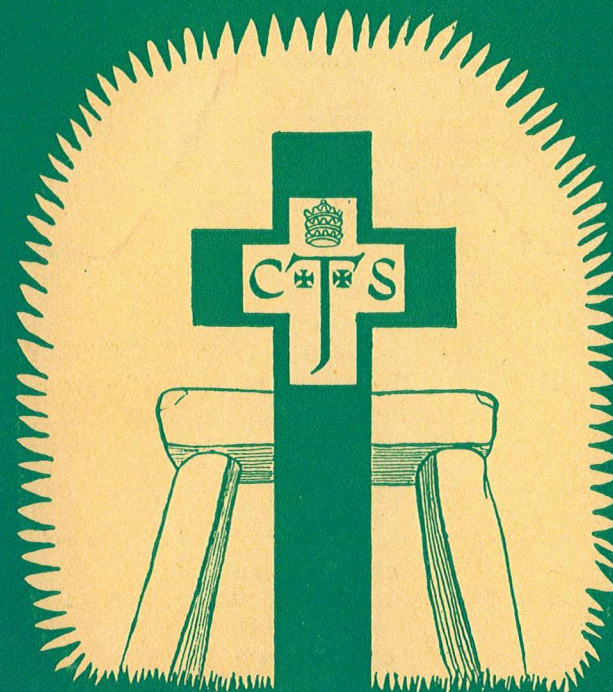
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## SEMITIC RELIGIONS

Rt Rev. Mgr John M. T. Barton D.D., F.S.A.



**STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE RELIGION**





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# SEMITIC RELIGIONS

(exclusive of the Religion of Babylonia and Assyria,  
and of the Religion of Israel)

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## INTRODUCTORY

As the title of this paper implies, the subject of our discussion is not one but manifold, since we cannot speak with accuracy of "the Semitic Religion" (in the singular), as we speak without fear of correction of the Catholic Religion or of the Religion of Islam. In the ancient Semitic world there were "gods many and lords many,"<sup>1</sup> and this, as we shall see, implied not merely polytheistic beliefs but a wide variety of cultus and practice. Hence the title of the standard English work *The Religion of the Semites*, by the late William Robertson Smith<sup>2</sup> is somewhat misleading, even when read with its sub-title: "The Fundamental Institutions." In so short a treatment of so vast a subject we can only attempt a bare outline of these fundamental institutions, together with a few references to some of the more striking idiosyncrasies of the various groups that make up the Semitic peoples. We shall not be able to say a great deal about the *origin* of the Semitic religions. Little is known with certainty regarding this, since the religions, when first we meet with them in historical record, had already attained to some degree of maturity or even, not infrequently, of decline.

<sup>1</sup>I. Cor. viii. 5.

<sup>2</sup>References throughout are to the 3rd (1927) edition, which has an introduction and some 200 pages of additional notes by Prof. S. A. Cook.



## THE SEMITES

The Semites, or the Semitic peoples, were and are those who speak the Semitic languages. This, the philological grouping, seems the best and simplest of all attempted classifications, though it suffers from the inconvenience of including certain peoples, such as the Philistines and the southern Hittites, who, although they adopted the Canaanite language of their environment, were by ethnographical standards non-Semitic. The term "Semitic" is derived from the table of the nations in Gen. x., where the then-known world is divided among the sons of Noe. It is clear that the sacred author has followed a political and geographical grouping rather than a strictly ethnographical and linguistic one, since Canaan, ancestor of the Canaanites, a Semitic people, and Heth, ancestor of the Hittites, who were neither Semitic nor Hamitic, are grouped among the sons of Cham.<sup>1</sup> In our modern usage we may agree with Prof. Stanley Cook<sup>2</sup> that "it is preferable to apply the term 'Semite' to certain languages and the people speaking them in south-west Asia, rather than to any specific type of civilization."

The Semitic languages, which show an even greater resemblance to one another than do the Romance languages of Europe, are divided by philologists into four main groups. There is, first, the *East Semitic* group, which comprises the almost identical Babylonian and Assyrian languages of Mesopotamia and which represents the earliest Semitic speeches, since they were in use by 3000 B.C. at the latest. Next, there is the *North Semitic* or Aramaic section, including East Aramaic, principally represented by Syriac, and West Aramaic, which comprises Palestinian Aramaic, Palmyrene, Nabatean and Samaritan. Then we have the *Western* group, which has, as its earliest members, the languages of Palestine during the earlier Biblical periods, e.g., Canaanite, Moabite, Phœnician and Biblical Hebrew. Finally, there is the *South Semitic* group, principally known to us in Arabic and Ethiopic.<sup>3</sup>

The religion of the *East Semitic* group (Assyro-Babylonian) and the religion of *Israel* are receiving separate treatment in this series. Our immediate concern is with the remainder of the *Western* group and with the *Northern* and *Southern* sections. If a preference has to be shown for any particular division it will be for that of the West, which includes the Canaanites, whose ritual practices and worship so often "made Israel to sin" during the Old Testament period.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For the table of the nations, consult Dr. Paul Heinisch, *Das Buch Genesis*, 1930, ch. x., Die Völkertafel, pp. 187-97.

<sup>2</sup>Art. "Semites" in *Chambers' Encyclopædia*, 1927, vol. ix., p. 247.

<sup>3</sup>See, in particular, Mr. G. R. Driver's paper on "The Modern Study of the Hebrew Language" in *The People and the Book*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1925, pp. 73-120. The date of first appearance of these languages varies considerably.

<sup>4</sup>A bibliography is given at the end of this pamphlet and many

The countries occupied by the peoples of these three groups correspond roughly to the Arabian peninsula with the Sinai Peninsula and Arabia Petraea, to modern Palestine and Syria, and to the district between the Mediterranean, the Taurus mountains, Armenia and Mesopotamia, which is nowadays covered, for the most part, by the area of Kurdistan. In the north, it is worth noting: "The present dividing line of peoples which speak respectively Arabic and Turkish marks the Semite's immemorial limit. So soon as the land-level of northern Syria attains a mean altitude of 2,500 feet, the Arab tongue is chilled to silence."<sup>1</sup>

The sources for our study of the ancient Semitic religions are, first, the Bible and some early writers, such as Pausanias, Herodotus, Philo of Byblos, and others; secondly, the large and ever-growing number of inscriptions left by these peoples; lastly, a wealth of monuments, such as temples, high places, tomb-chambers, and statues, which in the hands of competent archæologists can be made to yield the secret of their customary employment in a remote past.

## GODS AND GODDESSES

Readers of *Paradise Lost* will remember that, at the council of the infernal peers, there assisted "Moloch, horrid King besmear'd with blood," "Chemos, the obscene dread of Moab's sons," "Astarte, Queen of Heav'n with crescent Horns"<sup>2</sup> and many others, who are easily recognizable as Semitic divinities, transformed by Milton into rebel angels. A study of the last four hundred lines of Book I. would, in fact, be an excellent introduction to the names and chief characteristics of the pagan deities of Syria and Palestine.

It is evidently impracticable here to give a full description of the various Semitic pantheons. We can, however, discuss the Semites' general attitude towards their divinities and give some account of the more celebrated divine titles.

We need not delay long over the question of *monotheism* and *polytheism*. From all our existing records only one conclusion seems acceptable—that, throughout the whole period that comes under our observation, the Semites were polytheists, or, in Lagrange's words:<sup>3</sup> "There is at least one conclusion to which nobody at the present day

important authorities—Lagrange, Robertson Smith, Vincent, Cook, etc.—are quoted in the course of the study. My debt to the first-named is considerable in regard of both form and substance.

<sup>1</sup>*The Ancient East*, by D. G. Hogarth. Home University Library, 1914, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>See Bk. I., lines 392, 406 and 439.

<sup>3</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 438.



can refuse his assent, namely, that the Semitic religions were religions like the others, polytheistic religions . . . " The attempt made by Renan in the fifties and sixties of last century to prove that there was an imperious tendency towards monotheism in the Semitic world, and that the desert was the home of monotheism<sup>1</sup> is now generally discredited. In the expression of a recent writer, the well-known philologist, Prof. D. C. Brockelmann, of Halle: "There can really be no more question of Renan's hypothesis concerning the original tendency of the Semites to monotheism."<sup>2</sup> In his own day, Robertson Smith was equally critical of the suggestion made by Renan. "The monotheism of the patriarchs in the Book of Genesis is not natural monotheism, and it does not resemble anything which has existed in Semitic lands, apart from the influence of Judaism and Christianity."<sup>3</sup> In any event, as Fr. Schmidt insists,<sup>4</sup> the proof of any early monotheistic stage in Semitic religion would furnish no convincing evidence for primitive monotheism in general, since "the Semites are a comparatively long way from the real origin of humanity."

1. EL.—Among the Semitic names for the divinities, none can compare in antiquity and universality of diffusion with that of EL, which corresponds among western Semites to the Assyro-Babylonian ILU.

Its etymology is uncertain and is discussed at some length by Lagrange, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80; by the Oxford *Hebrew Lexicon*, s.v. pp. 41-42; and by Spurrell in his *Notes on the Text of the Book of Genesis*, 2nd ed., 1896: Appendix, pp. 407 ff. The more likely meanings are (i.) the strong one; (ii.) the leader or lord; (iii.) the one whom men strive to reach, "the goal of all men's longing and all men's striving" (de Lagarde). The third meaning is that favoured by Lagrange.

It is of some importance to decide whether EL is used as a *proper* name or as an appellative, that is, a *common* or class noun. On this point the evidence is somewhat conflicting.

It is attested as a *proper* name by a number of writers (Diodorus Siculus, Damascius, Servius); by a Phœnician inscription from Umm el-'Awâmid, published by Clermont-Ganneau,<sup>5</sup> which is held

<sup>1</sup>*Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, Paris, 1855, pp. 5 ff.

<sup>2</sup>*Allah und die Götzen, der Ursprung des vorislamischen Monotheismus*, p. 120, quoted by Fr. W. Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, Eng. tr., London, 1931, p. 194.

<sup>3</sup>*Lectures and Essays*, p. 612, a review written in 1887 of Renan's *Histoire du Peuple d'Israel*.

<sup>4</sup>*Op. et loc. cit.*

<sup>5</sup>See Lagrange, *op. cit.* p. 71, n. 7. For a different reading, see Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris f. semitische Epigraphik*, II., 165-7.

to give the reading "to the Lord, to El"; and by money from Byblos, which bears a representation of El as a man standing with three pairs of wings<sup>1</sup>. The corresponding goddess, Elât or Elôt, had collegiate bodies of priests at Carthage and a sanctuary was erected in her honour in Sardinia, where there is an inscription: "to the great lady, to Elât." She is represented as riding on a bull. El is seen to occur four times in the Hadad inscription from Zenjirli in Northern Syria, and is certainly used there as a proper name.<sup>2</sup> Apart from this example, the word is not found in Aramæan inscriptions, either as a proper name or as a class name, except in such composite proper names as Hazâ'êl (El sees), Tobe'êl (El is good), and the like. At Safâ, on the borders of the Syrian desert, inscriptions have been found in which, as regards proper names, "the god El takes by a long way the first place."<sup>3</sup> In South Arabia, the inscriptions testify to the fact that El was the proper name of a god and phrases recur, such as "priests of El and Athtar," "servant of El and of Athtar." Finally, in Ethiopic, a certain number of proper names are compounded with El.

As against these examples, one must set others in which *El* is clearly employed as an *appellative*. Among the Phœnicians and their colonists, the Carthaginians, El is more ordinarily used as a class name. It is to be gathered from the inscriptions that Elim was the plural of El, and this plural was used with a singular proper name, even a feminine, as in such phrases as: "Elim Nergal," "the god Nergal." In Aramaic, it is well known that *alah* or *alaha*, with its feminine and plural forms, was used as a common noun for "god" or "gods." In Southern Arabia, in addition to the use of El as a proper name, it is not seriously contested that it was employed with *ilâh* as an appellative. It may be added that in the Assyro-Babylonian religion, "one does not perceive that . . . the word *ilu* expressed anything other than the common name 'god.'"<sup>4</sup>

From these instances it may readily be seen that *El* is a noun found either as a proper name or as an appellative throughout the whole range of the Semitic peoples; further, it belongs to the most ancient stock of the languages and, unlike *Baal*, which we shall consider next, was a term applied only to gods, never to men. Should we go further and hold with Lagrange that it was originally a proper name of God and that the fact of its later becoming an appellative

<sup>1</sup>See the reproduction in Lagrange, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup>See Dr. G. A. Cooke's *Text-Book of North Semitic Inscriptions*, 1903, pp. 159 ff. Cp. line 2. "There stood by me the god(?) Hadad and El . . ."

<sup>3</sup>Dussaud and Macler, *Voyage archéologique à Safâ*, 1901, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup>P. Dhorme, *Les Semites*, p. 134 in *Où en est l'Histoire des Religions*, t. i., 1911.



is due to "the multiplication of persons to whom His transcendental properties were attributed"?<sup>1</sup> The thesis has been attacked with some vehemence by the eminent Assyriologist, Fr. Deimel, S.J., in *Verbum Domini*.<sup>2</sup> A more studied criticism is that of Dr. Johannes Hehn, of the Catholic faculty of Würzburg.<sup>3</sup> There is a somewhat superficial group of arguments against Lagrange in Prof. A. Lod's *Israel from the beginnings to the Middle of the Eighth Century*.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Dr. Stephen Langdon, the Professor of Assyriology at Oxford, writes: "The Semitic word for God meant originally 'He who is High', a sky god; and here also I believe that their religion began with monotheism; they probably worshipped El, Ilah, as their first deity."<sup>5</sup>

It is at least arguable that the alternative view that "among the heathen Semites the universal Godhead was developed out of the multiplicity of separate divinities"<sup>6</sup> is open to still graver objections, and that Lagrange's hypothesis remains the best existing interpretation of the facts. It is perhaps a somewhat academic dispute, since it does not contradict the fact that the Semitic religions *as we meet with them in the texts* were polytheistic. Further, on it depends not the general question of primitive monotheism, but merely the question whether the Semitic religions fell away from a high ideal or, on the contrary, never succeeded in attaining to one without the aid of divine revelation.

2. BAAL.—The second principal title for divinities, which is certainly primitive, proto-Semitic and found in all the Semitic languages, is Baal. The meaning is "possessor," "owner," "lord," and, unlike *El*, it is applied not only to gods but to men. It is variously used to designate the

<sup>1</sup>*Op. cit.* p. 70.

<sup>2</sup>Vol. 8, fasc. i., Jan. 1928, pp. 17–21. Deimel is somewhat over-impressed by the Assyro-Babylonian evidence and pays insufficient attention to the W. and S. Semitic texts.

<sup>3</sup>*Die biblische und die babylonische Gottesidee*, Leipzig, 1913, pp. 150–213. See *Revue Biblique*, 1913, pp. 154–6, and Schmidt, *op. cit.*, pp. 194–5.

<sup>4</sup>English trans. by Dr. S. H. Hooke, London, 1932, pp. 253–56.

<sup>5</sup>*Semitic Mythology*, 1931, p. 93.

<sup>6</sup>Hehn, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

possessor of physical objects, of physical characteristics, of mental qualities, and so forth. Thus the *baal* of a house is its owner, a *baal* of hair is a hairy man,<sup>1</sup> a *baal* of the tongue is an eloquent man. So too a married man is said to be the *baal*, i.e., the lord, of a wife. It was not, however, in general use for the master of a slave or for one who exercised rule or authority over others. The precise idea, as Lagrange writes<sup>2</sup> is "neither real ownership nor personal ownership, but real domination." He excellently compares it to the rights of a feudal lord—the title to personal service arising out of the ownership of real property.

Thus it was a word in common use among the Canaanites, Aramaeans, and Arabs for the god of a particular locality, "the master of the house" in a particular district. Hence in the so-called Panammu inscription from Zenjirli,<sup>3</sup> the god Rekub-el is called "master of the house," i.e., probably of the temple. Very frequently it is combined with the name of a place, a mountain, etc., and so *Baal Hermôn* is the Baal worshipped on Mt. Hermon and *Baal Šidôn* is the god of Sidon. But, as one might expect after seeing the various meanings of *baal*, the use is not restricted to localities. The *Baal Marqod* is not the god of a place, but the *baal* of dancing; *Baal-zebub* or Beelzebub is the lord of flies, who drives them away or summons them according to his pleasure.

We may accept the position that the local use is the most familiar one and that often the *baal* of a district replaces, as a generic term, a proper name that is frequently unknown to us. Every city had its own *baal* and for this reason the Old Testament refers to the *baalim* or *baals* in the plural.

Yet there is abundant evidence for the further use of *baal* as a proper name. "In the Amarna letters," writes Prof. Cook<sup>4</sup> "Baal proper corresponds to Addu (or Hadad), and in Egyptian texts (especially of the thirteenth century), Baal is known as a war-god,

<sup>1</sup>IV. Kings i. 8. Or perhaps, in this context, a wearer of a hairy mantle.

<sup>2</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>3</sup>See Cooke, *North Semitic Inscriptions*, pp. 171–80. Here, p. 175, line 22.

<sup>4</sup>*Religion of the Semites*, 3rd ed., p. 532.



causing terror and associated with the mountains." As regards Arabia, it was the opinion of Nöldeke<sup>1</sup> that there is evidence for the former worship of a god named Baal, even though later Arabs were unaware of it. Of Babylonia a competent authority has written: "... In Babylonia *Bēl* became the name of an individual god in a way that was never true of *Ba'al* among the West Semites."<sup>2</sup> It may also be observed that the god Hadad, who always replaces Baal in the Amarna letters, was the supreme god of Syria and was, in a special sense, the storm god; further, that in cuneiform script the sign with the syllabic value IM is used with the ideographic value of both Addu (*i.e.*, Hadad) and *Rammān*, the Thunderer.<sup>3</sup> So the equation: (A particular) Baal=Addu=Hadad=Rammān, appears to be fully justified by the texts and we may see in Baal, under this formality, a god of the heavens (Baal Shamem), a storm god, Baal *par excellence*.

If, from these uses of Baal or its equivalent as a proper name, we cannot draw an absolutely peremptory conclusion as to the existence, originally, of a supreme Baal of whom the local *baalim* were later differentiations,<sup>4</sup> our argument does, at least, vitiate Robertson Smith's attempt to tether, as it were, the *baal* to the soil and to represent him as a local god of natural fertility, a waterer of the crops and little else.<sup>5</sup>

These gods or *baalim* were not, it may be argued, merely local deities, but were sky gods, whose office it was, in the eyes of their clients, to watch over particular localities from their habitation in the heavens. This is, it must be confessed, far removed from ethical monotheism; it is equally remote from crude animism or polydaemonism.

<sup>1</sup>Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, art. Arabs (Ancient), vol. i., p. 664.

<sup>2</sup>Art. Baal in *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, by Dr. L. Paton, vol. ii., p. 296.

<sup>3</sup>See Mercer's *Assyrian Grammar*, 1921, pp. 105-6.

<sup>4</sup>Lagrange, *op. cit.*, pp. 89 ff. Dr. Hehn rejects this hypothesis uncompromisingly. "(It) is a theory not based upon actual historical fact." *Op. cit.*, p. 121. Yet Père Vincent, certainly no inconsiderable authority, has written fairly recently: "No decisive argument has set aside this interpretation. It is noteworthy that an analogous judgment can be passed regarding Egypt." See *Revue Biblique*, 1928, p. 533, n. 2.

<sup>5</sup>*Religion of the Semites*, pp. 93 ff. Prof. Cook in his notes on Baal, pp. 532-6, allows that: "W.R.S.'s pages have been found to need some modification." Unfortunately his own view is often far from clear.

3. MELEK (ALSO MOLECH AND MILK).—"There can be no doubt that 'Lord' and 'King' are favourite synonyms for 'God,' and that the conceptions of lordship and of kingship constitute the most essentially decisive factor (*das wesentlichste Moment*) in the idea of God among the Semitic peoples."<sup>1</sup> We have already discussed the Semitic conception of "lord." Something must now be said about the divine King or kings.

For the Semites the god was not only *baal* or lord; he was also *melek* or king, as we may judge from the name of the Tyrian baal, Melqart, whose name represents a contracted form of *Melek-qiryath*, *i.e.*, king of the city. "King" began as a common name for "god," but later it became the name of a particular god, "though the character of this god is difficult to grasp, doubtless because it was not everywhere the same."<sup>2</sup>

He is most clearly recognizable among the Ammonites in the case of Milkem, who was their national god, as Chemos was the national god of Moab, and who had a sanctuary near Jerusalem, built by Solomon for one of his pagan wives.<sup>3</sup>

The root also stands in the Hebrew Bible for a god MLK, the consonants of whose name were pointed by the Massoretes with the vowels of *bosheth*, "shameful thing," and so gave the reading Molech (in the Septuagint, Moloch). It is probable that the real pronunciation varied from time to time and that the name is best represented by the Hebrew *melek* or the Phœnician *milk*.

We must not ignore the fact that the name is to be remarked in many passages of the Old Testament<sup>4</sup> as a title of Jahweh (Jehovah) the God of Israel, though here, it would seem, it is always used appellatively. Evidence for this latter statement is to be found in the ancient theophorous names, such as Ahimelek (=the (divine) king is brother).<sup>5</sup> At a later date, *i.e.*, from the eighth century onwards, *Milk*

<sup>1</sup>Hehn, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

<sup>2</sup>Lagrange, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup>III. Kings xi. 5. The Douay version, following the Septuagint, reads "Moloch."

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Deut. xxxiii. 5; I. Kings xii. 22.

<sup>5</sup>See the late Dr. G. Buchanan Gray's *Studies in Hebrew Proper Names*, pp. 146 ff.



(Moloch) occurs in the Bible as the name of a particular deity, but he is a pagan divinity, whose worship is inseparably associated with the abomination of human sacrifices.

Such sacrifices were regarded by the Hebrews as Canaanite institutions, though the relatively late date of the Moloch cult may indicate a non-Canaanite origin. In any case, the god was worshipped in many places outside Canaan proper, for example at Byblos, at Tyre, and in the island of Cyprus. By classical authors he was assimilated to Kronos, the god who sacrificed his son, and it has been plausibly conjectured<sup>1</sup> that he corresponded in Babylonia to Nergal, the god of the underworld, whose character was necessarily sinister, since he peopled his dominions mainly by the agencies of pestilence, famine, and war.

The cruelties associated with child-sacrifice, which involved the burning of the victims alive, are sometimes explained in the light of Milk's alleged character as god of the underworld. M. Louis Desnoyers<sup>2</sup> is not satisfied with this interpretation. He points out that the victims could have been despatched to the lower regions without such a refinement of torture; hence, he is disposed to regard Milk "at least in remote times, as a sort of fire-god."

This special emphasis on Milk as a god of atrocious cruelty should not obscure the primitive significance of the title MLK, which did no more than point to the god's surpassing dignity not only as Baal, but as King. The notion of human sacrifice in honour of the King-god came later and marked a perversion, not a deepening, of the original conception.

4. GODS AS PARENTS OR RELATIVES OF MANKIND.—Side by side with the three great divine titles of El, Baal and Melek, we find in the Semitic languages terms used purely as appellatives and expressing relationship or filiation in regard of the gods. So, among Phœnician names we have *Ab-Baal*, "Baal is father"; *Bath-Baal*, "daughter of Baal"; *Ahath-Melqart*, "sister of Melqart." A people was called the sons or daughters of a god; the terms father,

<sup>1</sup>Lagrange, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-8.

<sup>2</sup>*Histoire du peuple hébreu*, 1922, t. i., p. 255.

brother, uncle, and the rest "replace a divine name as a species of customary synonym that everyone recognizes."<sup>1</sup>

The facts are admitted; the question to be decided is: Are these terms indicative of *natural* filiation or of filiation in a *metaphorical* sense? A number of scholars would answer that they indicate *natural* filiation, or blood relationship, but whereas some would trace the origin of the idea to *veneration for ancestors*, which resulted finally in their deification, and an ensuing relationship with the gods, others (in particular the English and Scottish scholars, T. K. Cheyne, G. Buchanan Gray, and W. Robertson Smith) turn for an explanation to *totemism*, that is, to a system connected with human kinship with animals.

We shall have more to say regarding Robertson Smith's totemistic conception when we come to consider sacrifice. Meanwhile, it may be premised that: "Totemism has been defined as the cult of a social group, especially an exogamous one (*i.e.*, one in which custom compels a man to marry outside the tribe), which stands to a species of animal or plant (generally edible), or to an object or class of objects, in an intimate relationship; the totem is treated as a cognate to be respected, and not to be eaten or used, or at least only under certain restrictions."<sup>2</sup> According to Robertson Smith's view, a complete proof of early totemism in a race or tribe involves establishing: (i.) that there were certain stocks named after animals and plants; (ii.) that the members of a stock traced their origin to such a plant or animal and considered themselves to be of the same family; (iii.) that the totem animal or plant was regarded, if not as the god of the stock, at least with veneration, so that the totem animal would not ordinarily be eaten.<sup>3</sup> Ordinarily, totemism is associated with *matriarchy*, *i.e.*, the condition of affairs where descent, kinship, and succession are reckoned through the distaff or maternal side, with its pendant, *exogamy*, which is mentioned above. Now it will be seen that numbers (ii.) and (iii.) are the crucial points for, unless it can be shown that there was a belief in a community of origin of men and animals *and* a marked veneration for the totem animal, the theory cannot stand. And this is precisely what cannot be proved, either as regards the Semites or as anything approaching a universal principle. Competent authorities assert that neither totemism nor

<sup>1</sup>Lagrange, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup>See S. A. Cook, following W. H. Rivers, in *The Religion of the Semites*, p. 535, n. 1.

<sup>3</sup>See his *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, 1st ed., Cambridge, 1885, p. 188. Also *Religion of the Semites*, pp. 124 and *passim*.



exogamy was found among the Semitic peoples,<sup>1</sup> or, for that matter, among the Indo-Europeans; that it is not uniform in its incidence, so that it is more correct to speak, in the plural, of totemisms; that its religious character is extremely doubtful, since in the words of Sir James Frazer, its chief chronicler: "Pure totemism is not in itself a religion at all; for the totems as such are not worshipped, they are in no sense deities, they are not propitiated with prayer and sacrifice."<sup>2</sup> Finally, it is not primitive, since "the presence of 'high gods' among the totemist peoples seems to contraindicate the priority of totemism, as it does that of animism or of magic."<sup>3</sup>

Hence, when faced by a choice between a wholly uncertain hypothesis of *natural* kinship and a perfectly intelligible *metaphor*, we have no hesitation in choosing the latter, in which the ideas of Master and King give place to the more familiar and intimate "Father." Yet since, among the Semites, the bare word "Father" did not of itself suffice to designate God, we may well believe that: "The feeling of tenderness which supposes so perfect a knowledge of the infinite Goodness was only to develop completely among men when He who was Son revealed to us the Father."<sup>4</sup>

5. THE GODDESSES ASHÊRÂ AND ASTARTE.—A summary list of the chief Semitic deities would not be of much service. It may, however, be of interest to mention two of the principal goddesses, since in Canaan at least: "Almost all the gods of the past seem to have become Baals; almost all the goddesses became 'Ashêrâs or Astartes.'"<sup>5</sup>

Of 'Ashêrâ it is sufficient to say that the word in the Hebrew Bible stands for two things: (i.) a sacred post or pole representing the goddess; and (ii.) the goddess herself. The former will be mentioned under sacred objects. The name of the goddess may mean "the Happy" or the "Dispenser of Happiness." The attempt of Robertson Smith<sup>6</sup> to question the existence of such a goddess is admitted by Dr. Cook to have been ill-considered. The inscriptions prove conclusively the cult of such a goddess in Babylonia, Arabia,

<sup>1</sup>See Père Pinard de la Boullaye, S.J.: *L'Etude comparée des Religions*, 3rd ed., 1929, t. i., pp. 403-9. Also for a succinct account and criticism, Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, pp. 103-9.

<sup>2</sup>*Totemism and Exogamy*, 1910-11, vol. iv., p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>Pinard de la Boullaye, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

<sup>4</sup>Lagrange, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>5</sup>Desnoyers, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>6</sup>*Religion of the Semites*, p. 188; see also pp. 560-62.

Canaan and elsewhere, though she seems to have been chiefly a West Semitic deity. From the time of the Amarna letters (c. 1450-1350 B.C.) a confusion arose between 'Ashêrâ and Astarte, so that in the Biblical literature the name survives mainly as an epithet of the great Canaanite goddess, Astarte.

Astarte, who is at once the oldest and the greatest of all Semitic goddesses, has a name of uncertain etymology, which equates with the Babylonian Ishtar, the Ashtar Chemos of the Moabites, the Atar (=Atargatis) of the Aramæans and the god Athtar of South Arabia. The Massoretes vocalized her name, as in the case of Moloch, with the vowels of *bosheth*, so making "Ashtoreth." By the Greeks she was called Aphrodite. Her three chief characteristics are (i.) she is a goddess of unbridled sexual love; (ii.) she is a goddess of maternity and fruitfulness; (iii.) she is a war-goddess.<sup>1</sup> Under the first heading we must mention, most unwillingly, the practice of sacred prostitution, both male and female, in her honour which, with human sacrifice, constitutes the two unforgivable elements in Semitic religion. That such an institution had a religious character and did not exist simply for sensual gratification is proved among other things by the special words *qâdêsh* (m.) and *qedêshâ* (f.), implying consecration, which distinguished the addicts from the ordinary *zônâ* or public woman. In a polygamous society, where ordinary prostitution was rife, this has its significance. The countless images of Astarte, varying from developed sculptures of the goddess, usually naked and often with the hands supporting the breasts, to conventional plaques roughly portraying the Queen of Heaven,<sup>2</sup> bear witness to the popularity of this goddess of abounding life and luxuriant fertility.

The exact relation between the Baals and the goddesses in Canaan is difficult to determine. The Bible frequently mentions them together, but it is not clear whether the Canaanites *habitually* regarded them as consorts. If one takes into account the Ashtar Chemos of the Moabites and the words of Hammurabi's dedication,

<sup>1</sup>See the article "Ashtart (Ashtoreth) Astarte," by the late Dr. L. Paton in *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. ii., pp. 115-18.

<sup>2</sup>For illustrations see Prof. R. A. S. Macalister's *A History of Civilization in Palestine*, 1921, p. 91.



in which 'Ashêrâ is called "bride of the king of heaven," it is probable that they were. But, if Astarte was a consort, she did not necessarily take second place. At Byblos she was superior to El; at Sidon to the Baal.<sup>1</sup> Again, the goddess 'Anath, who is often associated with Astarte in Egyptian texts as the two "great goddesses who conceive but do not bear" is at least on a level with her illustrious consort Mekal, the Baal of Bethshan.<sup>2</sup>

### HOLINESS AND UNCLEANNESS

From the Semitic representations, however imperfect, of the Holy One who is God, we turn naturally to the ideas of holiness as contrasted with that of ritual uncleanness, that are frequently found in the Bible and among Semitic peoples. "Though not precise, the distinction between what is holy and what is unclean is real; in rules of holiness the motive is respect for the gods, in rules of uncleanness it is primarily fear of an unknown or hostile power."<sup>3</sup>

Among the Semites a clear distinction was made between what was permitted, licit or profane (*halâl*) and what was forbidden, restricted and sacred (*harâm*).<sup>4</sup> "Things are either sacred and holy or common and profane; they are also divided into either clean or unclean."<sup>5</sup> The principal interrelations are (i.) that the *clean* and profane can become sacred; (ii.) that the *unclean* and profane cannot become sacred; (iii.) that the sacred can become unclean, "and even ought to become so in another and exclusive religion, since all that is sacred in a cult is necessarily an abomination to those who condemn it."<sup>6</sup>

The close association of the two ideas "holy" and "unclean" must not blind us to their essential distinction. True, they are

<sup>1</sup>See Desnoyers, *op. cit.*, p. 256, n. 2.

<sup>2</sup>For 'Anath, see Vincent in *Revue Biblique*, 1928, pp. 512-43, art. "Le Ba'al Cananéen de Beisan et sa Parèdre." Also S. A. Cook in *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the Light of Archaeology*, 1930, pp. 104-5.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson Smith: *Religion of the Semites*, p. 153.

<sup>4</sup>Hence the *harâm* or *harem* is the "forbidden" or "reserved" part of the house or tent, *i.e.*, the women's quarters. So also the *Harâm* at Jerusalem, Hebron, etc., is the temple-area, the sacred enclosure.

<sup>5</sup>S. A. Cook in *Religion of the Semites*, p. 548.

<sup>6</sup>Lagrange, p. 152.

correlative terms and have certain things in common, *e.g.*, neither is to be explained on purely natural grounds. So the prohibition of swine-flesh among the Israelites is not simply a registration of the fact that the pig is an unclean feeder. Further, in both cases there is an element of reserve and avoidance, since the fear of putting holy things to a profane use is closely paralleled by the fear of contracting some physical or moral impurity by contact with a corpse or by the use of unclean meats. Finally, in both cases there is some risk of "contagion." Hence the earthen vessel that has served for the baked meats must be broken<sup>1</sup> as though it had contracted impurity. In *Ezech. xlv. 19* it is ordained that the priests must exchange their sacred vestments, after the sacrifice, for ordinary garments, in order "that they sanctify not the people with their garments" by communicating to them a holiness for which ransom would have to be paid.

Yet, as has been said, the distinction is essential. Underlying the conception of uncleanness is the largely negative element of avoidance of something hurtful, *because it is hurtful*; under that of holiness, the conception of respect for the rights of the deity in using things that pertain to him. On the analogy of habitual grace and mortal sin, the two elements, holiness and uncleanness, cannot co-exist in the same subject, for one will cast out the other.

### SACRED THINGS AND PLACES

1. SACRED SPRINGS.—It is unnecessary to stress the fact that, throughout the Semitic world, springs, fountains, and rivers were often the object of cultus. Even the sea, though regarded rather as a part of the visible universe than as something with intrinsic qualities, had its gods. At Jôra, near Askalon, there was a vernal procession from the temple to the sea in honour of the goddess Atargatis, whose statue was immersed; at Dôr (Tantureh) there appears to have been a cult of a Poseidon-like deity.<sup>2</sup>

Yet there is no sufficient proof of Robertson Smith's dictum that: "The source itself is honoured as a divine being, I had almost said a divine animal."<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, the source had no priests, no temples and no sacrifices offered to it. It is more correct to say that living water as the principle of life and energy in plants, and as the essential drink of men and animals, was regarded as a marvellous effect wrought by a superior agency. "They saw in it the action of a higher power without distinguishing between natural and super-

<sup>1</sup>Lev. vi. 28; cp. xi. 33-35; xv. 12.

<sup>2</sup>See S. A. Cook, *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the Light of Archaeology*, pp. 172-4.

<sup>3</sup>*Religion of the Semites*, p. 184.



natural."<sup>1</sup> Among the chief rites were those of taking sacred objects, such as statues, down to the water for a rite of purification, and of bringing water from the source for the purpose of libations, symbolical of rain.

2. SACRED TREES.—Robertson Smith allows that: "There is no reason to think that any of the greater Semitic cults was developed out of tree-worship."<sup>2</sup> But from the observation that "no Canaanite high place was complete without its sacred tree standing beside the altar," and from the allegation that "the direct cult of trees was familiar to all the Semites," he judges that "some elements of tree worship entered into the ritual even of such deities as in their origin were not tree-gods." Actually, he seems here to go a good deal further than the facts warrant. If one is prepared to distinguish popular superstition from serious religious cultus, it may be claimed that the Semites did not worship trees, though trees were often accessories in their worship in the sense that they formed part of the ordinary Semitic sanctuary. The attempted proof of Canaanite tree worship from the Bible is quite inadequate. It is indifferent logic to argue from the statement that "the altars were habitually set up 'under green trees'" to the conclusion that the trees themselves were an object of worship!

An interesting question concerns the 'ashêrâ, or sacred pole, which was a regular feature of the Semitic enclosure. It is translated by the Septuagint and Vulgate as "grove,"<sup>3</sup> but it is commonly admitted that, at least in its more ordinary form, it was a post symbolizing a tree rather than a living tree rooted in the ground. It may be regarded as a tree-trunk, deprived of its upper branches and lopped off short, as in the bas-relief found at Susa by the de Morgan expedition.<sup>4</sup> Ordinarily there would only have been one in each sanctuary, but in the Susa representation there are three. How far, that is to what degree of perfection, the image of the goddess 'Ashêrâ was usually carved on the post, cannot be determined with certainty. Nor is it easy to arrive at the precise relation between the 'ashêrâ and the goddess, who gave her name to it. It does not seem probable that the 'ashêrâ was an epitome of the primordial sacred grove,<sup>5</sup> since in many sanctuaries there were trees, rooted in the soil, to which the name 'ashêrâ would have been more suitably applied; nor are we justified in holding that it was an idol as a direct object of worship, for it was honoured not under its own name, but under that of the goddess. Perhaps, as M. Desnoyers has suggested,<sup>6</sup> it is best regarded as one of the survivals of an ancient

<sup>1</sup>Lagrange, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup>*E.g.*, IV. Kings xxi. 7; III. Kings xvi. 33; xiv. 23.

<sup>4</sup>See illustration in Père Vincent's *Canaan d'après l'Exploration récente*, 1907, p. 144.

<sup>5</sup>Vincent, p. 132.

<sup>6</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 234, n. 1.

ritual practice (not fully appreciated by its later devotees?), unless with Lagrange<sup>1</sup> one elects to consider it as primarily "an image of the goddess, whose head was perhaps no more than sketched in outline, and whose body was a stake driven into the ground."

3. SACRED STONES.—This is a big subject. For our purpose the essential distinction is one between stones that are *representative* and stones that are merely *commemorative* or votive. The former, though not ordinarily carved in representation of any recognizable image, were held to symbolize and "contain" the god in whose honour they were erected. They differed from the sacred fountain and sacred trees, because, while the latter "are common symbols at sanctuaries, but . . . are not invariably found," the former are "the ordinary artificial mark of a Semitic sanctuary."<sup>2</sup> In Arabia and elsewhere they tend to take the place of an *altar*; the victim was slain beside them and his blood was poured out over the stones. After a sacrifice "the primitive rite of sprinkling or dashing the blood against the altar, or allowing it to flow down on the ground at its base, was hardly ever omitted."<sup>3</sup>

Yet, in addition to these sacred stones or *betyls*<sup>4</sup> with a representative character, there are others which seem to be merely *commemorative*, set up as funerary monuments, or votive tablets, erected in thanksgiving for some benefit conferred by the god.

There are excellent examples of both sorts of stone in the Semitic sanctuary at Gezer, where one of the stones in the line of pillars<sup>5</sup> is commonly regarded as a *betyl*; it has been polished to a fine gloss by the contact of innumerable lips or of "hands soaked for purposes of anointing in blood or some other liquid offered in homage or in sacrifice to a god."<sup>6</sup> But there are also other pillars in the same alignment<sup>7</sup> which are more suitably regarded as commemorative, as

<sup>1</sup>p. 176.

<sup>2</sup>Robertson Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup>Robertson Smith, p. 201.

<sup>4</sup>Compare the Greek *baitilos*, a meteorite; the Semitic *bait-il*, House of El.

<sup>5</sup>No. II. in Prof. Macalister's enumeration. Illustrations in Vincent, *Canaan*, pp. 110-14; S. R. Driver, *Modern Research as Illustrating the Bible*, 1909, pp. 48 and 63.

<sup>6</sup>Vincent, p. 111.

<sup>7</sup>In all there are eight columns and two fragments; the former range in height from 10ft. 6in. to 5ft. 5in.



monuments set up in memory of the dead, that they might not be wholly forgotten among men. So it was that Absalom "in his life time had taken and reared up for himself the pillar which is in the king's dale: for he said: I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name."<sup>1</sup> In like manner a Phœnician inscription from Kition, in Cyprus, commemorates Abd-osir who writes of himself: "I set up (this) pillar in my lifetime over my resting-place for ever."<sup>2</sup> Yet not all pillars of this kind were funerary. Many were votive tablets resembling those found in such quantities on the site of ancient Carthage,<sup>3</sup> which commemorated some favour received from the god or bestowed by men.

The theory that *all* such pillars [called in Hebrew *maššēbā*, pl. *maššēbōth*, i.e., standing (stone)] were representative abodes of the god is unwarranted, though it must be admitted that in certain cases there was some shifting of values.<sup>4</sup>

4. THE SACRED ENCLOSURE.—We have just considered some of the chief elements that went to the making of a Semitic sanctuary. We must now take a more general view of it. The Semitic conception was that of a sacred enclosure which was, at one and the same time, "the house of God and His inviolable domain. Thus He was established among men without any loss of dignity."<sup>5</sup> The form and extent of the enclosure varied from one people to another. In Babylonia, where the population was largely urban, the sanctuary was set up among the houses of the town and was the temple enclosure, marked off by its high tower or *ziggurat*. Among the Phœnicians, the open-air type of sanctuary is found wherever their influence penetrated, though they had no special name for it.<sup>6</sup> In Arabia, the sanctuary had much wider limits so that "the *hima*

<sup>1</sup>II. Kings xviii. 18, in Revised Version.

<sup>2</sup>See Cooke, *North Semitic Inscriptions*, pp. 61 ff.

<sup>3</sup>See Cooke, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>4</sup>See Lagrange, pp. 197-210. Vincent, pp. 67 and 425; S. A. Cook in *Religion of the Semites*, pp. 568-71. The two sanctuaries at Gezer have respectively ten and four columns; Beth-Shemesh has five; Taanakh has only two. The orientation of the lines of columns at Gezer and Megiddo is north-south; at Tell eš-Šāfiyē it is east-west.

<sup>5</sup>Lagrange, p. 187.

<sup>6</sup>Lagrange, p. 183.

sometimes enclosed a great tract of pasture land roughly marked off by pillars or cairns, and the *harām* or sacred territory of Mecca extends for some hours' journey on almost every side of the city."<sup>1</sup>

As a typical Canaanite high place<sup>2</sup> and the most complete one in existence, we may instance Gezer in South Palestine, where stands the impressive series of eight enormous monoliths which has already been mentioned. In addition to these, there was found, between pillars V and VI, a large block of stone containing a hollow, which is identified by Vincent as an altar on which the sacrificial victim was placed, so that its blood ran down into the cavity and was easily gathered up for the purpose of anointing the adjacent *betyl*.<sup>3</sup>

More ordinarily, it may well be, the altar was of the type shown in the Susa bas-relief<sup>4</sup> or in the Petra high place, i.e., a high structure with one or more steps leading up to it and furnished with horns of the type often mentioned in the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

In the sanctuary there were also one or more '*ashêrim*, which, it would seem, were ordinarily fixed in the ground, even in cases where the nature of the soil would have favoured the growth of living trees.

In default of a natural spring, which supplied water for lustrations and other ceremonial cleansings, reservoirs were made in the neighbourhood of the sanctuary<sup>6</sup> or, failing this, water was conveyed to the spot in large earthenware jars.

One need only notice, in addition, the trenches to contain the ashes

<sup>1</sup>Robertson Smith, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup>In Hebrew, *bāmā*, pl. *bāmōth*.

<sup>3</sup>*Canaan*, pp. 134-5. Macalister's original suggestion that it was an '*ashêrā* socket does not appear probable. See the *Quarterly Statement of the Palestine Exploration Fund*, 1903, p. 31; Vincent, pp. 131-2.

<sup>4</sup>Vincent, p. 144.

<sup>5</sup>E.g., III. Kings i. 50; ii. 28; Ex. xxix. 12. The horns were probably symbolic of the horns of the sacrificial animal and indicative of the perpetual character of sacrifice. See Desnoyers, p. 233, n. 1. For other forms of altar, see Barton, G. A., art. "Altar (Semitic)" in *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, i., pp. 350-54.

<sup>6</sup>Three are to be observed in the plan of the Canaanite high place at Gezer.



and other remains of the victims; also, in the more important sanctuaries, the small temples sometimes referred to at a later date,<sup>1</sup> a chamber for sacrificial meals; sleeping quarters for the priests who lived there and for the sacred prostitutes who came there at least on the occasions of great feasts.<sup>2</sup>

Of the furniture of such sanctuaries little remains. Much of it, doubtless, was perishable or easily destructible. Among objects of interest, found in Canaan, one may instance the Israelite altar or incense burner from Taanakh, which is dated conjecturally 700-600 B.C.<sup>3</sup>

The question of foundation and other sacrifices will be treated under "Sacrifice."

### SACRED SEASONS

"The word 'feast' has become for us synonymous with that of a day of rejoicing. It was not so in antiquity. A feast day was a day consecrated to a god."<sup>4</sup> It was a day of rest, which brought to an end a period of work; further it was a day entirely dedicated to the god and, as such, carried with it sacrifice, invocations, and processions.

Among nomad peoples, such as the Arabs, feast-days were in the nature of pilgrimages, of visits to the great sanctuaries. Since distances were often great and not seldom a visit to a great sanctuary involved passing through enemy territory, it became the custom to proclaim a truce of God during the festival period; it was an occasion for barter and commerce between tribes; hence feasts took on the character of fairs. The essential rite among the nomads was the procession, particularly the circumambulatory procession, and the very word "Hadj," now commonly reserved for the Meccan pilgrimage, has the meaning "to go round an object with some solemnity." This rite had its pendant among the Hebrews in certain of their feasts, in particular that of Tabernacles, in which it was customary to walk in procession, carrying branches of trees. Such processions and the circuit of the altar or sanctuary were the central rites. In the spring time there was a celebration

<sup>1</sup>III. Kings xiii. 32, "the houses of the high places"; IV. Kings xvii. 29.

<sup>2</sup>Desnoyers, pp. 235-6.

<sup>3</sup>Vincent, pp. 180-81; *Revue Biblique*, 1926, p. 492.

<sup>4</sup>Lagrange, p. 183.

of a sort of first-fruits solemnity, in which the first-born of domestic animals played a part. There was not, however, the custom among the nomads, as there was among the Hebrews, of sacrificing the first-born. There was another great feast and fair that lasted two months, *i.e.*, from the beginning of July till the end of August.

In Phœnicia the best-known feast was that of Aphrodite, which was celebrated in the month of July by the people of Byblos at Apheca, the modern Afqa, the grotto sacred to Adonis. It had the character of a mourning rite, and bewailed the death of the young god, whose tomb was located in the vicinity. Scarcely less famous was the feast of Herakles at Tyre. At Carthage the coming of Roman rule in 146 B.C. put an end to human sacrifices, but failed to check the generally immoral worship of the Great Goddess. Among the Syrians the great feast was held at Hierapolis (the modern Membig, 20 miles north-east of Aleppo), where living victims (sheep, goats and other animals) were cast into the flames in honour of the Dea Syra, Astarte.

All these feasts, though widely different in character, had this much in common—that they were not historically commemorative as were the feasts of the Jewish church. A mythical origin was often invented for them; actually they were chiefly connected with the recurring seasons of the year.

### SACRED PERSONS

1. MINISTERS OF THE SANCTUARY.—Among the Arabs we must distinguish the civilized inhabitants of South Arabia, who had priests as sacrificers and even a high priest who was the eponym for the reckoning of years, from the nomads, who had no holocausts and whose sacrifices were not functions reserved to priests. They had only a guardian of the sanctuary, called a *sâdin*, who was also an unofficial judge in contentious matters.

Among the Aramæans the priest was called the *komer* (doubtless from *kamar*, "to be kindled" or "to blaze") of a certain god and offered holocausts in his honour.

The double Phœnician inscription from Kition in Cyprus is a sort of salary list of those employed in the temple.<sup>1</sup> It refers to those

<sup>1</sup>See Cooke, *North Semitic Inscriptions*, pp. 65-70. References here are to document A.



"who reside for the sacred service on this day"; to "sacrificers"; to "the barbers officiating at the service" of ceremonial shaving of the head and offering of hair; to the "masons," the "chief of the scribes," and "to dogs and temple clients."<sup>1</sup> An inscription found at Carthage by Père Delattre, in November 1901, suggests that there were several degrees in the priesthood.

2. PERSONAL CONSECRATION.—We cannot spend any time over personal dedication by *vow*, though this too was known among the Semites. We need only refer to consecration by the rite of *circumcision*. As regards its antiquity, Dr. G. A. Barton has declared: "A practice which is so nearly co-extensive with the Semitic world probably originated with the common stock from which the Semites are sprung."<sup>2</sup> Yet its complete absence among the Assyro-Babylonians is distinctly unfavourable to this view. In any case, it has been practised from time immemorial by most Semitic peoples, e.g., the Arabs, the Edomites, the Ammonites and the Moabites.<sup>3</sup> There can be little doubt that it was a form of personal consecration by shedding of blood, usually performed either at puberty or just before marriage. Among the Hebrews it was commonly performed within a few days of birth.<sup>4</sup>

### SACRIFICE

Sacrifice is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as: "Primarily the slaughter of an animal (often including the subsequent consumption of it by fire) as an offering to God or a deity. Hence, in wider sense, the surrender to God or a deity, for the purpose of propitiation or homage, of some object or possession." The second sentence is highly important, since the narrower sense, involving the immolation of an animate victim, could not be verified in the case of all Semitic sacrifices; further, it emphasizes the generic idea of sacrifice, which is that of a *gift*, offered to God or a deity for the sake of entering into union with Him, of averting His wrath, of tendering to Him adoration and thanks. For the Semite, the *betyl* enshrining the presence of the god did not suffice; an altar was required to receive his gifts since "a complete act of worship implies not merely

<sup>1</sup>The "dogs" are frequently interpreted to mean temple prostitutes. See Deut. xxiii. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Art. "Circumcision (Semitic)" in *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. iii., p. 679.

<sup>3</sup>Jer. ix. 25-26. For the modern rite among the Qaraites of South Arabia, see Bertram Thomas's *Arabia Felix*, 1932, pp. 71-72.

<sup>4</sup>Gen. xvii. 10-12.

that the worshipper comes into the presence of his god with gestures of homage and words of prayer, but also that he lays before the deity some material oblation."<sup>1</sup>

With Robertson Smith<sup>2</sup> we may divide the Semitic sacrifices under three headings. Under the third heading we shall have to consider that aspect of sacrifice which is at once his most original and his most debatable contribution to the subject.

1. We must distinguish between *animal* and *vegetable* offerings, called by the Hebrews, respectively, *zebah* and *minha*. Naturally these vary in material among the Semites according to whether the offerers are a nomad or an agricultural people. So the Arabs offered oxen, camels, and sheep; for the last they sometimes economically substituted a gazelle. For the *minha* they offered wine, oil, and flour. The Canaanites, primarily an agricultural people, made offerings of oxen, calves, rams, goats, deer, and various kinds of birds; among vegetables they offered cereals, honey, oil, milk, and spiced wine. The absence of the camel is readily explained by the fact that they lived in settled communities. The Aramæans, who occupy an intermediate position in such matters, closely resembled the Hebrew ritual as regards the material of their sacrifices.

2. We distinguish also offerings merely set forth on a sacred table and offerings consumed by fire. Only in the latter case, evidently, is there a holocaust and unequivocal destruction of the victim. Apropos of the former it has been claimed that the "loaves of proposition" or show-bread<sup>3</sup> which were laid upon a table in the Israelite holy place, were a survival of an ancient belief that the god consumed the food set before him by worshippers, that sacrifice originated in a meal offered to the god.<sup>4</sup> Now it is certain, of course, that both in Israel and among the other Semites offerings of food that were not meant to be consumed by fire played a large part. In the list of religious offerings found at Carthage,<sup>5</sup> there is mention of "plants of fair fruit," of "bread," of "figs fair and white," and of "incense, fine frankincense" as part of the sacrificial offering. Yet the contention that sacrifice was regarded

<sup>1</sup>Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup>p. 217.

<sup>3</sup>Ex. xxv. 30; xxxv. 13; xxxix. 36.

<sup>4</sup>See the *Babylonian Legend of the Deluge*, ll. 160-162, British Museum publication, 1929, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup>See Cooke, *North Semitic Inscriptions*, pp. 125-30.



*primarily* as a meal of which the god eat his share does not bear much examination. "If sacrifice had been only a culinary procedure to give nourishment to famished gods, it would never have had any place in religion."<sup>1</sup>

In the Semitic world, as Robertson Smith allows: "The idea that the gods actually consume the solid food deposited at their shrines is too crude to subsist without modification beyond the savage state of society."<sup>2</sup> True, he thinks that *liquid* oblations were regarded as consumed, but he has to admit that the drinking by the deity of the most important effusion (that of blood) is not well attested among the Semites. "Apart from Ps. l. [Vulg. xlix.] 13, the direct evidence for this is somewhat scanty so far as the Semites are concerned. . . ."<sup>3</sup> In any event, the theory is not an adequate explanation of the world-wide phenomenon of sacrifice, though it is useful in so far as it emphasizes "the fact that the material of sacrifices is always an object capable of being eaten or drunken."<sup>4</sup>

3. W. R. Smith finally distinguished sacrifices "in which the consecrated gift is wholly made over to the god, to be consumed on the altar or otherwise disposed of in his service," and those "at which the god and his worshippers partake together in the consecrated thing."<sup>5</sup> With the latter type, we touch the heart of his theory, since, in his conception, sacrifice is *primarily an act of communion*. The theory occupies the last six chapters of his work, *i.e.*, chs. vi.-xi.—well over 200 pages—and cannot be adequately summarized. Very briefly, he held that the totem-animal already mentioned,<sup>6</sup> which was of the same blood as gods and men, might not ordinarily be eaten. Yet, on certain solemn occasions, a gathering of the tribe took place, the

<sup>1</sup>Lagrange, p. 267. Personally, I would prefer the more qualified statement in the 1st (1903) edition of *Études sur les Religions Sémitiques*: "If sacrifice had been only a culinary procedure to give nourishment to the gods, it would have disappeared as soon as man arrived at a less debased conception of the gods." pp. 266-7.

<sup>2</sup>*Op. cit.*, pp. 228-9.

<sup>3</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>4</sup>Lagrange, *loc. cit.*

<sup>5</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>6</sup>"Gods as parents or relatives," above p. 10.

totem-animal was slain and the worshippers, by eating its flesh, entered into living and intimate union with the god.

This theory of totemistic communion has been severely handled and, outside the British Isles, it is almost everywhere recognized to be damaged beyond repair. Dr. Cook's efforts in his edition of the *Religion of the Semites* to cobble together the rags of the theory are unsuccessful. The most serious criticism is that it is unsupported by sufficient evidence, since the only instance of such "communion" adduced by Smith is that of "St. Nilus's camel," so-called because it occurs in the life of St. Nilus the hermit, which describes the slaughter and eating of a camel by Bedawin of the Sinai peninsula.<sup>1</sup> This instance, apart from its late date and certain ambiguities of expression, does nothing to prove that the camel was regarded as a god or that the eating of his flesh was a form of communion with the god.

In fact, in Foucart's words<sup>2</sup>: "As regards St. Nilus's camel, I am still of the opinion that it does not deserve to have so heavy a weight as the genesis of a part of the history of religion laid on its hump." And, as regards the whole problem, the most recent synthetic treatment of sacrifice<sup>3</sup> declares that "to erect an elaborate reconstruction of the theory of sacrifice on the basis of totemism is to build on very insecure foundations," and that "the totemistic hypothesis breaks down with the Robertson Smith theory of sacrifice." Dr. James rightly insists that the totemistic stage in the development of Israelite sacrifice is unproved. He continues: "Be this as it may, it certainly cannot now be maintained that 'originally all sacrifices were eaten by the worshippers,' and that 'in the oldest sacrifice the blood was drunk by the worshippers, and after it ceased to be drunk it was all poured out at the altar.'"<sup>4</sup>

Yet, here again, as Lagrange points out, this theory has its value since it lays stress upon "the idea of union

<sup>1</sup>Migne, P. G., lxxix., 612-13.

<sup>2</sup>*Histoire des religions et méthode comparative*, Paris, 1912, p. lxvi.: quoted by Schmidt, *Origin and Growth of Religion*, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup>Dr. E. O. James: *Origins of Sacrifice*, 1933, pp. 45 and 47.

<sup>4</sup>The quotation is from Robertson Smith, p. 389. I have corrected one or two slight misquotations in Dr. James.



with the god [which] is certainly a constitutive element of sacrifice."<sup>1</sup>

So we come back again to the idea of *offering*, which is undoubtedly the generic element in all sacrifices and which alone can group together sacrifices with blood and bloodless sacrifices. If we look for the fundamental idea underlying the offering, it seems to be that of recognizing the supreme dominion of God or the gods by handing back a part of the goods of this world, so that one may obtain the right to make use of the remainder and, as it were, to "desecrate" them for profane use.

Yet all offerings are not sacrifices, though all sacrifices are generically offerings. The specific difference lies in the concept of *immolation*, which is present, actually or equivalently, in all sacrifices, since even inanimate objects have to be destroyed in order to be offered in sacrifice. In any case, sacrifice truly and properly so-called was that of a living animal; other types of sacrifice were all ancillary to the main type. Nomads and agriculturalists had nothing more precious to offer than their domestic animals. The further conception of communion, of dining at the table of the god, is readily explained by the nature of the offering, the fact that it is in principle a free gift to the god on the part of his worshippers, and, above all, because "the invariable usage of the East is that great lords should feed their dependents."<sup>2</sup>

We have already referred to the most revolting of all types of sacrifice—that of human beings in honour, particularly, of the god Milk. Throughout the Semitic world—in Phœnicia and its colonies, in Syria, among the Aramæans, in Arabia and in Canaan, we find evidence ranging from bare traces of the practice to well-established and well-attested usage. The excavations at Gezer revealed "a cemetery of infants deposited in large earthenware jars. The infants were all newly-born, probably not more than a week old."<sup>3</sup> We know that the custom among the Canaanites of sacrificing the first-born is attested by the Bible (*e.g.*, IV. Kings iii. 27, Micheas vi. 7. III. Kings xvi. 34 is doubtful evidence).

In addition to sacrifices of children, a further specialized type of human sacrifice is that of *foundation* sacrifices, *i.e.*, "sacrifices

<sup>1</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 268.

<sup>2</sup>Lagrange, p. 272.

<sup>3</sup>S. R. Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

offered at the foundation of a building, for the purpose of ensuring the stability of structure and the welfare of those about to occupy or use it."<sup>1</sup> So in one instance from Gezer, a jar-burial lay under a wall; at Megiddo the skeleton of a girl of fifteen was found buried under the western wall of the fortress; at Gezer again the remains of an old woman were dug out from the foundations of a house.<sup>2</sup> Two tendencies of a mitigating character are to be noted—that of substituting an animal in lieu of a human being,<sup>3</sup> and that of burying small figures of silver or other metal, or sometimes a lamp between two bowls, to take the place of a human victim.<sup>4</sup> Finally, there are at times signs of ritual mutilation of the bodies. At Gezer, for example, Prof. Macalister unearthed the upper half of a girl of about 15, buried in an old cistern among fourteen males, whose skeletons were whole and entire.<sup>5</sup>

In all these instances of sacrificial gifts and offerings we see an effort, however imperfect and distressing, to propitiate, to adore, to attain to union with the divinity. The hour was to come when "it would not be necessary to give to Him any other testimony than the heart's adoration in union with the sacrifice of God made man. But [in these studies] we are still far from this mystery, of which mere human nature could not have even an inkling."<sup>6</sup>

### THE DEAD

Before we consider the general manner of burial among the Semites and their attitude towards the next life, we must first ask: Did they regard *all* their dead as gods or was such deification reserved for a few? Did they pray *to* the dead or merely on their behalf? We know that Renan attempted to prove that, for practical purposes, the Semite showed no concern with regard to the question of a future existence.<sup>7</sup> We also know that a profound reaction has set in against this view and that many scholars are inclined to think that the Semite adored his dead as gods and offered sacrifice to them, as to those worthy of divine honours.

<sup>1</sup>Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup>See Vincent, pp. 50 ff., p. 192, 196. and 199 ff. Note illustrations on pp. 192 and 197.

<sup>3</sup>For examples, see Driver, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–72.

<sup>4</sup>See especially Cook, *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the Light of Archaeology*, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup>Cook, p. 83.

<sup>6</sup>Lagrange, p. 269.

<sup>7</sup>*Histoire du peuple d'Israel*, pp. 42 and 130.



In answer to these questions, it should be admitted that divine rank was attributed to certain of the *more illustrious* dead. The only Biblical passage adduced, that in which the witch of Endor speaks of Samuel's spirit as an *Elôhim*,<sup>1</sup> is unconvincing evidence of any godlike quality in the departed.<sup>2</sup> But inscriptions that have come to light in various parts of the Semitic world, notably in the Nabataean country round Petra, go to prove that *some* of the dead were regarded as gods. Nor is this a recent innovation in Semitic religion; it is found in Babylonia at a very early date.<sup>3</sup>

Yet there is nothing to show that in ordinary circumstances the dead had a claim to be divinized. Further, it may be observed that there is no one name for the dead among the Semites and of those that are known the etymology, while frequently uncertain, does not suggest a divine status. In the Bible and among the Phœnicians they are known as the *Rephaim*, which word is variously held to mean the "weak ones," the "terrible ones," the "wise ones," or, according to Père Lagrange's suggestion, the "healers." Whatever may be the real meaning, it is clear from the Phœnician inscriptions that it is a privilege to "have a resting place among the *Rephaim*" or shades.<sup>4</sup> The terms used in the Hadad monument from Zenjirli,<sup>5</sup> include the word *nephesh* or soul. "May the soul of Panammu eat with Hadad and may the soul of Panammu drink with Hadad." Whatever may be the precise sense of *nephesh* (and one would judge that a soul capable of eating and drinking would be of a somewhat material order) it is evident that the reference is to a principle distinct from the body, a principle not extinguished by death. The lack of philosophical exactness of expression among these eighth-century Aramæans does not obscure their recognition of a vital principle that survived the grave.

The ordinary Semitic method of disposing of the dead was burial. True, at Carthage and elsewhere, cremation was practised, but this was exceptional. An instance of both processes is furnished in I. Kings,<sup>6</sup> where it is related that the men of Jabes burned the corpses of Saul and his sons and then buried the bones. Other Scriptural examples<sup>7</sup> imply

<sup>1</sup>I. Kings xxviii. 13.

<sup>2</sup>See Lagrange, p. 316.

<sup>3</sup>See P. Dhorme: *La religion assyro-babylonienne*, 1910, pp. 166 ff.

<sup>4</sup>See Tabnith's inscription from Sidon in Cooke, *North Semitic Inscriptions*, p. 27, ii. 7-8, also Eshmun-'azar's, p. 31, i. 8. The former reads: "And if thou do at all open me, and at all disquiet me, mayest thou have no seed among the living under the sun, nor resting place among the *Rephaim*."

<sup>5</sup>Cooke, pp. 159 ff., esp. ii., 21 ff.

<sup>6</sup>xxxi. 11-13.

<sup>7</sup>Jos. vii. 26; Amos ii. 1.

that the preservation of the body in the best possible condition was quite secondary by comparison with the actual rite of burial. At Gezer, though the burials often recalled the Egyptian style, there was no trace of the elaborate processes of embalming which were practised in Egypt from at least the second dynasty onwards. Burial among the Canaanites frequently took place in an underground cavern, whether natural or artificial; the bodies were arranged in the grotto in somewhat haphazard fashion, sometimes stretched out at full length, but more usually flexed to a greater or less degree with the knees drawn up towards the chin. In some instances, the more notable dead were fenced off behind an inner wall of stones in a corner of the sepulchre. There is good reason for thinking that a much simpler and less exclusive type of burial obtained in the case of the poorer inhabitants of the land.<sup>1</sup> Further, the excavations have proved that in Canaan there was a usage, analogous to that of Egypt, of placing near the body objects similar to those used by the deceased during life or, in many cases, small figures representing such objects. "Among the contents of Palestinian tombs are plates, knives, and vessels, with ashes, remains of animals—in one case a whole sheep for one man . . . and drink."<sup>2</sup> We need not assume from this usage that the Semites failed to recognise the vast difference between life on earth and life beyond the grave. But, knowing little with certainty regarding the conditions of that future life, they preferred to lay beside their dead the objects that were of proved value in the only life they had really experienced.<sup>3</sup>

Frequently in the inscriptions we meet with a desire or a threat on behalf of the deceased that he should not be disturbed in his last resting-place. We have already quoted Tabnith's words; those of Eshmun-'azar are equally striking. "I adjure every prince and every man that they open me not, nor uncover me, nor carry me from this resting-place, nor take away the coffin of my resting-place, lest these holy gods deliver them up, and cut off that prince and those men and

<sup>1</sup>See Vincent, pp. 244-5.

<sup>2</sup>S. A. Cook: *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the light of Archaeology*, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup>See Vincent, *Canaan*, p. 288.



their seed for ever!"<sup>1</sup> It has been suggested that the motive for their fear of disturbance in the grave was this—that, if the corpse was buried, the soul of the dead person was free either to dwell in the underworld or to revisit the body. If, on the other hand, it was exposed to light and air, the soul could not descend into the nether regions, but was condemned to wander upon the earth in a country not its own.<sup>2</sup>

As regards the so-called sacrifices for the dead, if it were true that they were genuine sacrifices to propitiate the departed, there would be no escape from the conclusion that the dead *in general* were regarded as gods. But there seems to be no sufficient proof that the offerings made in regard of the dead were sacrifices made *to* them; rather, as the Hadad monument implies, they were offerings made to the gods on behalf of the dead.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, what was the Semitic conception of the next life? We have already seen that for them death was not the end of all things, that a life with the Rephaim existed for some at least of the departed, that intercession could and should be made on behalf of the deceased. Outside the Bible and the Babylonian literature we have little in the way of detailed description of the abode called in Hebrew *sheol*, and in Babylonian *arallû*.<sup>4</sup> But we may judge that the dominant ideas were similar throughout the Semitic world—of a *vita umbratilis*, a shadowy and attenuated life, a condition of affairs where the deceased were constantly in need of various offices of piety on the part of the living. Among the Canaanites, the prevailing conception is well described by Père Vincent: "In so far as the established practices make it known to us, this new world would appear to have had few attractions. The existence that was there endured must have greatly resembled that which men led on earth—compounded of the same needs, subject to like toil, having apparently a capacity for the same joys, but exposed to the same perils, since it was as necessary to provide oneself with weapons as with all the remainder of one's goods; in short, nothing indicates in this notion the absence

<sup>1</sup>Cooke. *North Semitic Inscriptions*, p. 32. See also the Nêrab inscriptions, p. 186, and that of Ahiram of Byblos in *Revue Biblique*, 1925, p. 184.

<sup>2</sup>Lagrange, p. 331.

<sup>3</sup>See Cooke. *op. cit.*, p. 162, lines 21 ff.

<sup>4</sup>Consult Dhorme's article: "Le Séjour des Morts chez les Babyloniens et les Hébreux" in *Revue Biblique*, 1907, pp. 59–78.

of all fear, or any compensation, by reason of some more exalted hope, for the disquiet inseparable from that entry into the unknown which death inevitably represented even for the most enlightened philosophical speculation."<sup>1</sup> There is no sign of any appreciation of "the progress of the life here, as from divinely quickened elements, towards final causes, the greatness of the spiritual man, his far-reaching aims, his everlasting duration, the curtain raised before his future state." As we have said, God did not leave Himself entirely without witness even in the midst of the degraded and often immoral polytheism of that Eastern world. But "the singleness of heart, the sunny confident belief, that condition of all the just so beautifully yet exactly described by the Apostle's words 'abounding in hope through the Holy Ghost,'"<sup>2</sup>—all these, like the purer doctrine of Monotheism and the serene faith in a coming Messiah, went quite beyond the content and the purview of the ancient Semitic religions.

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<sup>1</sup>*Canaan*, pp. 294–5.

<sup>2</sup>Rom. xv. 13. The last two quotations are from Montgomery Carmichael's *The Solitaries of the Sambuca*, 1914, pp. 183–4.



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