

# Canaanite Psalms

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The problem of Canaanite psalmography began to attract the attention of exegetes soon after the discovery of the El Amarna (abbr. EA) tablets<sup>1</sup> towards the end of the last century, and the coming to light of the poetical texts from Ugarit has only served to widen the professional scholar's field of investigation. In this paper we shall restrict ourselves to the texts from El Amarna and the psalmic tradition of Canaan surviving in them. As a matter of fact, even the most casual reader of the EA letters is struck by the poetical flavour of several expressions and phrases, and even of entire clauses, and the moot question is whether these are citations unconsciously made by the scribes of Canaan from the religious poetry of their land, or are only conventional formulae used by servile subordinates with a view to flattering their lord and master in Egypt.

According to J. de Koning, there is no question of borrowing from cultico-liturgical compositions but only of the use polite phrases: 'Er zijn beleefsheidsphrases bij, die met een tempel hymne niet te maken hebben.'<sup>2</sup> This position, it must be avowed, is most unlikely for the obvious reason that the relevant passages in the EA correspondence do not at all follow the canons of letter-writing in vogue in the ancient Orient.<sup>3</sup> Besides the passages concerned occur in letters

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<sup>1</sup> El-Amarna is the name of an Egyptian village located on the site of the capital built by the notorious 'heretic' Akhnaton (1353-36), and the period known as the Amarna Age was one of general confusion and chaos in Egypt and in the lands forming part of the empire of the Pharaohs. Latest discussion in M. G. Drower, 'The Amarna Age', *The Cambridge Ancient History*, II/1, (3rd ed., Cambridge, 1973), pp. 483-93. For a popular discussion, cf. C.F. Pfeiffer, *Tell el Amarna and the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, 1970). The best edition of the EA letters with translation and notes is J. A. Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln mit Einleitung und Erläuterung*, (2 vols., Vorderasiatische Bibliothek, 2, Leipzig, 1 15; repr., 1966); newly discovered texts are published by A. F. Rainey, *El Amarna Tablets 359-379. Supplement to J. A. Knudtzon, Die El-Amarna-Tafeln*, (Alter Orient und Altes Testament, 8, Neukirchen, 1970). Text with English translation in S. A. B. Mercer, *The Tell El-Amarna Tablets*, (2 vols., Toronto, 1939).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. his massive dissertation, *Studiën over de El-Amarnabrieven en het Oude Testament inzonderheid uit historisch oogpunt*, (Amsterdam, 1940), pp. 495-501, (p. 496).

<sup>3</sup> On the epistolary style of the ancient Semitic world, cf. A. Salonen, *Die Gruss—und Höflichkeitsformeln in babylonisch-assyrischen Briefen*, (Studia Orientalia, 36, Helsinki, 1967).

from men of different races residing in the different parts of the land,<sup>4</sup> and the constancy and uniformity of style so characteristic of their communications to the Pharaoh suggest a long-established literary tradition with its roots in cultic lyric. Jirku even goes to the extent of saying that one has but to substitute the name of Israel's God for that of the king of Egypt and then the language of the OT will become audible.<sup>5</sup> According to Böhl the texts in question are citations from poetical compositions whose original language was not Accadian but Canaanite Hebrew.<sup>6</sup> This is quite true, and several other scholars have expressed the same view.<sup>7</sup>

Since the vast majority of readers in India will not have at their disposal the EA letters, we intend to give here a number of extracts which are remarkable not only for their ideological affinity with the religious lyric of ancient Israel but also for their poetical excellence.<sup>8</sup> Needless to say, we do not mean that each and every phrase or statement is a fragment reproduced verbatim from literary or oral sources by the writers of the EA letters; what we wish to accentuate is the virtually certain fact that the scribes are quoting from memory, perhaps unconsciously, bits from poetical compositions they had come to

<sup>4</sup> Thus Sutatara and Suwardatta are Indo-Aryan chieftains governing Qades in the extreme north and Hebron in the South; Rib-Addi, the ruler of Byblos, is a Semite, and the king of Jerusalem bears the name IR-Hepa whose first element is the Sumerian logogram meaning servant (in Accadian *ardu*, and in Canaanite *abdu*) and the second the name of a Hurrian goddess; the presence of the Hurrian element would point to the fact that the king of Jerusalem was a Hurrian by origin.

<sup>5</sup> A. Jirku, "Kanaanäische Psalmenfragmente in der vorisraelitischen Zeit Palästinas und Syriens," *Von Jerusalem nach Ugarit. Gesammelte Schriften ergänzt durch neue Anmerkungen und Tafeln*, (Graz, 1966), pp. 331-44.

<sup>6</sup> F.T.M. de Liagre Böhl, "Hymnisches und rhythmisches in den Amarnabriefen aus Kanaan," *Opera minora. Studien en bijdragen en op assyriologisch en oudtestamenteisch terrein*, (Gronigen, 1953), pp. 375-79, 516f. Incidentally, the scribes of Canaan write the letters in Accadian, the international language of diplomacy in their age, but theirs is a 'barbaric' variety of Accadian abounding in Canaanisms. On the point, cf. Böhl, *Die Sprache der Amarnabriefe mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Kanaanismen*, (Leipziger semitische Studien, V/2, Leipzig, 1909; repr., 1968), and E. Ebeling, "Das Verbum in den Amarnabriefen," *Beiträge zur Assyriologie* 8 (1909), pp. 39-79. Cf. too E. Dhorme, "La langue de Canaan," *Recueil Edouard Dhorme*, (Paris, 1951), pp. 405-87.

<sup>7</sup> From among recent studies we may mention S. Gevirtz, "Evidence of Conjugational Variation in the Parallelization of selfsame Verbs in the Amarna Letters," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22 (1973), pp. 99-104; id., "On Canaanite Rhetoric. The Evidence of the Amarna Letters from Tyre," *Gelb Volume. Approaches to the Study of the Ancient Near East = Orientalia* 42 (1973), pp. 162-77. G. Widengren, *The Accadian and Hebrew Psalms of Lamentation as Religious Documents*, (Uppsala, 1936), pp. 5-16.

<sup>8</sup> The translations given in this paper are those of Mercer (cf. n. 1 above); the first numeral indicates the serial number of the letters, and the other figures the lines.

know from tradition. To illustrate the close affinity the vocabulary of these pieces has with the expressions found in the Hebrew Bible a couple of phrases will be discussed briefly.

Biriawaza, a petty ruler of the land of Upe,<sup>9</sup> introduces himself as follows:

...thy servant,  
The dust of thy feet,  
And the ground on which thou treadest,  
And the seat on which thou sittest,  
And the footstool of thy feet... (195: 5-10).<sup>10</sup>

This piling up of epithets is no doubt reminiscent of the procedure we are all familiar with from the poetry of Mesopotamia<sup>11</sup> and Israel.<sup>12</sup>

The following words of the same ruler recall to our mind Ps. 89:37 where Yahweh's throne is likened to the sun and moon:

My lord is the sun in heaven,  
And as (one awaits) the rising of the sun in the heavens,  
So thy servants await the going forth of the words  
From the mouth of their lord (195:16-23).

The last phrase in the third stichos, 'going forth of words', in the original, *a-ša-i a-wa-te*, is worthy of special note. The verbal base underlying the first word is *wašú*, which literally means 'to go out',<sup>13</sup> and is used, for example, of the rising of the sun; thus in the prologue to the Code of Hammurabi we read: *ki-ma* <sup>d</sup>UTU *a-na* SAG. GIG *wa-ši-e-im-ma*, 'to rise like the sun over the black-headed (people).'<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The texts from Mari (18th cent.) refer to *māt Apim*, 'the land of Apum'; the name appears in the sources as Api, Apina (the Hurrian form), and later on Upi (Upe), and the territory referred to is the area whose capital is Damascus.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. too 241: 4-7.

<sup>11</sup> Numerous examples in A. Falkenstein-W. von Soden, *Sumerische und akkadische Hymnen und Gebete*, (Zurich, 1953). Cf. too J. Begg, "Die Vertrauensäusserungen in israelitischen Klagelied des Einzelnen und in seinen babylonischen Gegenstück," *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, (Theologische Bücherei 21, Munich, 1964), pp. 168-216 (cf. especially pp. 179-200).

<sup>12</sup> Exhaustive discussions in H. Gunkel-J. Begg, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, (Göttingen, 1932), *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> This root occurs in Phoenician, Ugaritic, Old South Arabian, Ethiopic and Hebrew.

<sup>14</sup> This text occurs in col. I, lines 40-42. A word of explanation may be added here about the way in which cuneiform texts are cited. Accadian is written syllabically, and hence the separation of syllables in the transcriptions; the terms in capitals are Sumerian logograms (ideograms) and the d before a word means that it is a divine name (in the text <sup>d</sup>UTU = *deus sol*, the sun-god). The reader should remember that the Code's prologue and epilogue are written in a special poetical dialect, known in professional circles as the hymnic-epic dialect.

The verb's use with reference to uttering of words is quite understandable; compare the use of *awātu* as the object of *suteššū*, a special causative form of the base, in the sense of 'to cause words to go forth', i.e., 'to babble, chatter'. In the Hebrew Bible our root appears as *yāšā*, and this verb occurs in contexts where there is question of the promulgation of royal edicts (Dan. 9:25), and especially of the 'going forth' of Yahweh's own word (Isa. 55:11; 62:1; Hos. 6:5; Hab. 1:4; Ps. 17:2).

The expression *a-wa-te* is the plural of *awātu* (written also in later times *amātu*), a term which has a variety of meanings,<sup>16</sup> and has as its equivalent in Ugaritic *hw̄t*, 'word, desire'. 'There is a poetical text in which the verb discussed above and the present noun occur in close conjunction: *bph rgm lyša||bspth hw̄th* (LAqht: 113, etc.);

From his mouth the word went forth,  
From his lips his utterance.

Be it recalled here that the Ugaritic texts too are representative of genuine Canaanite usage.

The use of fixed pairs in parallelism is a distinctive feature of Semitic poetry.<sup>16</sup> The following lines (where the thought shows affinity with Am. 9:2) embody such a pair:

See, as for us, my two eyes are upon thee.  
Whether we go up to heaven  
Or go down to the earth (=underworld),  
Our head is in thy hands (264: 14-19).

In Accadian the terms for heaven and earth are *samū* and *iršitu*, and in Hebrew *samayim* and *'aeraes*. To illustrate the Accadian tradition we cite here a couple of lines from the Code of Hammurabi: *dEn-lil be-el sa-me-e ū ir-ši-tim*, 'the god Enlil, lord of heaven and earth' (1:3-5); *ki-ma sa-me-e ū ir-ši-tim*, 'Babel whose foundations are like heaven and earth' (1:22f.). The tradition of the Bible can clearly be seen in Gen. 1:1; Deut. 32:1; Isa. 1:2 etc. The combination under consideration, it would seem, was inspired by the traditions of the Sumerians who were wont to make use of the pair AN//KI not only in poetry but also in proper names. The Inscription of Gudea of Lagas, one of the longest poetical creations in Sumerian, begins thus: UD AN. KI. A. . ., "When in heaven and on earth the fates were determined . . ."<sup>17</sup> From among names we may mention ÊTEMENANKI, i.e., Ê, "house", TEMEN, "foundation", AN, "heaven", and KI, "earth",

<sup>16</sup> Short discussion in Luke, " 'Word' in the Traditions of Mesopotamia and Egypt", *Jeevadhara. A Journal of Christian Interpretation* 1 (1971), pp. 169-75 (cf. pp. 168-70).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel*, (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, 32, Chicago, 1963); id., "The Ugaritic Parallel to Jeremiah 8:23," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 20 (1961), pp. 41-46.

<sup>17</sup> German translation in Falkenstein-von Soden, *op. cit.*, pp. 137ff.

and DURANKI, i.e., DUR, "bond", etc.<sup>18</sup> The Sumerian tradition survives in Accadian poetry as well; the following passage from the epilogue to the Code of Hammurabi is typical: *i-na qt-bf-it* <sup>d</sup>UTU *da-a-a-nim ra-bi-im sa AN ú KI* (r XXIV: 84-86), "by the order of the sun-god, the great judge of heaven and earth." The expression found in the EA letters and the Bible continues, then, a very old literary tradition.

The next text we are going to see is taken from another letter despatched by the sender of no. 264; here is the passage that is of interest to us:

I have looked here and I have looked there,  
But it has not become light.  
And I have looked upon the king my lord,  
And it has become light.  
And, behold, I have set my two eyes  
To serve the king my lord (266:9-25).<sup>19</sup>

Since we are all familiar with the symbolism of light and darkness in the Bible and its connection with Yahweh's activities, all comment will be superfluous.

The petty rulers of Canaan liken their lord to the sun-god; Abimilki, the ruler of Tyre, writes:

My lord is the sun that rises over the lands day by day  
According to the determination of the sun, his gracious father,  
Through whose friendly breath one lives, but mourns at his disappearance,  
Who sets the whole land at rest by the power of (his) hand,  
Who thunders in the heavens as Adad,  
So that the whole world trembles at his thunder (147:5-15).

Adad is the Accadian god of thunder and storm, and his counterpart in Canaanite mythology is Baal; as for biblical tradition, it too regards thunder as the voice of Yahweh (cf. esp. Ps. 29).<sup>20</sup> We may also note here that the language and thought of the piece here cited are reminiscent of the nature-hymns of the Psalter.

The idea of entering into the presence of the god-king of Egypt is another noteworthy feature of the EA letters, a feature that will not fail to evoke in our minds the memory of several touching passages from the book of Psalms. Compare,

<sup>18</sup> For details, cf. Luke, "The Tower of Babel", *Indian Ecclesiastical Studies* 11 (1972), pp. 16-23.

<sup>19</sup> Parallels may be found in 292: 8-17 and 296: 11-22.

<sup>20</sup> On this point, cf. Luke, "'Word' in the Traditions. . .", pp. 168f.

I say, I will enter into the presence of the king, my lord,  
 And I will see the two eyes of the king, my lord.  
 So let it seem right to the king. . .  
 And I will enter and see the two eyes of the king, my lord  
 (286:39-47).

The vision of the ruler's face is a theme occurring in some of the EA documents, and as it has close parallels in the Psalms, it deserves some comment. The word for face in Accadian is *pānu* (generally plural *pānū*),<sup>21</sup> which, in the literary sources, appears in a variety of combinations; compare the expressions, *hidūt pa-ni*, "joy of face", *pa-ni banūti*, "face of goodness", *pa-ni ha-du-tu šá sarri*, "face of joy of the king", *pu-un-nu pa-ni šá sarri*, *pu-ni pa-ni šá sarri*, "showing of the face of the king", etc. The idea of seeing the face is expressed with the help of the verb *amāru*,<sup>22</sup> "to see"; thus, *pānū × amāru*, "to see the face of X", *pa-ni-ia ul tamar*, "You shall not see my face," etc. The term occurs too as the object of the verb *dagālu*, "to wait" (for the showing of someone's face). In the light of these observations the ensuing texts will become quite meaningful:

Verily, I have said. . .  
 'When shall I see the face of the king, my lord?' (147:59f.).  
 'The face of the king, my lord, the beautiful,  
 I seek for ever' (165: 6-8).  
 'May I see the beautiful face of the king, my lord, in health.'  
 (165:12f.).  
 'Givest thou me life, or givest thou me death,  
 I look upon thy face!  
 Thou art indeed my lord' (167:7-10).

The word *pānim* is part of the theological vocabulary of the OT, occurring as it does more than 2000 times, and its use with reference to Yahweh is something we are all familiar with. The seeking of the divine face was the very core of Israel's religious life (Ps. 24:6; 27:8).

Another theme that is closely related to the one just mentioned is the rejoicing of the heart; the recipients of royal favours exclaim:

'I have heard the words of the tablet  
 Which the graciousness of the king, my lord, has sent  
 And when I heard the words of the tablet of the king, my lord,  
 My heart rejoiced. . . ' (142:6-10).  
 'Because he has written to his servant,  
 My heart is glad, my head is erect,  
 And my two eyes shine' (144:14-18)

<sup>21</sup> Occurring in Ugaritic, Phoenician, Arabic, etc.

<sup>22</sup> In Hebrew *'amar*, "to speak".

Entering into Yahweh's presence, seeking and beholding his face, and rejoicing as he showers forth his gracious blessings are basic factors in the religious traditions of Israel.

The king is at times thought of as saviour and praised in glowing terms that remind us of the world of thought of the psalms of confidence and, at times, also of wisdom psalms; we add here a pretty long extract:

He who hearkens to the king, his lord,  
And serves him in his place,  
Over him the sun rises,  
And the good breath returns from the mouth of his lord.  
But if he does not hearken to the word of the king, his lord,  
Then his city fails, his house fails;  
His name is no more for ever in the whole land.  
Behold, the servant who hearkens to his lord—  
His city is prosperous, his house is prosperous,  
His name is for ever  
Thou art the sun which rises over me,  
And a wall of bronze which rises up for me,<sup>23</sup>  
And because of the mighty hand of the king I am at rest.  
Verily, I have said. . .  
'When shall I see the face of the king. . .?' (147: 41-60).

There is no denying of the fact that the writer of these lines wishes to ingratiate himself with the Pharaoh by flattering his vanity, but what is of moment for us is the affinity his thoughts and words have with the world of ideas of the poets of Israel.

We shall now pass on to another group of texts that will help us to have a deeper understanding of the *arrière-fond* of some of the petitions and thoughts in the laments of the Psalter; for example,

Let the king, my lord, listen to the words of his faithful servant  
And give a present to his servant,  
While our enemies see and eat dust.  
Let the breath of the king not depart from us (100:31-38).

In Accadian the second line runs as follows: *ia-di-na qista a-na ardi-su*; the text deserves to be carefully analysed. The verbal form *ia-di-na* goes back to the base *nadānu*, "to give", its Hebrew equivalent being *nātan*, id.; in Accadian this is a common verb, and of its various uses we wish to mention here but two. First, the verb has, in the EA letters, *pānu*, "face", as its object; hence *li-id-din sarru pānī-su ana ardī-su* (150:14; 155:59 etc.), 'may the king "give" (show) his face to his servants'; secondly, it can have as its subject the gods, and as its

<sup>23</sup> Discussions in A. Alt, "Hic murus aeneus esto", *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* N. F. 11 (1932), pp. 33-48.

object *tértu*, "oracle"<sup>24</sup> and *ittu*, "sign" (to be discussed below). While addressing a mortal ruler, nobody will ever think of him as the giver of oracles, signs and the like but rather as the bestower of special favours, and hence it is that the Pharaoh is requested to give a present.

Accadian *qistu* is a nominal form derived from the verb *qiāsu*,<sup>25</sup> "to give a gift, present", and there are texts in which the former occurs as the object of the latter: *ana qistim li-qī-su-sum*, "May they grant him (life) as gift"; *i-qī-sa-an-ni qīsti*, "He granted me (wisdom) as gift". The use of our noun as the object of the verb *nadānu* is no less clear from the sources, and kings naturally figure as the subject of the verb; thus we read in the Code of Hammurabi, *qī-is-ti sar-rum a-na UKU. US id-di-nu*, "the gifts the king gave to the officer" (XI:59f.).

As the present is being given to the writer, his foes should see it and *ti-ka-lu ip-ra*, "eat dust". The first form here is derived from the verb *akālu*, "to eat", which appears in Hebrew as *'ākal*,<sup>26</sup> and the second word (which, understandably enough, is in the accusative case) corresponds to Hebrew *'āfār*, "dust".<sup>27</sup> Now in Gen. 3:14 we have the same verb and noun occurring together: the serpent that beguiled the woman is condemned to eat dust. Another passage that belongs here is Ps. 72:9 where the wish is expressed that the foes of Israel's ruler should lick<sup>28</sup> the dust.

The petition of the author of EA 100 has an excellent parallel in one of the laments of the Psalter:

Show me a sign of thy favour,  
That those who hate may see  
And be put to shame (86:17).

The word here rendered 'sign' is *'ōt* which is the Hebrew equivalent of Accadian *ittu*,<sup>29</sup> however, the verbal base used by the poet is not *nātan* but *'āsāh*, "to do, make", and the sense accordingly is that Yahweh should perform on behalf of the psalmist such a spectacular *'ōt* as would cover with shame the foes who would happen to witness it. One who has read EA 100 will, as he goes through Ps. 86:17, get the

<sup>24</sup> This noun is formed from the doubly weak verb *wa'āru*, which, in the intensive stem, means "to enquire, ask"; this root does not survive in the Hebrew language.

<sup>25</sup> Contracted form *qisu* (not attested in Hebrew).

<sup>26</sup> Occurring in all the Semitic languages with the exception of Ethiopic.

<sup>27</sup> We may note here in passing that this noun is related to the much-discussed appellation Habiru ('Apiru) whose original meaning was "dusty, dusty foot" (cf. W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, [Doubleday Anchor Books, New York, 1969], pp. 74f.).

<sup>28</sup> For the same idea, cf. Isa. 49:23 and Mic. 7:17 (with a reference to the serpent); the verb employed in all these instances is *lāhaq* (cf. too Num. 22:4. 1 Kings 18:38) which, like *'ākal*, conveys the idea of utter humiliation.

<sup>29</sup> The process of formation involved here is too complicated, and as it is hardly of any interest to the non-Semitist, we shall not dwell upon it.



feeling that the Israelite poet is reproducing almost verbatim a petition that used to be repeated by the Canaanites as they prayed to their gods, or as they sought the favour of their rulers.<sup>30</sup>

We shall bring our study of EA 100 to a close with a passing reference to a petition to be found in a letter King Zimri-Lim of Mari wrote to the river-god: 'To the god River, my lord. . . A little while ago I sent my message to my lord. My lord showed me a sign (*be-lí it-tam ú-ka-al-li-im*). Let my lord fulfil the sign which he showed me (*be-lí it-tam sa ú-ka-al-li-mu li-sa-ak-li-lam*), and let my lord not be negligent in guarding my life. Let my lord not turn his face elsewhere. Let my lord desire none other than me.<sup>31</sup> Even though Zimri-Lim does not use the verb *nadānu*, the occurrence of *ittu* is quite significant, and the text can very well be set alongside EA 100 and Ps. 86.

The persuasion that sickness was the punishment the powers on high inflicted on those who committed some sin or other was widespread in the Orient; the following passage from an EA letter is quite typical:

Behold, . . . my body is afflicted with a severe disease.  
And let the king, my lord know that the gods. . . are angry,  
And (consequently) the disease is worse,  
And I acknowledged my sins to the gods (137:27-33).

The last line, in the original *hi-e-ti ip-ti a-na ilāni*, must be carefully studied. The first word here is the plural of *hītu* (written also *hīttu*), from the verbal root *ḥaṭú*, "to fail, to sin"; the Hebrew equivalent is *ḥāṭā'*,<sup>32</sup> which is part of the OT vocabulary of sin. The verbal form *ip-ti* is derived from the base *petú*, "to open", corresponding to Hebrew *pātaḥ*,<sup>33</sup> but in the Bible this verb is never used when there is a question of confessing one's sins to God. We know that pious Israelites, when they happened to be sick, used to make known their sins to Yahweh (cf. Ps. 32:5), and Ps. 41:5 may very well be regarded as a traditional formula of confession used by sick folk in ancient Israel. A caveat is to be added here: the Israelite believer's avowal of sin is not to be put on a par with that of the writer of EA 137, or be interpreted as something inspired by Canaanite tradition.

<sup>30</sup> Using modern terminology, we may say that the Canaanite scribe and the psalmist are eliciting the wish that their foes suffer "loss of face", and to lose one's face, as we know, is one of the worst humiliations possible in the Orient, to escape which people even resort to suicide. On the cultural and legal implications of this petition, cf. Luke, "Imprecations in the Psalms: their Positive Value," *Jeevadhara*, 2 (1972), pp. 132-48.

<sup>31</sup> For the original text, cf. G. Dossin, "Les archives épistolaires du palais de Mari," *Syria* 19 (1938), p. 126. English translation in G. E. Mendenhall, "Mari," *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader* 2 (Doubleday Anchor Books, New York, 1964), p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> The basic sense of this root, which occurs too in Ugaritic, Arabic, Old South Arabian and Ethiopic, is "to miss the mark".

<sup>33</sup> The root is common Semitic.

The laments of individuals who are in distress include several details derived from the legal traditions of the Orient. The sufferers in Israel pray to God to vindicate them, and this usage, it would seem, was inspired by Canaanite antecedents, but even if this were not the case, the striking parallels in the EA letters are of great help to understand the world of ideas of the Psalms. Rib-Addi of Byblos, who was accused of having put to death the Pharaoh's soldiers, writes thus to his sovereign and master:

I have a lawsuit.

Send a deputy who will hearken to my words

And give my right into my hand (118:13-17).

Behold, this lawsuit is a lawsuit about my right (119:4-5).

The Accadian original of the first line, *di-nu a-na ia-si*, literally means, "To me (there is) a lawsuit". The technical term *dīnu* is quite well known from the legal documents of ancient Mesopotamia<sup>34</sup>, but its Hebrew equivalent, viz., *dīn*, is not at all of any importance in the OT; it occurs just 17 times (in the Psalter only twice; 9:5 and 140:13), whereas *riṣ*, "strife, dispute, legal contention, lawsuit", remains the term of predilection of the people of Israel (to be met with 62 times in the OT). This difference in vocabulary should not be overstressed since the two terms signify the same thing, and in addition there is also the fact that the controversy-pattern was a characteristic feature of the ancient Semites' mode of thought and expression.<sup>35</sup>

In line four the writer claims, *di-nu an-nu-ú di-en ki-ti-ia*, "this *dīnu* is a *dīnu* about my right", and demands, *i-di-na ki-ti-ia*; "give my right". The important term here is *kittu*, derived from *kintu* through the assimilation of *n* and the consequent gemination of the ensuing consonant. In Accadian texts *kittu u mēsarū* (*u*=and) occurs as a conventional phrase denoting the nature and function of law,<sup>36</sup> and it is to be regarded as an instance of the literary procedure known as hendiadys; whereas the second noun means "equity, justice",<sup>37</sup> the first stands

<sup>34</sup> Succinct discussion in von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, I (Wiesbaden, 1965), pp. 171f.

<sup>35</sup> On the *rib*-pattern, cf. B. Gemser, "The *Rib*- or Controversy-Pattern in Hebrew Mentality," *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East, Presented to H. H. Rowley*, (Suppl. to *Vetus Testamentum* 3, Leiden, 1955), pp. 120-37. J. Harvey, "Le 'Rib-Pattern', réquisitoire prophétique sur la rupture de l'alliance," *Biblica* 43 (1962), pp. 172-98. Interesting discussions also in C. Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, (Philadelphia, 1967).

<sup>36</sup> Detailed discussion in B. Landsberger, "Die babylonischen Termini für Gesetz und Recht," *Symbolae ad jura orientis antiqui pertinentes Paulo Koschaker dedicatae*, (Studia et monumenta ad jura orientis antiqui pertinentia, 2, Leiden, 1939), pp. 219-34. E. A. Speiser, "Early Law and Civilization", *Oriental and Biblical Studies*, (Philadelphia, 1967), pp. 534-55; "Religion and Government in the Near East," *ibid.*, pp. 556-72.

<sup>37</sup> The verbal base is *wasāru*=Hebrew *yāsar*, "be smooth, straight, right"; Hebrew attests the nominal form *mēsār*, "evenness, smoothness, (in the ethical sense) uprightness, equity".

for that which is firm, established, true.<sup>38</sup> When an accused person demands that the judge give his *kittu i-na qa-ti-ia*, "into my hands", what he asks for is the establishment, by the supreme authority, of what is true, i.e., his vindication. And this is a feature that figures prominently in the laments of the Psalter.

In our discussions so far, we have been concerned with texts in the EA letters that exhibit ideological and even verbal affinity with Israel's religious lyric, and we have not touched upon some of the subtle grammatical and rhetorical procedures which occur in these documents and have their exact parallels in the Bible.<sup>39</sup> To mention but one example, the EA letters as well as the poetical sections of the OT employ in the same verse different forms of one and the same verb; compare the forms of the two verbs "heal" and "save" in,

Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed,  
Save me, and I shall be saved (Jer. 17:14).

The same procedure occurs in EA 112:7-9:<sup>40</sup>

Why has the king, my lord, written to me,  
"Protect (and) be protected!"

A discussion of this type of stylistic peculiarity cannot be attempted in this modest study, for it is bound to be highly technical and as such hardly of any interest to readers in India.

Before concluding we wish to refer here to a detail emphasised by Widengren,<sup>41</sup> viz., the correspondence between the Accadian and Hebrew forms of the expression "my God", occurring both in the EA letters and in the book of Psalms. From the former we may cite, 'to my lord, the king, *ilāni-ia* (my god), the breath of my life' (141:1-2). The expression *ilāni-ia* is the plural of *ilu*, the common Semitic term denoting the god-head or deity, with the suffix of the first person singular; the sense accordingly is "my gods", but in the context the title has reference to an individual person, and as such must be rendered "my god". Canaanite *ilāni-ia*, therefore, corresponds to Hebrew 'ae *lôhē*, "my God".<sup>42</sup>

To conclude, the interpreter of the Psalms must make use of the data furnished by the EA correspondence, a thing which has so far been done only in the most superficial and haphazard way. A full understanding of the Canaanite formulaic locutions will certainly help us to acquire a better insight into and appreciation of the numerous phrases and expressions, and the rich and variegated world of images the poets of Israel took over from their predecessors in the land. In short, the EA texts are as important as the corpus of Ugaritic literature.

<sup>38</sup> The root is *kānu*=Hebrew *kān*, "to be firm" (cf. too Arabic *kāna*, "to exist, occur, be").

<sup>39</sup> These are investigated by Prof. Gevartz in his studies mentioned in n. 7 above.

<sup>40</sup> Gevartz, "Evidence of Conjugational Variation," p. 103.

<sup>41</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> " "Mein Gott" im Alten Testament,' *Kleine Schriften*, III, (Tübingen, 1966), pp. 35-47.