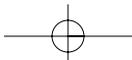
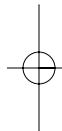
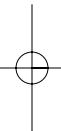




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# The Origins of the West Semitic Alphabet in Egyptian Scripts

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BY  
Gordon J. Hamilton

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For two young friends,  
Jake and Josh Beale,  
who are having their own encounters with the alphabet

and

*In memoriam*

Romain F. Butin, S. M.

1871–1937

Semitist,

The Catholic University of America

“Who can plant a papyrus stalk upon a mountain?”  
Sinuhe B 122 (Redford 1992: 87)

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I decided not to publish the dissertation in a lightly revised form for two major reasons. First, the chronological framework espoused in that work, following Albright's dating of the Proto-Canaanite inscriptions from the Sinai *en bloc* to early in Egypt's New Kingdom, seemed necessary but made little sense to me. Secondly, I could not understand why some of the best graphic parallels to the handwriting of the West Semitic inscriptions from both the western Sinai and Palestine came from Egyptian rock inscriptions found by the Czechoslovak team in northern Nubia and southern Egypt.

The fortuitous convergence of two events later caused me to reconsider that decision. The discovery by the Darnells of two new early alphabetic inscriptions at Wadi el-Hol in southern Egypt was announced at an ASOR/SBL annual meeting. The summer before that announcement, Prof. Mark Smith and the then editor of the CBQMS,

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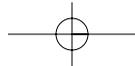
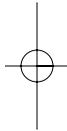
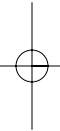
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Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God  
Toronto, Ontario

*Editor's Note*

Because of the vast number of citations of secondary literature in this work, an exception to the CBQMS system for such citations was made. This volume employs the “social science” format (citation by author and year of work, followed by page numbers); full bibliographical information for each work cited appears in the bibliography at the end of the book.



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## Chronology

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This chronology follows Baines and Malek (2000: 8-9). All dates are approximate.

Foundation of the Egyptian State	ca. 3100 B.C.
Early Dynastic Period	2950-2575 B.C.
First Dynasty	2950-2775 B.C.
Second Dynasty	2775-2650 B.C.
Third Dynasty	2650-2575 B.C.
Old Kingdom	2575-2125 B.C.
Fourth Dynasty	2575-2450 B.C.
Fifth Dynasty	2450-2325 B.C.
Sixth Dynasty	2325-2125 B.C.
First Intermediate Period	2125-1975 B.C.
Ninth/Tenth Dynasty (Herakleopolis)	2125-1975 B.C.
Eleventh Dynasty (Thebes)	2080-1975 B.C.
Middle Kingdom	1975-1630 B.C.
Eleventh Dynasty (all Egypt)	1975-1940 B.C.
Twelfth Dynasty	1940-1756 B.C.
Thirteenth Dynasty	1755-1630 B.C.

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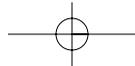
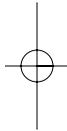
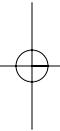
Second Intermediate Period	1630-1520 B.C.
Fifteenth Dynasty (Hyksos)	1630-1520 B.C.
Seventeenth Dynasty (Thebes)	1630-1540 B.C.
New Kingdom	1539-1075 B.C.
Eighteenth Dynasty	1539-1292 B.C.
Nineteenth Dynasty	1292-1190 B.C.
Twentieth Dynasty	1190-1075 B.C.

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## Abbreviations

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I Int. Per.	First Intermediate Period
II Int. Per.	Second Intermediate Period
beg.	beginning
c.s.	construct state
Dyn.	Dynasty
h	a horizontal line (direction of reading uncertain or unknown)
<i>HT</i>	<i>Hieroglyphic Texts</i> (see Bibliography)
JE	<i>Journal d'Entrée</i> (of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo)
l-r	a horizontal line that reads from left to right
LXX	Septuagint
MK	Middle Kingdom
MT	Masoretic Text
NK	New Kingdom
NP	no provenance
r-l	a horizontal line that reads from right to left
Same	same information about a sign or letter already listed to the left
v	a vertical column
WSR	West Semitic Research
xi, xii, xiii	first, second, or third instances of specific letter forms from the same inscription (numbered according to the order they occur in this study)



## CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

## I. The Aims of This Monograph

I aim in this chapter to provide an introduction to, and an overview of the three ways of reconstructing the origins of each letter of the earliest West Semitic alphabet: isolating its graphic prototype(s) in Egyptian writing; ascertaining its typologically earliest graphic forms; and establishing the meaning of its acrophonic name(s). Special attention will be paid to the sources of the drawings used in this study. I shall also briefly address the two orders of the letters that are now known to have been in use during the second millennium B.C.

I aim in Chapter 2 to reconstruct the letters of the original West Semitic consonantal alphabet as fully as possible, reassessing previous research regarding their Egyptian prototypes, typologically earliest forms, and letter names in light of information from recently published inscriptions (Wadi el-Ḥol Texts 1 and 2 [Wimmer and Wimmer-Dweikat 2001; Altschuler 2002; Darnell 2003; Darnell et al. 2005]) as well as recently rediscovered ones (Sinai 375a [Starr and Butin 1936: 22, 42, pl. 9, fig. 18; Sass 1988: 44, figs. 132, 133], Sinai 375c [Starr and Butin 1936: 23, 42, pl. 11, fig. 22; Sass 1988: 45, fig. 137], and the heddle jack from Lahun, Egypt [Petrie 1890: pl. 27.85; Sass 104, fig. 282]<sup>1</sup>).

In Chapter 3, my goal will be to summarize those paleographic and

<sup>1</sup> I shall employ the toponym Lahun for the place of discovery of this heddle jack and set aside the artificial or mistaken name “Kahun,” that was first used by Petrie in 1897 for the town area of that site (see David 1998: ix; Luft 1998: 1-2). On the location of Lahun in Middle Egypt, between the west bank of the Nile and the Faiyum, see Baines

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linguistic findings. This will include a reassessment of the long-standing and vexing issues of how and when to date both the emergence of consonantal alphabetic writing and the earliest epigraphs in that tradition. Based on a more secure chronological framework, I shall then begin the process of correlating the selection of certain signs with other aspects of the material culture of West Semites during the relevant time period so as to situate, at least tentatively, the birth and early childhood of the Proto-Canaanite alphabet culturally.

In Appendix 1, I aim to provide a catalogue of the best-preserved Proto-Canaanite inscriptions dating mostly to ca. 1400 B.C. or earlier as a paleographic service to researchers who wish to continue the linguistic decipherment of the more complete of these fascinating, yet difficult little texts.<sup>2</sup>

In Appendix 2, I shall briefly address the etiology of the arrangements of letters found on early alphabetic inscriptions (from groups to single files).

## II. Terms

### *A. Alphabet and Alphabetic*

There is no consensus among scholars regarding the definition of “alphabet” and the identification of which writing systems are “alphabetic.” By those terms I mean a system of writing in which the sign-list is very short and generally (only) one sign represents each phoneme. While the total number of graphemes varies from alphabet to alphabet, one always counts them by the tens (and not by the hundreds as

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and Malek (2000: 129-30). Sass (1988: 104) correctly identified this object as a heddle jack (contrast Dijkstra 1990: 51), while Cartwright, Granger-Taylor, and Quirke (1998: 92-94, 99) were able to specify, with parallels, that it is a small-scale one. Confusion about its present location has abounded until recently. Quirke (Cartwright, Granger-Taylor, and Quirke 1998: 92) correlated Dijkstra’s study (1990) of its inscription and the actual object, EA 70881 in The British Museum’s collection. It is neither lost (so Dijkstra 1990: 51, n. 1), nor in the Manchester Museum collection (so Sass 1988: 211), nor does EA 70881 represent a new inscription (so Parkinson 1999: 196, n. 24; Darnell et al. 2005: 93, n. 18). On the definition of a “heddle,” see n. 31 below.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Smith (personal communication) would suggest that readers who are less familiar with these inscriptions might benefit by reading Appendix 1 first to gain an overview. While there is considerable merit in that suggestion, readers are advised that much in that appendix comes by way of conclusions from the body of this study (e.g., new transliterations, proposed dates, and discussions of uncertain readings based on the forms of certain ones).

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one would the signs of the older hieroglyphic and syllabic systems).<sup>3</sup> As a standard—but not rigid—feature of alphabetic writing, only one of this limited inventory of signs represents each phoneme.<sup>4</sup> The original West Semitic alphabet had notations for only the consonantal phonemes.<sup>5</sup> All of the Proto- and Old Canaanite inscriptions witness this incomplete system of notation. Alphabetic writing was improved in derived traditions by the additional notation of some vocal phonemes in certain environments (e.g., Ugaritic: ʾa, ʾi, ʾu; Old Aramaic: the use of *h*, *w*, and *y* as vowel-markers) or almost all of them (Old Greek: but *ōmēga* was a still later innovation).<sup>6</sup> One is able to trace the name “alphabet,” through Latin *alphabetum* and Greek *alphabētos*, ultimately to the West Semitic acrophones of the first two letters (see, among others, Lambdin 1962: 89; Cross 1967: 11\*, n. 26; 2003: 320, n. 28).

<sup>3</sup> On the importance of a small number of graphemes as a *sine qua non* of alphabetic writing, most recently see Lemaire (1994: 3), Darnell et al. (2005: 86), and Dobbs-Allsopp (2006: 495).

<sup>4</sup> I couch my language here to take into account two different and common phenomena of alphabetic writing. First, it is not unusual for two (or more) different graphic forms to be employed for the same phoneme, either through borrowing of more than one (see, for example, *b* in Chapter 2) or through the retention of older forms of letters after newer ones have developed (but which to the beginning writer are two different signs, e.g., A and a). Secondly, the transmitted alphabet “was stretched to fit” in some instances: a single grapheme could represent more than one phoneme (e.g., Old Aramaic *q* could stand for \**q* or \**d*; T. O. Lambdin, oral communication).

<sup>5</sup> Representation of only the consonants was one of the major features that pointed early researchers, such as Gardiner (1916: 12), towards Egyptian for the origin of the West Semitic alphabet. Note the contrasting appraisals of the evolution of the idea of alphabetic writing from components of ancient Egyptian most recently given by Loprieno (1997: 23), “there is a very different ‘philosophy of writing’ underlying the two graphic models,” versus Parkinson (1999: 183), “The alphabet is, however, neither a revolutionary writing system, nor a uniquely efficient one,” or Freu (2000: 98), “Il faut reconnaître aux Égyptiens le mérite d’avoir inventé l’alphabet.”

<sup>6</sup> I am not persuaded by Gelb’s attempt (1969: 72-80, 122-53, 166-76, 190-205) to limit “alphabet(ic)” to Greek (and its derivatives) because of its fuller representation of the “total” phonemic inventory and to classify ancient West Semitic writing as syllabic. See the older critiques by Cross (1967: 11\*, n. 26; 2003: 320, n. 28; contrast 2003: 313, n. 3), Diringier (1968: 166), Driver (1976: 253f.), and especially Ryckmans (1987: 312-22). For more recent discussions (and bibliographies), see especially Davies (1990: 131), Whitt (1995: 2379-80), Hallo (1996: 35-36), O’Connor (1996: 88-90) and Daniels (1997: 353-54)—both of the latter preferred the term *abjad*—and especially Smith (2001: 54-57, 101-3, nn. 10-31). Trigger (1991), among others, tried to sidestep this debate by employing the term “consonantaries” to describe West Semitic writing. For deeper critiques of the syllabic versus consonantal classifications, see Herrens Schmidt (1996) and Viers (2000).

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### *B. Pictographs and Linear Forms*

By “pictograph” I mean a grapheme whose pictorial identity can be recognized.

By “linear form” I mean a grapheme that cannot be identified as a pictograph.

### *C. Proto-Canaanite and Old Canaanite*

Various terms have been employed to describe the earliest West Semitic alphabetic inscriptions and scripts from Egypt, the western Sinai, and Canaan. Naveh (e.g., 1978: 33) generally employed “Proto-Canaanite,” while Cross (e.g., 1980: 13; 2003: 213) usually used “Old Canaanite” as synonymous terms for this script tradition and its earliest epigraphs. Sass (1988; 1991; 1992) used the designation “Proto-Sinaitic,” a term initiated by Albright (1926: 75), for the texts and scripts from the Sinai and “Proto-Canaanite” for those from Palestine. Those two terms were similarly employed by Pardee (1997a; 1997b) and Lemaire (2000: 112). Colless (1988; 1990; 1991) coined the term “proto-alphabetic” for both (in part to distinguish them from ones he considered syllabic or syllabic-logographic [e.g., 1998]). O’Connor (1996) usually used “Northern Linear (Canaanite).” Darnell et al. (2005) preferred “early alphabetic” in part to find a more neutral designation that would include two new West Semitic texts found at Wadi el-Ḥol in Egypt. In this study I shall retain the older terms as they are the best known, but employ “Proto-Canaanite” to designate the earliest alphabetic inscriptions and scripts from all three geographical areas dated to before ca. 1400 B.C. and “Old Canaanite” for ones whose writing is assigned to between ca. 1400-1050 B.C., whose scripts are transparently more linear in character. This terminology intends to signal that one is encountering two different stages in a single script tradition<sup>7</sup> that was transmitted by West Semites who lived in, or came from the southern Levant. By Proto- and Old Canaanite, I intend no connotation regarding the ethnicity of those who wrote these inscriptions or any presuppositions about language subdivisions within West Semitic in the second millennium B.C.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See especially Naveh (1987: 23) and Pardee (1997b: 354); compare the contrary or skeptical views of, for example, Diringer (1968: 157, 161), Driver (1976: 140f.), Lundin (1985: 173-76), Whitt (1997: 2382), and Parkinson (1999: 183).

<sup>8</sup> Following standardizations in the direction of writing, from right to left, and in the

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### III. The Egyptian Prototypes of the Alphabetic Letter Forms

Many, if not most, scholars agree that West Semites adopted Egyptian signs to use as letter forms in the earliest alphabet, although the quantitative extent and qualitative degree in that borrowing have been variously estimated. For higher appraisals of that borrowing, see, *inter alia*: Lenormant (in de Rougé 1874); Halevy (1901); Sethe (1916; 1917; 1926); Cowley (1916; 1929); Eisler (1919); Ullman (1927); Montet (1928: 294-305); Taylor (1930a; 1930b; 1931); Leibovitch (1934); Butin (1936; cf. 1932: 154); van den Branden (1962: 201-4; 1979: 174-83); Weidmüller (1969; 1974); Helck (1972); Zauzich (1973; 1980; 2003); Sznycer (1974); Sass (1978: 184; 1988: 106-33); Hamilton (1985; 2002); Colless (1988; 1990; 1991); Lemaire (1994: 5-6; 2000: 109); Tropper (2003: 173-75); Darnell (2003); Darnell et al. (2005); and Dobbs-Allsopp (2006: 496-97). Similar to the findings of Gardiner (1916), Davies (1990: 130) concluded that the forms of over half of the early letters “are clearly borrowed from Egyptian.” Fischer (2001: 85) estimated that almost a half of them were borrowed. A more limited appraisal of that borrowing was given by Cross (1985: 276): “Several of the pictographs are transparently derived from hieroglyphic models.” Over the course of his writings, he specified only four or five Egyptian signs as antecedents (Cross 1954: 21; 1980: 10-11; 1984: 72; 2003: 311, 222, 294; Cross and Huehnergard 2003: 226, n. 5). Healey (1990: 211) reached similar, limited conclusions. Ryckmans (1987: 322) characterized West Semitic contact with Egyptian writing as superficial and previous attempts to find a systematic correspondence between the two scripts as unsatisfactory. Briquel-Chatonnet (1998: 57-58) posited that the alphabet was invented by someone with only a limited grasp of Egyptian writing, who relied on the visual shapes of some signs without knowing either their phonetic or semantic values in Egyptian.

Other good scholars have either expressed skepticism about or denied outright that West Semites borrowed Egyptian signs to use as letters. Even after Sass’s detailed work (1988: 106-33, Table 3), the respected British Egyptologist Parkinson (1999: 181-83, fig. 61) concluded that the so-called Proto-Sinaitic script descended from Egyptian hieroglyphic writing, but that this was “controversial” and “highly

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stances of the letters near the end of that millennium, neither term is appropriate to describe West Semitic scripts (contrast Sass 2005).

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debatable,” citing Whitt (1995: 2379-97) and modifying a diagram (from Trigger 1998: 58, fig. 1), to show only indirect influence for one letter. Isserlin (1982: 801-2) also evinced skepticism about this issue, as Bauer (1937: 27) had earlier. While it is difficult to summarize Driver’s position (1976: 162-71), one might say that he concluded that the forms of the alphabet are Semitic, but are often influenced by specific Egyptian models. Similarly, the closest Albright (1966: 2) came to commenting on this issue was in his description of Petrie’s finds in the Sinai as an “unidentified script which seemed to have strong Egyptian affinities.” Daniels (1997: 355) went even further by asserting that one of several unproven assumptions about the “Proto-Sinaitic signs” were their Egyptian prototypes. Gelb (1969: 137f.), followed by Lundin (1985), denied any relationship between the earliest West Semitic and Egyptian scripts. So did Moran and Kelley, the latter a pioneer in deciphering Mayan hieroglyphs (1969; foreword by D. Diringler), who traced the alphabetic letters to ancient calendar signs of China and Central America. Mendenhall (1985) proposed instead that the earliest letter forms stemmed from Byblian syllabic signs.<sup>9</sup> Hoch (1990) viewed the Byblian signs as graphically intermediate between hieroglyphs and letters, while the later Colless (1998) saw them as linguistically intermediate.

Denials of, or skepticism about, the graphic origins of the Proto-Canaanite alphabet in Egyptian scripts are often fueled by sharp disagreements among those who claim such a borrowing concerning four fundamental issues: (a) which signs were borrowed (cf., for example, the generally but not completely overlapping list of Egyptian prototypes compiled by Puech [1983: 579, fig. 8], Sass [1988: 106-33, Table 3], Colless [1988: 33-52; 1990: 7, fig. 1; 1991: 21], Davies [1990: 131-32, Tables 2, 3], and, concerning just two new texts, Tropper [2003: 175, Abb. 2], and Darnell et al. [2005: 76-86]); (b) whether all, most, or just some of the alphabetic forms derive from Egyptian antecedents (see especially Sznycer 1974: 11-12; Sass 1988: 122, 130, 161; Davies 1990: 130); (c) whether hieroglyphic or hieratic shapes of signs constitute the closer graphic prototypes for alphabetic forms;<sup>10</sup> and (d) when this borrowing occurred.

<sup>9</sup> See, the critiques of his position by, among others, Ryckmans (1987: 327, n. 6) and Hamilton (1987: 693-95).

<sup>10</sup> See the reviews of the literature by Février (1959: 189-92), Diringler (1968: 146), Sass (1988: 1-7, 161), Lemaire (2000: 104-9), and Zauzich (2003: 183, nn. 1-15).

## *Introduction · 7*

### *A. The Search for Graphic Prototypes*

The nineteenth century scholar Lenormant began a concerted search for the graphic antecedents of the alphabet in Egyptian writing. His findings were transmitted by de Rougé (1874).<sup>11</sup> At first Lenormant posited hieroglyphic prototypes, but later abandoned this approach and sought antecedents in hieratic forms (see Gardiner 1916: 1). Lenormant's attraction to both styles of Egyptian writing presaged the debate of scholars who followed him. Even though since the seminal studies by Gardiner (1916) and Sethe (1916; 1917; 1926), those who posit hieroglyphic prototypes have dominated the secondary literature, periodically there have been a few scholars who claim that hieratic forms would constitute the closer graphic analogues for at least some letter forms (e.g., Montet 1928: 294-305; Mallon 1930; Taylor 1930a, 1930b; 1931; Weidmüller 1969; 1974; Helck 1972; Zauzich 1973; 1980; 2003; Hamilton 1985; 2002; Darnell 2003; Darnell et al. 2005; Dobbs-Allsopp 2006).<sup>12</sup> Without presupposing the type of Egyptian writing upon which early alphabetic writers were dependent, I shall reassess the most likely graphic prototypes for each letter form below on a case-by-case basis.

### *B. Characteristics of Hieroglyphic and Hieratic*

Given that on-going debate among scholars from various fields, a review of the special characteristics of hieratic and hieroglyphic and an illustration of the range of forms of signs in those script traditions are in order.<sup>13</sup>

Gardiner (1957: 9) described hieroglyphic as follows: “Hieroglyphic owes its name to the fact that in the latest times it was employed almost exclusively for ‘sacred’ (Greek *hīeros*) inscriptions ‘sculptured’ (Greek *glūpho*) on temple-walls or on public monuments. At the

<sup>11</sup> For scholarship before de Rougé, the references compiled by Weidmüller (1969; 1974), Lemaire (2000: 104-8, nn. 5-8), and Zauzich (2003: 189, nn. 8, 9) are often useful.

<sup>12</sup> Note there are two very different appeals by scholars to hieratic prototypes. Zauzich (2003), for example, appealed to hieratic forms of the late second millennium B.C. for Phoenician (and Greek!) letter forms and would trace the earlier letter forms to hieroglyphs (a double derivation if you will). In contrast, I will investigate both hieroglyphic and hieratic forms as potential antecedents for the shapes of the Proto-Canaanite letters at the earliest stage of writing.

<sup>13</sup> For recent overviews in English of the Egyptian writing system, see especially Davies (1990: 82-112), Ritner (1996), Loprieno (1997), and Parkinson (1999: 46-63, 79, 88-89). Concerning scribes and writing, see particularly Baines and Malek (2000: 198-201).

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outset hieroglyphic was used for all purposes. . . .” Concentrating on contextual aspects, especially the choice of writing materials, the eminent American Egyptologist Fischer (1976: 40) rearranged Gardiner’s further description (1957: 9) into three streams of hieroglyphic writing:

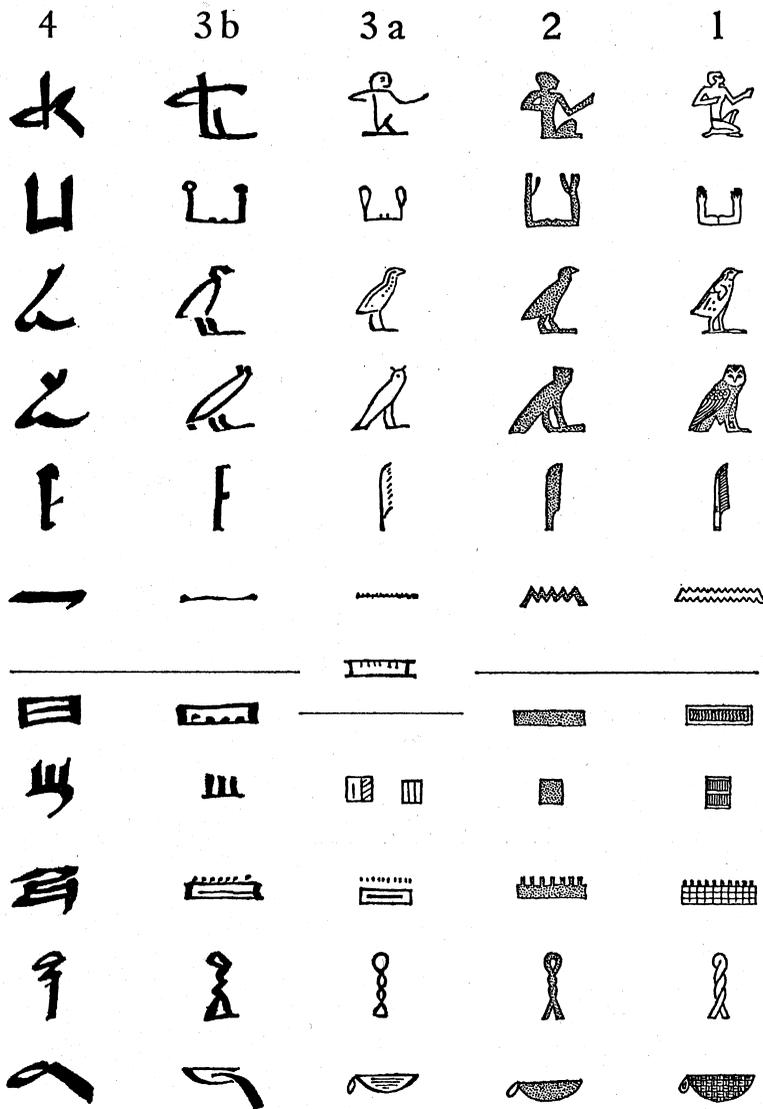
- (1) “In temples and tombs where their decorative effect was of account the hieroglyphs were often executed with the most elaborate detail and beautifully coloured . . .
- (2) ‘On stelae of stone and the like the signs were incised, or more rarely in raised relief, without internal markings . . .
- (3) ‘Upon papyrus the outlines were, on the other hand, abbreviated to a very considerable extent.’”

Fischer (1976: 40, 42) expanded and subdivided the latter category, which contains important script types that are new to discussions of the graphic origins of the early alphabet:

The last category, sometimes known as ‘semi-cursive’ or ‘book-writing,’ is also found in the Old Kingdom where it serves for the headings of hieratic accounts, much more rarely for inscriptions attached to painted scenes, and occasionally for inscriptions that were incised with a hard point in stone. The semi-cursive style became still more cursive in ink inscriptions during the Middle Kingdom; those of the Twelfth Dynasty and later may appropriately be called 3b, while the older style, which persisted in inscriptions incised on metal and wood may be called 3a. The latter was also used, with scarcely any modification, in the early Eighteenth Dynasty, down to the Amarna Period, after which it seems to have been somewhat less frequent.

Fischer (1976: 41, fig. 4) illustrated this range of hieroglyphic styles for twelve signs and added a fifth line, column 4, to exemplify their corresponding hieratic forms (arranged from right to left):<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Most of the examples in columns 1, 2, 3a, and 3b were taken from Twelfth Dynasty texts (Fischer 1976: 40, nn. 1-3b). Type 2 can be subdivided into hieroglyphs whose interiors were sculpted, often termed sunk relief, and hieroglyphs around whose exteriors the surrounding stone had been removed, termed raised relief (see especially Malek [1999: 426]). For a more detailed division of hieroglyphs into seven classifications, see Davies (1958: 13-14).



(Fig. 1.1: Fischer 1976: 41, fig. 4)

1. elaborately detailed hieroglyphs in temples and tombs
2. hieroglyphs incised or in raised relief on stelae of stone or the like with no internal details
- 3a. an older semi-cursive style of hieroglyphs on metal, wood, and papyrus
- 3b. a newer semi-cursive style of hieroglyphs in ink inscriptions
4. hieratic forms

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As well as possessing a range of forms, from elaborate to abbreviated models, hieroglyphs often have two stances. Hieroglyphs that represent persons or animals as well as those that have fronts and backs possess two, mirror-image postures (Gardiner 1957: 25). Hieroglyphic texts are arranged either in vertical columns or as horizontal lines, which usually read from right to left, more rarely from left to right (Gardiner 1957: 25), and sometimes there was a boustrophedon arrangement of the lines (Iversen 1961: 26).<sup>15</sup> Generally, but not rigidly, hieroglyphic signs point towards the beginnings of the horizontal lines or the vertical columns on which they are written. By ancient convention, they are then said to face towards the direction of reading or writing (see especially Fischer 1977: 5-6; cf. Darnell et al. 2005: 93, n. 19).<sup>16</sup>

Gardiner (1957: 10) described hieratic as follows:

Hieratic, so called because in the Graeco-Roman age it was the usual script employed by the priests (Greek *hieratikos* “priestly”), is the name now given to all the earlier styles of writing cursive enough for the original pictorial forms of the signs to be no longer clearly recognizable. Hieratic was nothing more, in the beginning, than the hieroglyphic in the summary and rounded forms resulting from the rapid manipulation of a reed pen as contrasted with the angular and precise shapes arising from the use of a chisel. Under the Old Kingdom, hieratic is hardly differentiated from hieroglyphic. Under the Middle Kingdom and in the Eighteenth Dynasty hieratic is invariably used on papyrus, except for reli-

<sup>15</sup> Boustrophedon arrangements were passed down from Egyptian to Proto-Canaanite (see especially the end of Sinai 346b [Albright 1966: 17] and the Grossman Seal [Cross 1954: n. 24; 2003: 312, n. 24; Albright 1966: 11]), then from Old Canaanite (e.g., the Lachish Boustrophedon Text) into both Epigraphic South Arabian and Old Greek scripts (see Cross 1984: 71; 2003: 293).

<sup>16</sup> The major exceptions here are the semi-cursive hieroglyphic papyri from the Ramesseum (Gardiner 1955) and the Veterinary Papyrus (Griffith 1898a) all of whose signs face right, on columns that read from left to right (for an excerpt from the former, see Parkinson 1999: 91). These are often termed simply “cursive” or “linear hieroglyphs” (e.g., Parkinson 1999: 188-89). I shall generally avoid the former as it has the potential to be confused with fully cursive hieratic forms and eschew the latter given the diversity of senses already given to the term “linear” in early alphabetic studies. I shall use the term “semi-cursive hieroglyphic” for examples of both Fischer’s subtypes 3a and 3b.

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gious texts; it is distinguishing a relatively consistent orthography of its own and distinguishes both more and less cursive varieties.<sup>17</sup>

With few exceptions (e.g., Goedicke 1988: xxi; Parkinson and Quirke 1995: 40), hieratic signs possess only one stance. “[H]ieratic was almost invariably written from right to left. Most of the earlier hieratic texts were written in vertical lines, but horizontal lines became more usual during the late Middle Kingdom and vertical lines were rare after the early New Kingdom” (Parkinson and Quirke 1995: 26-27).<sup>18</sup>

*C. When Consonantal Alphabetic Writing Began*

Scholars have variously dated the origin of the West Semitic consonantal alphabet from ca. 2000 to 1550 B.C.: the end of the third millennium B.C. (Tropper 2003: 173); early in Egypt’s Middle Kingdom (*inter alia*, Eisler 1919; Ullman 1927: 325; Smith 2001: 194-95; Hamilton 2002: 40; Sanders 2004: 31; Darnell et al. 2005: 90); the end of that period, the earliest date for the Proto-Canaanite inscriptions from the Sinai (so, with much hesitation, but forcefully, Gardiner 1916: 13-14; 1962: 47-48); the eighteenth century B.C. (Albright 1966: 15;<sup>19</sup> Cross 1985: 274; 1989: 80); the late eighteenth or seventeenth centuries B.C. (Lemaire 2000: 117); ca. 1700 B.C. (Demsy 1997: 362-65; Hallo 2004: 288-89); or its Second Intermediate Period (Sethe 1917; 1926: 137-38; Dever 1987: 169; Lemaire 1994: 6-7; Briquel-Chatonnet 1998: 59), preceding the latest possible date for

<sup>17</sup> Hieratic can be subdivided into streams as well (see Parkinson [1999: 88-89] for examples of Formal and Administrative Hieratic, branching off by the mid-Middle Kingdom, and late New Kingdom Literary Hieratic; most recently, see Darnell [2002] for multiple examples of Lapidary Hieratic). For the purposes of this study, usually the generic term “hieratic” will be employed.

<sup>18</sup> In term of general usage, Baines and Malek (2000: 198-201) noted that cursive writing was “from the beginning the commonest form. Further instruction was probably needed for proficiency in the monumental hieroglyphic script.” See also Lesko (2001: 297), Darnell (2002), and Darnell et al. (2005: 88-90; 102-5). For a detail examination of the relationship between language, culture, and script in Egypt in the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period, see Morenz (1996: esp. 56, fig. 3).

<sup>19</sup> Perhaps because he had once changed his mind on this issue, Albright (1966: 15) was uncharacteristically circumspect about the time that this writing system began: “we may ultimately find ourselves forced back into the Twelfth Dynasty for the origin of our alphabet. *Dies diem docebit!*”

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the first West Semitic inscriptions from the Sinai, the beginning of Egypt's New Kingdom (e.g., Petrie 1906: 131; Albright 1966: 6; Beit Arieh 1985; Puech 1986; and, in very nuanced fashion, Chartier-Raymond et al. 1994).<sup>20</sup> I hope to make a contribution to this debate through a comparison of the two scripts, though these chronological issues of dating the origin of the new script system and its earliest inscriptional witnesses are secondary to my primary goals of isolating the Egyptian graphemes that most closely resemble the Proto-Canaanite letter forms and reassessing the early typological development of the latter.<sup>21</sup>

### *D. The Drawings of Egyptian Signs Used in This Study*

Following the negative injunction of Ullman (1927: 313) to avoid using fonts of Egyptian signs, which are usually based on idealizations of Eighteenth Dynasty forms (Gardiner 1957: 438), I shall reproduce graphic excerpts of individual signs most often drawn by Egyptologists in the comparisons with early alphabetic letters in Chapter 2. This will be done both to insure the accuracy of the forms and to avoid any “fudging” of Egyptian forms drawn by Semitists (that too often have plagued early alphabetic studies in the past). I shall employ Gardiner's sign numbers, supplemented by numbers assigned to variant signs by *Hieroglyphica* (2000: sign list),<sup>22</sup> and cite the source of each excerpt (scholar, publication, provenance, and date—if the last two are known). With few exceptions (the works of the exacting epigraphers

<sup>20</sup> On the often minimal and sometimes conflicting evidence for dating the earliest inscriptions from the Sinai and Canaan, see the extensive review by Sass (1988: 135-44), who clearly favored assigning them to the late Middle Kingdom (more forcefully articulated in 1991: 4-27), and the shorter but important overview by Briquel-Chatonnet (1998), done after extensive new archeological work by a French-Egyptian team at Serabit el-Khadim (Valbelle and Bonnet 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Two new early alphabetic texts found at the Wadi el-Hol, Egypt (Darnell and Darnell 1995; Wimmer and Wimmer-Dweikat 2001; Altschuler 2002; Darnell 2003) have the potential for helping to narrow the wide chronological estimates for both the beginning of this script system and the dating of the earliest inscriptions from the Sinai and Canaan (Wilford 1999; Smith 2001: 194-95; Hamilton 2002: 40; Tropper 2003: 173-74; Darnell et al. 2005: 130, n. 130).

<sup>22</sup> I am grateful to Prof. R. Wilkinson for this reference, which can be found on line at <http://www.ccer.theo.uu.nl/ccer/apps/hierolhiero.html1> (edited by N. Grimal, J. Hallof, and D. van der Plas [Utrecht, Paris, 2000]; second edition, revised and enlarged by J. Hallof, H. van den Berg, and G. Hallof). The first edition of this collation of all known hieroglyphic variants was excerpted as an “extended library” in Hannig (1995: 117-68).

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Möller, Fischer, and Goedicke), I have checked the accuracy of each of these representations either on the original inscriptions (in London, Toronto, Montréal, and Cairo) or in photographic form (published or in the photographic collection of The British Museum). If, on occasion, such “double checking” was not possible (e.g., some of Butin’s exemplars [1936] from Egyptian Sinaitic inscriptions) or the tracing of a font became necessary, an asterisk will be placed to the left of that figure to indicate that it should be treated as an idealization, of some but considerably more limited worth than an actual attestation.

For the most part, my graphic “quotations” of actual hieroglyphic exemplars come from four sources: Parts 1-6 of *Hieroglyphic Texts*, mostly personal stelae, in The British Museum, cited as *HT* plus volume number and plate number;<sup>23</sup> Goyon’s collection (1957) of rock inscriptions from the ancient mining site of Wadi Hammamat (each published with a photograph); Žába’s collection (1974) of rock inscriptions from southern Egypt and northern Nubia (also published with a photograph of each inscription); Stewart’s publication (1979) of stelae from the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period, some of which come from the Sinai, in the Petrie Museum, University College, London (each examined in person).<sup>24</sup> Where no drawing by an Egyptologist exists but there is a published photograph, I drew the sign myself (most often semi-cursive hieroglyphs on papyri from the Ramesseum [traced from Gardiner 1955] and other sources [see Fischer 1976: 40, nn. 3a, 3b]). Other published hieroglyphic forms will be also employed, though less frequently, as the need to find actual comparable signs arises.

<sup>23</sup> Double-checking the forms in *HT* 1-6 was of particular importance since the drawings in those volumes are often considered inaccurate; many of those forms can now be checked on photographs contained in recent works by Parkinson (1999) and Russmann (2001). I would like to thank N. Spencer, Assistant Keeper, The Department of Ancient Egypt and the Sudan for checking the date and provenance of each of these texts in the data base of The British Museum (some of which are inaccurate in *HT* 1-6). Any errors that remain are, of course, my own.

<sup>24</sup> While ideally I would have preferred to draw consistent comparisons of Egyptian and Semitic forms from the same place, most often the western Sinai, this was not possible because of the inadequate publication of many of the Egyptian Sinaitic texts—see Černý’s constant reference to the lack of adequate photographs and drawings (Gardiner, Peet, and Černý 1955). Where adequate photographs have been published (e.g., Reich 1933: pl. 16; Valbelle and Bonnet 1996: *passim*; Parkinson 1999: 163, fig. 75) or I have examined an original (e.g., Sinai 165), reference will be made to them whenever possible.

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My graphic “quotations” of hieratic exemplars come from three sources: Möller’s *Hieratische Paläographie* (1909; 1927), which will be cited as Möller plus volume number and sign number; Žába’s collection (1974) of rock inscriptions, including lapidary hieratic forms, from southern Egypt and northern Nubia (with photographs); and Goedicke’s *Old Hieratic Paleography* (1988). I shall cite the source of each graphic quotation above its reproduction (and in the verbal analysis) for ease of reference.

I shall arrange these Egyptian forms from left to right (with no regard for their orientations) according to my understanding of their typological development (not necessarily in chronological order).

A précis describing the range and sometimes the development of each sign borrowed by West Semites will precede these graphic quotations. For some signs, one in effect needs to chart their typological development in Egyptian scripts before one can understand the typological development of the form of a Proto-Canaanite letter. As an epigrapher specializing in West Semitic scripts, I hesitate to comment on the paleography of even a small part of another complex script tradition (even with the aid of many specialized publications in Egyptology), although such seems necessary since the simple listing of potential prototypical Egyptian signs over the course of the last century and a quarter has resolved neither the large issue of the Egyptian origin of the alphabetic graphemes nor established many of the particulars in that borrowing necessary for paleographic typological analysis.

Whenever they are available, I shall select hieroglyphic and hieratic forms from the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period, the eras isolated by previous researchers as the time when West Semitic consonantal alphabetic writing began. Both earlier forms from the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period and later ones from the Eighteenth Dynasty will be cited less frequently and with more caution.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> For recent discussions of the chronology of Egypt and Palestine, particularly as it concerns the Middle Kingdom and Middle Bronze Age, see especially Teissier (1995: 1-6), Ben-Tor (1997: 163-64), and Cohen (2002). Following Baines and Malek (2000: 8-9), see the chronological chart outlining from the Early Dynastic Period to the end of the New Kingdom included above in the preface. For recent maps of the relevant sites in Egypt, see esp. Baines and Malek (2000) and Darnell et al. (2005: 74, fig. 1), and, for those in Palestine, see Lemaire (2000: 124, fig. 6).

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#### IV. The Proto-Canaanite Letter Forms and Stances

The routes one takes to ascertain the typologically earliest letter forms differ significantly if one deems the consonantal alphabet to have begun as a *sui generis* graphic system or as a system whose graphic forms and often stances were derived from Egyptian scripts.

##### *A. Establishing the Typologically Earliest Letter Forms*

If one takes the *sui generis* route, one starts from later, usually Phoenician scripts, most often that on the *ʿahiram* Sarcophagus dated to the early tenth century B.C.<sup>26</sup> and follows each letter form back through chronologically earlier inscriptions until one reaches or postulates a single form, usually deemed a primitive pictograph in the mid- to early second millennium B.C. (so, most dramatically, Puech [1986], who treated the early alphabetic texts and scripts of that millennium [1986: fig. 8] in chronologically reversed order). This way seemed surest because it worked from the known to the unknown in terms of the identification of letters. The implicit objective appears to have been the reconstruction of a proto-abecedary, a list of actual or postulated shapes of the letters from which one could then derive all subsequent forms. Some of the script charts by Albright (1966: fig. 1) and Cross (1980: fig. 13; 2003: 228, fig. 32.9) may serve to illustrate this route to reconstructing the earliest West Semitic alphabet. But two problems in this approach need to be acknowledged. First, when one compares the range of script charts produced over the last quarter century by good scholars, there are often profound disagreements in the consonantal values assigned to some of the same letter forms (e.g., compare those by Albright, Cross, and Puech cited above with those by, *inter alia*, Isserlin [1982: 806-7], Ryckmans [1987: 319, fig.1], Sass [1988: Tables 4, 5], Colless [1988: 34; 1990: 7, fig. 1; 1991: 21], Davies [1990: 131-32, Tables 2, 3], Tropper [2003: 175], and Darnell et al. [2005]). Clearly, working from known to unknown regarding the scripts of the second millennium B.C.

<sup>26</sup> I am provisionally following the dating of this epigraph advocated by Cross (1993: 534; 2003: 208). See the recent and indispensable study and photographs by Lundberg (2004: 81-93; pls. 10-24), with bibliography (esp. nn. 1, 7, 10). Pending the publication and integration of the results of Lehman's study, which will address the discrepancies between the dating of this sarcophagus and its inscription(s) (Lundberg 2004: 83, n. 7), I shall leave Sass's radical redating of both (2005: 17-28, 45-50, 75-82) *sub judice*.

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has provoked a wide variety of scholarly responses (even after the discovery of the difficult ʿIzbet Šarṭah Abecedary, which provides significant controls about the identities of the letters later in that millennium). Secondly, working from later to earlier forms is methodologically flawed (and would be tolerated in no other application of typological method, particularly concerning any of the West Semitic scripts of the first millennium B.C.).<sup>27</sup> Typology as a vehicle for analysis runs poorly—if at all—in reverse. During the twentieth century, most scholars were forced into using that chronologically backwards approach primarily due to a paucity of early alphabetic inscriptional data. But at times there was also an implicit presupposition that the alphabet was a *sui generis* creation, the pictorial identities of whose earliest letters could be recognized, sometimes with the help of letter names, at other times based solely on their graphic shapes (which unleashed a superabundance of scholarly imagination as to their original forms and values).

Butin (1936), apparently following the lead of Ullman (1927: 313), started down a different perhaps more difficult but methodologically surer path in terms of the typological analysis of the earliest letter forms. He returned to the western Sinai and studied exactly how forms of six signs on Egyptian inscriptions were executed and then charted how those prototypes were continued or changed for five letters in what some would now term the Proto-Canaanite alphabetic script. In this way he was able to begin a standard typological analysis, working from received to developed graphic forms. Then he published his modest results setting the varieties of those Egyptian hieroglyphs on the top line and the sometimes completely and at other times only partially overlapping range of the shapes of the West Semitic letters directly below them so that others could adjudicate his results. More than one letter form can be original in this approach because the parent script system already had over a millennium to develop a wide range of forms and script sequences (illustrated briefly above in fig. 1.1). The shapes of a letter need not be any more “pictographic” than the Egyptian forms that were adopted by West Semites; in fact, Butin

<sup>27</sup> Working from *earlier* to *later* forms is implicit in one of Cross’s postulations for that method (1982: 127; 2003: 347): “a typological sequence always reveals a continuity of types. Each emergent type is related to, and continues with its antecedent type”; see now Zuckerman (2003: 94).

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(1936: 52-53) called the graphemes in both types of writing hieroglyphs. Butin never completed the rest of the comparisons between antecedent Egyptian signs and early alphabetic letters since he died the year following the appearance of that study. While some of the details in his approach could be improved,<sup>28</sup> Butin's method was sound and will be followed in the present study. By matching the Proto-Canaanite letter forms with their closest Egyptian prototypes, one can fix the starting points from which to trace all subsequent graphic developments. With these beginning points, other scholars, both Egyptologists and Semitists, can check, concur, critique, or revise those comparisons.

### *B. Charting the Stances of Letters*

Continuity with or development of a Proto-Canaanite letter from its Egyptian prototypes can also be traced through its stances. Part of this analysis is to establish which stances (often horizontal mirror-images) were received from Egyptian antecedents and which postures represent innovations by West Semitic writers. Since many Egyptian hieroglyphs have mirror-image orientations, while others have two or more postures (usually upright and horizontal), the only way to know which are received or developed stances in letters is by charting their movement from such antecedents. In general, I accept the insight of several scholars that many letters turned ninety degrees (e.g., Sayce 1910: 215; Ullman 1927: 320; Cross 1954: 18-19; 1980: 3; 1984: 72; 2003: 310-312, 214, 294 and *passim*; Sass 1988: 107-8 and *passim*), although I would like to know whether this was a generalized phenomenon or if such rotations occurred on a letter-by-letter basis. On occasion I shall modify the attested stance of a letter so as to be able to compare its form with Egyptian models more clearly; such modern reconstructions will always be marked by asterisks to their left (to differentiate them from stances that actually occur in early alphabetic texts). One also needs to synthesize which stances are employed on vertically arranged texts and which occur on horizontal lines. Concerning the latter, I shall pay con-

<sup>28</sup> For instance: one of his prototypes was almost assuredly wrong; better drawings of both script sequences could be given; and appeals could be made to specific inscriptions from which each writing is drawn so that its accuracy can be checked—rather than appealing to a large collection of Egyptian inscriptions, many of which are still *in situ* in the western Sinai and some of which have not been photographed.

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siderable attention to the orientation of a letter *vis-à-vis* the direction in which one reads its line (if that is known). In order to chart that, below each drawing of a Proto-Canaanite letter form I shall include an abbreviation indicating the direction in which its text is arranged:

- v stands for a vertical column;
- h for a horizontal line (direction of reading uncertain or unknown);
- l-r for a horizontal line that reads from left to right;
- r-l for one that reads from right to left;
- ? following any of these indicates uncertainty about the direction of reading or how to hold an inscription.

### *C. The Drawings of Proto- and Old Canaanite Letters in This Study*

The drawings of the early alphabetic letters that will be reproduced in Chapters 2 and 3 were clipped from tracings of thirty-nine inscriptions presently known and well enough preserved for paleographic analysis.<sup>29</sup> These tracings were made, for the most part, by the present writer after examining the original inscriptions in Cairo (Sinai 346, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 356, 359, 365), Jerusalem (Sinai 378, the Lachish Dagger, Tell en-Nagila Sherd, Shechem Plaque, Gezer Sherd, Gezer Jar Signs<sup>30</sup>), London

<sup>29</sup> That number is deceptive since some are multi-faceted inscriptions, while others are only fragments with two or three letters (cf. the totals reviewed by Hallo [2004: 294, n. 46]). See Appendix 1 for a catalogue of these inscriptions including: a full drawing; a select bibliography; its place of discovery; the size of the inscription (and artifact); its direction of writing; a full transliteration; an estimation of the time of its writing (following a more extensive discussion in Chapter 3); and a discussion of any uncertain readings. I have set aside a number of inscriptions as being too damaged to provide reliable paleographic information (with reference to their figures in Sass 1988): Sinai 347a (fig. 22), 348 (figs. 23-26), 370-373c (figs. 112-131), 375b (figs. 134-135), and 375d (figs. 138-139). I have also put aside four inscriptions about whose classification as alphabetic texts I remain uncertain: Milik Arrowhead 1 (figs. 278, 279), a seal from "Kahun"/Lahun (fig. 283), a stone from Arava (figs. 276-279), and a seal from Tell Abu Zureiq (Kitchen 1989).

<sup>30</sup> I would concur with Seger (1983) that these jar signs represent important secondary witnesses to early alphabetic writing, the first from a controlled archeological dig in Palestine (with Lemaire 2000: 113, n. 58; against Sass 1988: 74, 98). Letters used as jar signs are also known from the shoulders of pithoi found at Iron Age Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Meshel 1978: figs. 22, 23), occasionally from Persian Period Judea (Stern 1982: 204, figs. 338, 339; ? not a *h*, Hamilton: in press), in Paleo-Hebrew script from Mt. Gerizim in the early Hellenistic Period (Naveh and Magen 1997: 17\*; Magen, Misgav, and Tsfnania 2004:

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(Sinai 345, the Lahun Heddle Jack<sup>31</sup>), and Cambridge, MA (Sinai 375a, 375c, an impression of the Grossman Seal<sup>32</sup>). I am grateful to Prof. J. C. Darnell of Yale University for granting me access to the WSR photographs of the Wadi el-Ḥol early alphabetic inscriptions prior to their publication and galleys of the *editio princeps* before its appearance. Prof. L. Stager of the Harvard Semitic Museum also graciously permitted me to examine Sinai 375a and 375c, both of which were only recently rediscovered, and to use the new WSR color photographs of those texts, as well as the WSR digitized photographs of the original black and white glass negatives of other Proto-Canaanite texts from the Sinai in that collection (most originally published in Butin 1932). Access to those photographs was indispensable for making accurate drawings of the Proto-Canaanite texts from the Sinai even after having viewed many of the originals.<sup>33</sup> After examining the original of the Lahun Heddle Jack in The British Museum, I modified the drawing of it in Petrie (1890: pl. 27.85). Since there are no published photographs from which to trace the roughly incised letters of that inscription, this modified drawing represents a linear approximation of its essential

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260; jar signs, not a name, Hamilton: in press), at Roman Period Masada, with literary reflections in the Mishnah and Tosefta (the latter two cited in Meshel 1978)—in short, from each subsequent period of antiquity. Excluding Seger's proposed rectangular *bêt* (1983: pl. 3, no. 14) from Stratum XIX at Gezer as a damaged seal impression (personal examination of the original) and several others that do not conform to known shapes of letters (nos. 6, 13, 23), eleven remaining signs from the transitional MB-LB Stratum XVIII can be identified as letters from other sources. Since there is still debate concerning the Egyptian campaign that caused the destruction of that stratum (see Weinstein [1981: 4] for early references), Seger (1983: 478, 481) opting for just after 1525 B.C. and Dever (1992: 1000; 1997: 397) tentatively but persistently for about 1468 B.C., I shall treat these valuable reflections of alphabetic writing as coming from ca. 1500 B.C. (± 25 years), allowing for some usage of the pithoi at either chronological extremity before that destruction.

<sup>31</sup> *OED* (7: 94) defined heddles as: "The small cords . . . through which the warp is passed in a loom after going through the reed, and by means of which the warp threads are separated into two sets so as to allow the shuttle bearing the weft." Heddle jacks presumably were used to keep those sets apart. Cartwright, Granger-Taylor, and Quirke (1998: 92) also established that such heddle jacks were employed on horizontal looms used in the Middle Kingdom (and not on vertical looms of the New Kingdom).

<sup>32</sup> This seal has also been known as the Goetze or St. Louis Seal (see Appendix 1).

<sup>33</sup> I am deeply indebted to Dr. M. Lundberg for making CD ROMs and transparencies of the WSR photographs of the Wadi el-Ḥol inscriptions, Sinai 375a, 375c, and most of the Harvard Semitic Museum glass negatives for me.

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forms.<sup>34</sup> For some of the inscriptions still *in situ* in the Sinai whose published photographs are sometimes difficult to interpret (especially Sinai 357, 379, 380), I thought it wisest to reproduce the drawings of others who have had access to the originals. So too for the Gezer Jar Signs (Seger 1983), for which there are no published photographs. I shall cite the source of any graphic quotation from others' drawings below its reproduction (and in the verbal analysis) for ease of reference. I have traced the remainder from the best photographs available (sources given in Appendix 1). Every effort has been made to render as accurate tracings as possible of the handwriting of these texts, including any ambiguities and damage to their letters; the latter will be included with each graphic excerpt (usually represented by dots). Any "cleaned up" figures will be preceded on their left by an asterisk, again to mark them as hypothetical forms. With few exceptions, I shall include only Proto-Canaanite letters whose identities are certain in Chapter 2 (uncertain readings will be discussed in Appendix 1).<sup>35</sup> Given the number of graphic excerpts, a scale for each letter will be too difficult to provide (see Appendix 1 for the size of each inscription).

Tracings of Old Canaanite letters will be included, on occasion, for two reasons. First, a few letters are not yet clearly attested in the Proto-Canaanite inscriptions. With due caution about the methodical issues involved (see above), appeals will be made to their occurrences in subsequent Old Canaanite inscriptions (primarily the Abecedary line of

<sup>34</sup> I would like to thank M. Marée, Assistant Keeper, the Department of Ancient Egypt and the Sudan, for taking photographs of the individual letters of this cylindrical object for me.

<sup>35</sup> I realize that I am participating in an "interpretative circle" here, dependent on the readings of previous scholars for identifying their consonantal values. Both a greater emphasis on the coherence of the paleographic range of each letter form as it relates to its Egyptian precursor(s) and the consonantal values as attested on the "shorter" 'Izbet Šarḥāh Abecedary allow for significant "breaking" in that circle. With regard to the Proto-Canaanite texts from the Sinai, two extremes are to be avoided: one that would give the impression that they have been fully deciphered (see the critiques of especially Albright's work by Sass [1988: 45-50] and Hamilton [2002: 36-37]); and the other, that they remain undeciphered (so, apart from *b'lt*, Gardiner [1962: 48] and Hallo [2004: 294]; so with no qualifications, Whitt [1995: 2382], Daniels [1997: 355], and O'Connor [1996: 90]). They are partially deciphered texts (see especially: Pardee [1997b: 354], the select bibliography on each inscription in Appendix 1, and references for a few letters whose values are still being established in Chapter 2).

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the ʿIzbet Šarṭah Ostrakon).<sup>36</sup> In these few instances, every effort will be made to chart the movement forward typologically and chronologically. Given the large chronological gap between a potential borrowing of an Egyptian sign in the early to mid-second millennium B.C. and its appearance on an inscription later in that millennium,<sup>37</sup> the results here will be surest when little or no graphic development can be shown to have taken place. Secondly, some Old Canaanite forms will be solicited to understand how some changes from Egyptian forms in Proto-Canaanite scripts presage later attestations. I have examined most of the major Old Canaanite inscriptions in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and London and will attempt to give as accurate renderings of their letters as in the earlier attestations.

### V. The Acrophonic Letter Names

The third avenue of approaching the earliest alphabet is through the acrophonic name(s) of each letter.<sup>38</sup> These names in effect describe—or otherwise complement—their letter forms. After taking into account the subsequent mergers of some consonants in West Semitic languages particularly as they are attested in some of the more completely deci-

<sup>36</sup> Stated negatively, to ignore these letters would result in not having at least a notion of the full repertoire of letters when adjudicating choices of readings in damaged contexts.

<sup>37</sup> I am following Cross's reassignment (2003: 209, n. 11) of the Lachish Bowl, Raddana Handle, ʿIzbet Šarṭah Ostrakon, Beth Shemesh Sherd, and Zarephath Sherd to the twelfth century B.C. based on a lowered chronology for Ramesses II and III. I will, however, retain the earlier dating of ca. 1200 B.C. for the Lachish Boustrophedon Text and Qubur Walaydah Ostrakon, whose scripts are manifestly more archaic—perhaps “heirlooms”—than found on those five inscriptions (against Cross 2003: 209, n. 11). I would strongly object to the recent attempt by Sass (2005: 44-45, 55) to reassign the ʿIzbet Šarṭah Ostrakon to ca. 1150-850 B.C. and the Raddana Handle to the tenth century B.C. (with the possibility of the latter period also entertained for the Zarephath Sherd) as representing an abandonment of paleographic typological method; his curt dismissal of the dating in the excavators' reports on those two sites (2005: 45) is shocking.

<sup>38</sup> Nöldeke (1904: 124-36) laid the foundational and still useful study of these names, although new information about them is still appearing (e.g., Finkel 1998; Cross and Huehnergard 2003; Jursa 2005). Before Petrie's finds (1906) and Gardiner (1916) and Sethe's studies (1916; 1917), Nöldeke (1904: 136) also achieved a synthesis *in embryo* between them and their graphic forms: “Mein Resultat, daß die semit. Buchstabbennamen von Phönizien ausgehen...daß die Erfindung des semitschen Alphabets selbst eben den Phöniziern zuzuschreiben ist.”

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phered Proto- and Old Canaanite texts, these names also aid in establishing the consonantal value of many of the alphabetic graphemes because they are acrophonic (e.g., the letters with the graphic shapes of the heads of bulls have to stand for ʾ because their name, \*ʾalp-, “bull/ox,” begins with ʾ).<sup>39</sup>

Along with many scholars, I consider it entirely likely that these names were part-and-parcel of the creation of the Proto-Canaanite alphabet itself.<sup>40</sup> In any case, they can now be shown to have existed in the second millennium B.C. because of their presence in traditions that derive from that period. With one exception (Latin *vau*), the sources of information about the acrophones used in this study come from six disparate language traditions.

### A. *The Partial List of Clipped Names from Ugarit*

An incomplete tablet in syllabic cuneiform from Ras Shamra,<sup>41</sup> covering ʾ-t[ ]š-t plus three Ugaritic supplemental letters, records the

<sup>39</sup> See, in particular, Sass (1988: 106-33, Table 3) for the history of scholarship to that time concerning the use of the acrophonic principle in helping to establish many, but not all of the values of the consonants. See Sass (1991: 26), Lemaire (1994: 6), and Parkinson (1999: 79) for the use of the acrophonic principle in different aspects of Egyptian writing (cf. the proposal by Freu [2000: 94-95] that the monoconsonantal signs also had acrophonic names). No matter whether one appeals to predecessors in Egyptian syllabic (e.g., Sass 1991; Lemaire 1994: 6) or monoconsonantal writing (e.g., Freu 2000; Viers 2000: 165), recent research has confirmed the findings of nineteenth century scholars that the phonetic values of graphically corresponding signs in Egyptian and West Semitic are not the same (most recently, see Lemaire [1994: 6; 2000: 104-6, n. 8] and Vier [2000: 165]). For a possible exception, see Appendix 1, Wadi el-Ḥol Text 2.

<sup>40</sup> Recently see Lemaire (1994: 6), Hamilton (2002: 40), Cross and Huehnergard (2003), Tropper (2003: 173-75), and Darnell et al. (2005: 76-86). The case for the existence of a naming system parallel to these acrophones or in place of them, involving their initial consonants plus arbitrary vowels or diphthongs, most recently rearticulated by Hallo (1996: 35-41, esp. 37; 2004: 285-86)—a weak proposal since Gardiner’s synthesis (1916) and the analysis of their clipped names at Ugarit (Cross and Lambdin 1960)—has become untenable given the publication of several full names in syllabic cuneiform from first millennium B.C. sources—*ša-du-ú* (tentatively, Zadok [1997]; more assuredly, Jursa [2002]); *a-a-nu*, *bis* in a “Babylonian ABC” (Finkel 1998), whose names are otherwise abbreviated (not with arbitrary vowels); *šin* (Jursa and Weszeli 2000: 79); and *mi-i-mi* (Jursa 2002)—each discussed by Cross and Huehnergard (2003) and in Chapter 2 below (contrast Hallo 2004: 293-95, n. 53). I am grateful to Prof. Jursa for alerting me to his further findings of some Aramaic names in Akkadian transliteration in a text from the reign of Darius I: *il-pi*, *ši-in*, and *ya-a-di* (Jursa 2005).

<sup>41</sup> RS 19.159 = CAT 5.14 (Cross and Huehnergard 2003: 224). For color photographs, a drawing, and transcriptions of the columns of this fire-damaged tablet, see Bordreuil (2000: pl. 25a, b, 161, fig. 4).

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beginning of some of the names, their initial consonants plus vowels, thus providing an indirect witness to their full Old Canaanite acrophones and their existence at least as early as the fourteenth century B.C. (Cross and Lambdin 1960; Cross 2003: 313-16).<sup>42</sup>

### *B. The Ethiopic Letter Names*

The Ethiopic letter names<sup>43</sup> go back to an Epigraphic South Arabian source that adopted the Old Canaanite alphabet most likely ca. 1300 B.C. (Cross 1967: 19\*; 2003: 325; against Sass 1991: 28-93; 2005: 96-132).<sup>44</sup>

### *C. The Greek Letter Names*

The Greeks borrowed the West Semitic alphabet, its graphemes, and its acrophones most likely late in the second millennium B.C. (see, *inter alia*, Ullmann 1927; Naveh 1973a: 1-8; McCarter 1976; and Naveh 1987b: 175f., which includes a review of counter-proposals).<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See the corrections by Speiser (1964) as well as Cross and Huehnergard (2003: 225, n. 7).

<sup>43</sup> I would like to thank Prof. Huehnergard for transcribing the list of these names in Dillmann (1857: Taf. 1) into Lambdin's transcription system for me.

Nöldeke's valuation (1904: 131-34) of the antiquity of these names, challenged by Ullendorff (1951: 211-13) as recent inventions based on the Hebrew acrophones that he claimed were unknown in older Ethiopic tradition, has been sustained by some careful research by Ryckmans (1988: 127-28; cf. 1987: 323, n. 22), who demonstrated that the Ethiopic acrophones were used in transcribing about one hundred pages of Arabic words and that some of them appear in an astrological treatise originating no later than the fifteenth century A.D., the publication of which Ullendorff appears to have misread (contrast Sass [1991: 92] and compare the muted evaluation of this research by Smith [2001: 56]). Ullendorff's position was already very weak since at least fifteen of the Ethiopic acrophones do not correspond with their Hebrew counterparts (see Chapter 2).

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter 2 below for the Proto- and Old Canaanite progenitors of South Semitic *b*, *d*, revalued *ḥ*, *z*, *n*, *ṣ*, *š* < *θ* (cf. Sass 1991: 89, chart 1; 2005: 121, Table 8). The outlined forms of South Semitic *g*, in three stances (Sass 1991: 89, chart 1; 2005: 121, Table 9), likely constitute revalued forms of early West Semitic *p* (Chapter 2 below). Only *l* is difficult but not impossible to derive from West Semitic scripts of the second millennium B.C.—compare the form of that letter on recently found epigraphs from Yalâ (Sass 2005: fig. 21, Table 8) with the *lamed* of Wadi el-Hol 1.3 (Darnell et al. 2005: 3, fig. 2). Vertical columns also died out in West Semitic usage well before the end of that millennium, but reappear in South Semitic texts (e.g., Jamme 1955: 33; Sass 1991: fig. 6).

<sup>45</sup> I am not persuaded by Sass's attempts (1991: 94-98; 2005: 133-52) to lower the date of that borrowing to the first millennium B.C. since some West Semitic letter forms (e.g., multiple stances of A-forms of *ʾalep*), horizontal lines in both directions, and boustro-

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### *D. The Hebrew Letter Names*

Hebrew tradition is particularly rich because it provides four sources for the letter names. The Septuagint (hereafter LXX) of Psalm 118 (MT 119) transcribes the Hebrew names in Greek characters quite likely as they were in the third to second centuries B.C. (transcribed from Rahlfs 1935: 287-303). The Samaritan Hebrew names (transcribed from Rosenberg 1901: 9-10)<sup>46</sup> stem from before that tradition's break with Jerusalem, no later than the second century B.C.<sup>47</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea gives another Greek transcription of the Hebrew names as they were known in Palestine during the early fourth century A.D. in Book 10, Chapter 5 of *The Preparation for the Gospel* (transcribed from Gifford 1903: 473-74). Jewish tradition transmits the Hebrew acrophones to this day; whenever they are available, the pointed forms in the Mishnah and early rabbinic literature will be cited, especially for the less well-known plural forms (transcribed from Jastrow 1903, but with no indication of the spirants).

### *E. A Late Babylonian School Tablet and the Aramaic Letter Names*

Aramaic traditions are also multi-layered and appear to have been augmented by an important recent find.

phedon arrangements of lines had died out in West Semitic usage by that time (and all of which appear in the typologically earliest Greek inscriptions). See n. 37 above regarding my unwillingness to accept his recent reassignment of several Old Canaanite inscriptions to the first millennium B.C. so as to account for the adoption of such forms and directions of writing by the Greeks ca. 750 or slightly earlier (Sass 2005: 44-45, 55, 150). It is better to admit a "stand off" between many West Semitic and Greek epigraphers—see the review of the latter by Sass (2005: 134-38)—than to manipulate the epigraphic data. A single find by either group of scholars could resolve this conflict (e.g., an epigraph from a West Semitic context dated to the first quarter of the first millennium B.C. that archaizes consistently in imitation of an Old Canaanite script; or, a single Greek epigraph from a context dating certainly to the late second millennium B.C.).

<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately Ben Ḥayyim's studies (1957-1977) of the Samaritan names were available to me only through citations in *HALOT* (the revisions to which he assisted).

<sup>47</sup> Cross (oral communication) conceived of these names as having come from Judea, traveled with the Paleo-Hebrew script tradition, and been preserved in Samaritan tradition from the Hellenistic era forward. But since the evidence for Paleo-Hebrew inscriptions from Samaria in the Persian and early Hellenistic periods is mounting (Naveh and Magen 1997: 9\*-17\*; Naveh 1998; Magen, Misgav, and Tsfania 2004; Hamilton: in press), it may be that the Samaritan acrophones represent a source independent of how they were known in Judean or Jewish traditions. While I clearly favor the latter, both views are tenable and will be presented in Chapter 2 concerning the relevant letters.

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In 1998 I. L. Finkel announced the discovery of a Late Babylonian school tablet in the British Museum in which the first two of the three columns clearly represent the West Semitic (presumably Aramaic) alphabet. A full edition of the tablet has now been published by M. J. Geller [1997-2000: 144-46] as an appendix to an important new study of the famous Aramaic incantation in cuneiform script. With one exception, the two columns are identical, and, again with one exception, the “letters” of the alphabet are rendered in single cuneiform signs (Cross and Huehnergard 2003: 223).

Finkel (1998) demonstrated that the last mentioned exception, *a-a-nu*, represented the letter name *‘ayin*; more suggestively, Geller (1997-2000) may have shown by his choice of transcription values for at least two of signs, “*bé* rather than *bi* and *re* rather than *ri*,” that he too was thinking of the letter names (Cross and Huehnergard 2003: 224). The latter then made the case that the vowels for almost all the remaining signs were not arbitrary but represented the initial vowels of the letter names of the “short” alphabet (rendering a twice-recorded list of clipped names parallel to but not always the same as those found on the broken tablet from Ugarit [Cross and Lambdin 1960]). This tablet represents one of the first reflections<sup>48</sup> of what apparently the Aramaic letter names looked like in the first millennium B.C.<sup>49</sup>

Syriac witnesses usually the full letter names (cited from Thackston 1999: xviii-xx, with some reference to Nöldeke 1966: 2 and Brockelmann 1968: 5).

Jewish Aramaic also transmits some of the acrophones (transcriptions from Jastrow 1903).

*F. The Names in Classical Arabic*

While the Classical Arabic names are often considered the most developed, especially those ending in  $-\bar{a}^2$ , they are still a valuable source (transcribed from Brockelmann 1974: 4-5).<sup>50</sup>

I shall not presuppose which acrophone might be more original

<sup>48</sup> Also see some of the full names in Akkadian transliteration published by Zadok (1997), Jursa and Weszeli (2000: 79), and especially Jursa (2002; 2005).

<sup>49</sup> It is difficult to determine a more precise date for this school tablet. Finkel (1998: 20) suggested assigning it to around the late seventh century B.C., while Cross and Huehnergard [2003: 223-24, n. 3], following an epigraphic parallel cited by Geller [1997-2000: 154], ended by obliquely suggesting the third or second centuries B.C.

<sup>50</sup> For the Arabic names, I shall use the transcription system advocated by Kaltner (1996: 107-8), with three exceptions, *h* instead of *k*, *ð* instead of *d*, and *g* in place of *ġ*.

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where, in a few instances, languages transmit two different names for the same letter. Despite thousands of years of transmission and potential development, primarily through rhyming and shortening, it is often startling how similar the names of most of the letters of the alphabet are in these disparate traditions. “Whether these names please us or not, they are our *data* and we have to accept them, or at least account for them in some way or another” (Gardiner 1916: 7).

### VI. The Format for Titles and Usage of Names in Chapters 2 and 3

As the title of each letter in Chapter 2, I shall include three elements: (1) the Hebrew name as known from Jewish tradition (used simply because it is the most familiar to those interested in West Semitic epigraphy), supplemented by the Ethiopic or Arabic names where Hebrew tradition transmits no name due to the merging of consonants; (2) a reconstruction of the vocalization(s) of the name from which all traditions derive (followed by a hyphen to indicate the original presence of case endings, now largely lost); and (3) a translation of the acrophone. Where the earliest letter forms supply more information, I shall add that to the translation in parentheses (e.g., *ʔālep*, \**ʔalp-*, “(Profiled Head of an) Ox”). When there are close but no exact cognates to a letter name, I shall place an asterisk before the translation (e.g., *ḥarm*, \**ḥarm-*, \**“Wick”*). Where there are no certain cognates to an acrophone, but the identity of its letter is secure, I shall reconstruct the translation in square brackets (e.g., *wāw*, \**waw-*, [*“Mace”*]).

In two instances I shall use reconstructed acrophones as the usual terms: \**dag-*, to differentiate it from forms of *dālet*; and \**θann-*, simply to make clear which consonant was originally being named.

Discussion of a letter’s name will follow an analysis of its Egyptian antecedent(s) and Proto-Canaanite forms and stances.

### VII. The Two Orders of the Letters

Two orders to the letters can now be shown to have been in use during the second millennium B.C. along the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean.

One order, whose initial letters are *ḥlh*, has surfaced just in the last

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two decades, from only two sites. Lundin (1987: 243-52) recognized the *h̄lh* order on a very damaged alphabetic cuneiform tablet from Beth Shemesh in Palestine that is usually dated to the thirteenth century B.C. Sass's fresh collation (1992) of this tablet showed that only six of its first eight letters are clear, *h̄lhmqwšr*, only five or six other letters extant, and there was room on this axe-shaped tablet to reconstruct only twenty-one to twenty-four letters *in toto*. Bordreuil and Pardee (1995) then published a better-preserved but still difficult tablet from Ugarit with a similar but not identical order of the letters. At least four of the twenty-seven cuneiform letters on the *recto* this tablet were difficult enough to understand to warrant only question marks in the transliteration of the *editio princeps* (Bordreuil and Pardee 1995: 857; cf. the seven in Bordreuil 2000: 153).<sup>51</sup> While these two finds are significant in demonstrating that the *h̄lh* order (or something like it), later used in some Epigraphic South Arabian and Ethiopic traditions (cf. Macdonald 1992: 420; Dillmann 1857: Taf. 1), was also employed among West Semites in the second millennium B.C. (see, in particular, Röllig 1998: 87-88), the importance of these one and a third tablets can be overstated.<sup>52</sup>

In all but one instance, I shall follow the other, much better attested order of the complete West Semitic consonantal alphabet as witnessed by fourteen abecedaries from Ugarit (see especially Albright 1950a; 1950b; Puech 1983: 570; Ryckmans 1987: 325; Naveh 1987; Bordreuil and Pardee 1995: 855, n. 1; Hallo 1996: 36; Bordreuil 2000: 147-48, esp. n. 4; photos: 160, fig. 3, pls. 26a, b; Tropper 2003: 176). I shall move *z* from its position after *n* in the standard Ugaritic order and treat it with *š* since I cannot tell whether one or two Proto-Canaanite consonants with one or two Egyptian prototypes is/are being reflected. After taking into account subsequent mergings, this order is that known, with few exceptions, from an Old Canaanite abecedarium dating to the twelfth

<sup>51</sup> Bordreuil and Pardee (1995: 857) also noted another intriguing aspect about four other letters (*z*, *š*, *s*, *š*), a quarter turn rotation from their normal stances in Ugaritic script.

<sup>52</sup> See the balanced treatment of these new finds by Smith (2001: 193-94, 225-26, nn. 5-14), with bibliography, to which one might add Healey (1990: 218-20), Demsky (1997: 363), Röllig (1998: 87-88), Parkinson (1999: 184), Bordreuil (2000: 152-57; 163, fig. 7), Tropper (2003: 176), Hallo (2004: 290-92), Sanders (2004: 32, with further references in nn. 14, 15), and Sass (2005: 110, n. 172, 122-23). I am grateful to Prof. Smith for many of these references.

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century B.C. and West Semitic sources of the first millennium B.C.<sup>53</sup> Since some readers may find this ancient arrangement to be inconveniently novel, I shall try to alleviate that burden by giving this order as a footer throughout Chapter 2. The alphabetic order here followed is: *ʾ b g h d h w z h ʔ y k š l m ð n s ʿ p š/z q r θ ġ t*.

<sup>53</sup> As difficult as it is, the fifth line of the ʿIzbet Šarṭah Ostrakon remains the earliest and most complete example of an abecedarium in the script tradition under examination in this study (see, among others, Kochavi 1977; Demsky 1977; 1997: 363; Cross 1980: 9-15; 2003: 220-227; Sass 1988: 65-69; Hallo 1996: 36; Pardee 1997a: 353; and some new proposals for reading that line in Chapter 2 below). Important, diverse witnesses to this order in the first millennium B.C. include: three partial abecedaries in Old Hebrew script from Kuntillet ʿAjrud (Meshel 1978); six Ammonite “alphabet seals,” containing up to half the letters (Aufrecht 1989: nos. 22, 24, 82, 93, 114, 115); an abecedarium in Phoenician script from Salamis dated to the seventh century B.C. (most recently, see Nebe [2000: 19]); abecedaries in Aramaic script on ostraca from Elephantine dating to the fifth century B.C. (Porten 2000: 245); two listings in order on a Late Babylonian school tablet, probably reflecting Aramaic tradition (Finkel 1998; Cross and Huehnergard 2003; Hallo 2004: 294-95); and the fourteen or fifteen alphabetic acrostic poems in the Bible (Psalms 9-10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145; Prov 31:10-31; Lamentations 1, 2, 3, 4; and to *kāp* in Nahum 1), the Hebrew text of Sir 51:13-30 plus others from Qumran (most conveniently, see Soll [1992] and Nebe [2000]), one an “elementary” (Puech 2000: 181; color photo: pl. 30). One eagerly awaits the full publication of a complete abecedarium found by Prof. Ron E. Tappy at Tel Zayit and initially assigned to the tenth century B.C. (Sostek 2005). Also see Macdonald (1992: 420) for a South Saffaitic abecedarium in the *ʾbg* order and Hallo (2004: 301-2) for other recent South Semitic finds.

## CHAPTER 2

# A Reconstruction of the Proto-Canaanite Alphabet

## I. ʾālep, \*ʾalp-, “(Profiled Head of an) Ox”

### A. Egyptian Antecedents of ʾālep

The letter ʾālep derives from the Egyptian hieroglyph F1, “head of ox.”<sup>1</sup>

Hieroglyphic forms of F1 vary in terms of complexity, the flat or pointed appearance of their snouts, the positions of their axes, and their stances. Möller (I, 154) selected a most complex Third Dynasty profiled “head of ox,” one with large horns, an outlined ear, an indented jaw, a muzzle with both a pointed nose and flat snout, a subtle marking for the mouth, and an eye topped by an eyebrow. This Early Dynastic Period ox-head rests on a diagonal axis. An ox-head from a Middle Kingdom stele (Stewart 1979: pl. 26: 1) is similar but manifests only the details of an ear and eye and has a very flat snout. A rightward facing F1 from Sinai 53, an inscription from Serabit el-Khadim dating to the Twelfth Dynasty (Ullman 1927: 314, fig. 2; photo: Valbelle and Bonnet 1996: 122, fig. 145), exemplifies a form with a snub snout and no details except an outlined ear. A single line depicts that organ in a low relief form of F1 on Sinai 421, the Catholic University of America’s McMahon Stele, also from Serabit, probably from the

<sup>1</sup> Gardiner (1916: 14) credited Lenormant (de Rougé 1874) for this derivation, which is most recently followed by Darnell et al. (2005: 81, 85) for the ʾāleps from Wadi el-Ḥol.

Alphabet: ʾ b g ḥ d h w z ḥ ṭ y k š l m ð n s ʿ p š/z q r θ ḡ t

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Middle Kingdom (drawn from Reich 1933: pl. 16). A New Kingdom painted version of F1 from the Valley of the Queens (drawn from Leibovitch 1940: pl. 16) has a very pointed snout and includes only the detail of an eye, rendered by a line.<sup>2</sup> The least complex form of this hieroglyph shows only the outline, as illustrated by another Twelfth Dynasty ox-head that faces left from Sinai 89 (Ullman 1927: 314, fig. 2; asterisked below as there is, to my knowledge, no supporting photograph).<sup>3</sup> Some writings of this sign rest on a diagonal axis (Möller I, 154; Stewart 1979: pl. 26.1; Ullman 1927: 314, fig. 2), while others have their base lines arranged fairly horizontally (Sinai 421; Valley of the Queens), a position common in idealized fonts of F1 (Gardiner 1957: 461; Hannig 1995: 1043; *Hieroglyphica* 2000: sign list). The hieroglyphic forms of this very common sign habitually show closure at the top of their heads.

Žába (1974: 94) recorded an atypical, linear form of F1 in an early Middle Kingdom rock inscription from Nubia. This sign shows a reduction to three strokes: two continuous ones for the combined horn and facial lines, with a small opening at the snout; and a single horizontal line for the top of the head and ear (drawn from Žába 1974: figs. 135, 136; reproduced in Section C, fig. 2.3 below). The only detail inside this minimalistic form is a dot depicting the eye. The linguistic context in which this rare linear form occurs is obscure (Žába 1974: 94).

Rarely attested hieratic writings of F1 manifest openings in different parts of their forms. Goedicke (1988: 10a) recorded only three hieratic writings from the Fifth to Twelfth Dynasties: the earliest occurrence shows an eye and ear, but an opening between its head and shallow horns; an intermediate form has an open head; and an early Middle Kingdom writing manifests shallow horns, an eye, and an ear but, though damaged at the bottom, appears to have been left open at its muzzle. Möller (I, 154) recorded one early Eighteenth Dynasty attestation, one with a dotted eye and an opening at the upper left.

<sup>2</sup> For two semi-cursive hieroglyphic writings, unfortunately damaged, see Gardiner (1955: pl. 15, prescription 13, line 11 [with an ear and a flat snout]; pl. 16, prescription 17, line 32 [with an ear, an eye, and a more pointed snout]).

<sup>3</sup> See Habachi (1987: 285, fig. 8; Elephantine, Thirteenth Dynasty inscription) for another possible example of this simplest Egyptian form, which is relatively rare. Helck (1995: 1) drew the same form with a dotted eye.

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Fig. 2.1  
ʾāleps Following Varieties of Hieroglyphic F1

Hieroglyph F1 “head of ox” Möller I, 154 NP Dyn. 3	Same, <sup>4</sup> Stewart 1979: pl. 26.1 NP MK	Same, Ullman 1927: fig. 2 Sinai 53 Serabiṭ Dyn. 12	Same, Sinai 421 Serabiṭ MK	Same, Valley of the Queens NK	Same, Ullman 1927: fig. 2 Sinai 89 Serabiṭ Dyn. 12
	Sinai 377 v	Sinai 362 v	Sinai 365a v	Sinai 350 v	Sinai 378 v

Fig. 2.2  
ʾāleps Showing Cursive Openings

Hieratic F1, “head of an ox” Goedicke 1988: 10a Dy. 5-12	Same, Möller I, 154 Early Dyn. 18
Sinai 358 v	Sinai 345 l-r
Wadi el-Hol 1.12 r-l	Wadi el-Hol 2.11 v

<sup>4</sup> The abbreviation “same” will be employed to refer to information about a sign (or letter) already listed in a column to its left (here: Hieroglyph F1, “head of ox”).

32 · *Origins of the West Semitic Alphabet**B. Proto-Canaanite Forms of ʾālep*

Proto-Canaanite ʾālep continues the formal varieties of hieroglyphic F1. The complex profile of a bull's head on Sinai 377, which manifests large horns, an ear, an eye, and an indented jaw is most comparable to an ornate form of F1, as exemplified from a Third Dynasty writing above (Möller I, 154). It differs only slightly from a Middle Kingdom example selected from Stewart (1979: pl. 26.1) in its dotted versus outlined eye and pointed versus flat snout. Following Ullman (1927: 313, n. 2), the alphabetic ox-head on Sinai 362 is very similar to a Twelfth Dynasty form of F1 from Sinai 53, especially in their inclusion of outlined ears. The internally carved ʾālep from Sinai 365a represents the detail of an ear by a narrow line, as does the hieroglyphic F1 in sunk relief from Sinai 421. The only organ included in the damaged pictographic ox-head from Sinai 350 is an eye, rendered by a short line. That corresponds to the representation of the eye on a painted version of F1 from the Valley of the Queens. The ʾālep of Sinai 378 is similar to that New Kingdom form in their horizontally-arranged baselines. The simple bovine profile from Sinai 349 matches the least ornate type of F1 selected from Sinai 89 by Ullman (1927: 314, fig. 2; no photograph). One can easily see how an early form such as Möller's Third Dynasty autograph of F1 engendered profiles with blunt, sometimes flat snouts as well as ones with more pointed noses in both its direct Egyptian descendants and in the variety of alphabetic forms adopted by West Semites.<sup>5</sup>

Four early alphabetic writings of this letter show openings in their forms. Sass (1988: 108) perceptively noted that several of the ʾāleps from the Sinai have openings between their horns. The clearest of these is the ʾālep from Sinai 358, whose bottom is no longer extant. Wadi el-Ḥol 1.12 and 2.11 (Darnell et al. 2005: figs. 2, 16) exhibit this same opening. Open-headed forms also appear in two of the four hieratic forms of F1 attested from the Fifth to early Eighteenth Dynasties (Goedicke 1988: 10a; Möller I, 154). But apart from that single feature, both of the ox-heads from Wadi el-Ḥol more closely resemble hieroglyphic forms of F1, with their details of long horns, mouths, and eyes. The latter are represented in different fashions: 1.12 shows an elliptical, ʿayin-shaped eye, cruder but of the same essential form as seen in the Middle Kingdom hieroglyphic F1 drawn by Stewart (1979: pl. 26.1); 2.11 has a square

<sup>5</sup> Contrast Sass (1988: 109) who viewed the pointed muzzle as a new feature.

eye, a Semitic innovation.<sup>6</sup> The lines for the mouth on both letters appear to be slight exaggerations of that feature on an antecedent hieroglyph (e.g., Möller’s autograph). The ʾālep on Sinai 345 is closed at the top, but probably was originally left open at the bottom left (photos: Lemaire 2000: fig. 3a, pl. 24b). This appears to mirror the slight opening on a Twelfth Dynasty hieratic F1 which Goedicke recorded (1988: 10a). Since each of these forms have suffered some damage in that bottom area, the degree and significance of those openings remains uncertain. While the eyes of the ʾālep on Sinai 345 and of that hieratic F1 are both represented by dots, the prominent horns on this letter seem much more at home in the hieroglyphic sequence. Instead of deriving these four occurrences of ʾālep from the hieratic sequence of Egyptian writing, perhaps one is seeing two manifestations of a single cursive feature—openings at the top or bottom—transferred to essentially hieroglyphic forms (as the non-hieratic leftward facing stances of three of these letters would seem to indicate).

The overlap of hieroglyphic and Proto-Canaanite forms of bulls’ heads is hardly co-incidental, both showing profiles facing in either direction, with or without the details of eyes, ears, mouths, with either blunt or pointed snouts, most being closed at the top or snout, some remaining open (cf. Sass 1988: 108). They provide one anchor for the consonantal alphabet’s graphic origin in Egyptian writing. The only Semitic innovations detected in these typologically early forms of ʾālep are the square eye in one bull’s head from Wadi el-Ḥol and an elongation in the mouth-lines in both of the attestations of this letter from that site.

### C. *The Early Development of Linear Forms of ʾālep*

Linear A-forms of ʾālep, in various stances, are also attested early in alphabetic writing.<sup>7</sup> The etiology of these forms is debatable. They could continue the simplest Egyptian form of F1 executed with three

<sup>6</sup> This contrast plus the slightly differing formation of the profiles of these ʾāleps are among the elements suggesting that different individuals wrote these two inscriptions (albeit from the same “school” of handwriting [cf. Wimmer and Wimmer-Dweikat 2001: 108, n. 8]).

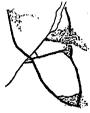
<sup>7</sup> This paragraph treats the beginning of linear forms with pointed ends. See especially Cross (1984: fig. 3; 2003: 295, fig. 46.4) on the development of a blunt- or square-“snouted” biform of this letter in Old Canaanite scripts (the progenitors for which in Egyptian writing are easily obtained).

Alphabet: ʾ b g ḥ d h w z ḥ t y k š l m ð n s ʿ p š/z q r θ ḡ t

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Fig. 2.3: The Development of Early Linear Forms of ʾālep

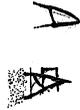
Hieroglyph F1, “head of ox”  
 from Žába 1974: figs. 135, 136  
 Nubia  
 early MK



Sinai  
 359  
 v



Lahun  
 modified  
 from Petrie  
 1890:  
 pl. 27.85  
 h



Shechem  
 ʾi,  
 ʾii,  
 v?



Qubur  
 Walaydah  
 ʾi, ʾii  
 l-r



Sinai  
 375c  
 v

strokes, two for combined horn-head lines and one for a head-ear line, such as is found in one early Middle Kingdom inscription from Nubia (drawn from Žába 1974: figs. 135, 136). But since that form is atypical for this sign and is attested only once in an obscure context (Žába 1974: 94), it seems more likely that the A-form represents an inner-alphabetic development (perhaps an instance of parallel reductions of the same grapheme in the two scripts). The pictographic ʾālep from Sinai 359, although damaged at its tip, clearly has a pointed snout (against Sass 1988: fig. 65), and even with a vestigial ear marking, may serve as the closest formal precursor to such an evolved form. The linear ʾālep on the heddle jack from Lahun exhibits combined horn-facial lines and a merged head-ear line made with continuous strokes (modifying Petrie’s drawing [1890: pl. 27.85] to show a slight extension for the ear and following the stance for this letter most recently advocated in Cartwright, Granger-Taylor, and Quirke [1998: 92]—see discussion of how to hold this object in Appendix 1). Two sideways A-forms of ʾālep are also attested on the front of the Shechem Plaque.<sup>8</sup> The first writing,

<sup>8</sup> Reading with Böhl (1938); see the collation of readings by Wimmer (2001: 21), to

Alphabet: ʾ b g ḥ d h w z ḥ ṭ y k š l m ḏ n s ʿ p š/z q r θ ḡ t

ʾālep, \*ʾalp- · 35

ʾi,<sup>9</sup> shows its origins in the older pictographic ʾālep in two subtle ways: the slight curvature of its upper line and the formation of the triangular head portion are incised more heavily and probably independent of the vestigial horn lines on the left (most apparent when one draws the bottom line). The second occurrence of that letter on that plaque, ʾii, apparently an overwriting of another letter and extending beyond the marginal lines) exhibits the further development of the horn and facial lines being made with one stroke. The line marking the former top of the head is set in the middle of the figure in both of those forms (as in the ʾālep from Sinai 359). From a much later text, ʾi on the Qubur Walaydah Bowl manifests an archaic vestige in its curved right side. But ʾii has a straight A-form. The ʾālep on the small plaque numbered Sinai 375c from Serabiṭ exemplifies a further development: the extension of the line formerly demarking the top of the head well beyond the top and bottom strokes.

Two of these developments are likely chronologically significant (contrast Sass 1988: 109). The basic A-shape (point on the bottom) likely occurred no later than ca. 1700 B.C., the latest date for the Lahun Heddle Jack (following Cartwright, Granger-Taylor, Quirke 1998: 92).<sup>10</sup> Use of this linear form likely overlapped with pictographic forms of ʾālep in early alphabetic scripts, a reasonable postulation given usage of both a linear form of the parent sign, F1, early in the Middle Kingdom (Žába 1974: 94, figs. 135, 136), as well as pictographic forms of that hieroglyph during that period (e.g., Stewart 1979: pl. 26.1; Ullman 1927: fig. 2). The further development of extended sidebars witnessed on the ʾālep of Sinai 375c means that that plaque cannot be dated to Egypt's Middle Kingdom or Palestine's Middle Bronze Age. That form (from a well-known letter the attestations for which are only partially represented above) must have been written in Egypt's New Kingdom or the Late Bronze Age, quite likely late in either of those ways of marking historical or archeological periods (Hamilton 2002: 40, n. 5). Both of these developments also link together geographically disparate

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which one might add Colless (1991: 33). They are not *dālets*—a guess tentatively offered by Sass (1988: 109-10).

<sup>9</sup> I shall use the abbreviations of transliterations plus Roman numerals to refer to specific instances of letters from the same text whose forms differ (not necessarily numbered according to the order that they occur on that inscription).

<sup>10</sup> See the discussion in “Chronological Concerns,” Chapter 3.

Alphabet: ʾ b g ḥ d h w z ḥ t y k š l m ð n s ʿ p š/z q r θ g t

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parts of the Proto- and Old Canaanite script tradition: Lahun in Egypt; Shechem and Qubur Walaydah in Palestine; Sinai 375c from Serabiṭ el-Khadim.

#### *D. Stances of Early and Developed ʾālep*

Both hieroglyphic and alphabetic ox-heads possess two sets of slightly different mirror-image stances. Some models of F1 rest on a diagonal axis and point southwest (e.g., Sinai 89) or southeast (e.g., Möller's Third Dynasty hieroglyph; Stewart's Middle Kingdom form; Sinai 53). The ʾāleps from Sinai 365a and 345 similarly point southeast. Those from Sinai 377, 362, 350, 349, 358, plus Wadi el-Ḥol Texts 1 and 2 face southwest. The other set of hieroglyphs have more a due east position (e.g., Sinai 421, a painted F1 from the Valley of the Queens) or west (e.g., see Gardiner's font [1957: 461]). The ʾālep of Sinai 378 faces westward.

While it did not seem to matter whether pictographic ʾāleps face right or left on vertical columns,<sup>11</sup> those written on horizontal lines appear to point away from the beginning of the line, the opposite usage of most orientations of the parent sign. The ʾāleps on Sinai 345 and 357 face rightward on horizontal lines that read from left to right. Those from Wadi el-Ḥol Text 1 and Sinai 349 face left on horizontal lines that were written from right to left (Darnell et al. 2005: 3, 9; Albright 1966: 18-19).<sup>12</sup>

The linear A-forms of ʾālep exhibit both received and rotated stances.<sup>13</sup> The ʾāleps on the Shechem Plaque and Sinai 375c likely illustrate received stances, pointing due east and west on inscriptions that are most likely read as vertical columns. The Qubur Walaydah ʾāleps point to the northwest, witnessing a ninety-degree rotation from an originally southeast orientation. The latter clearly point towards the beginning of the horizontal line on which they occur (following Cross's decipherment [1980: 2-3; 2003: 214]).

<sup>11</sup> F1 generally pointed towards the beginning of the inscription on vertical columns (but see Gardiner 1955: pls. 15, 21 for exceptions in late Middle Kingdom semi-cursive texts).

<sup>12</sup> The bull's head on Sinai 380 faces right on a line whose direction is unknown (Sass 1980: figs. 103, 105).

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 1 for a discussion of how to hold the Lahun Heddle Jack, giving its A-form either a received stance, pointing to the southwest, or a developed one, pointing to the northeast.

Alphabet: ʾ b g ḥ d h w z ḥ ṭ y k š l m ḏ n s ʿ p š/z q r θ ḡ t

*E. Letter Name*

The first letter's name was \*ʾalp-, "ox" or "bull" (similarly Nöldeke 1904: 134).<sup>14</sup> The choice between these two translations is a completely arbitrary one, as with this acrophone's cognate nouns, Akkadian *alpu(m)*, Ugaritic ʾalp, and Hebrew ʾālāpīm (attested only in the plural in reference to cattle [BDB 48]). Ethiopic ʾalf transmits the oldest, monosyllabic vocalization of this acrophone (Nöldeke 1904: 130). This name was abbreviated and transcribed as *a* in the syllabic cuneiform list from Ugarit (Cross and Lambdin 1960: 23-25; Cross 2003: 314-15) and in the Late Babylonian school tablet (Cross and Huehnergard 2003: 223, 225).<sup>15</sup> Jewish Aramaic calls this letter ʾalpāʾ. More developed, disyllabic vocalizations are transmitted in Arabic *alif* and Syriac ʾālap. Samaritan Hebrew ʾalap is an Aramaicism that stands closer to the Syriac form than Judean/Jewish Hebrew vocalizations (so Cross orally). While the transcription by LXX and Eusebius, *alph*, is linguistically older than the vocalization in the Mishnah, ʾālep, the latter is itself an archaism that is identical to the Masoretic pausal form of the noun meaning "thousand" (instead of its regular form, ʾelep [BDB, 48]).<sup>16</sup> Retaining the letter name *alpha*, the Greeks revalued this

<sup>14</sup> For some indications of the importance of cattle in Middle Bronze Age culture in Palestine, see the summaries of the bone evidence by Hesse and Wapnish (2002: 481-82), a red-burnished vessel in the shape of a bull from one of the public buildings assigned to MBIB-C at Tell en-Nagila (Amiran and Eitan 1965: 118, fig. 9, 121), bulls' heads applied to ceramics found in a cultic context at Tel Haror (Oren 1992: 989), a small figurine of a calf or young bull in bronze with remnants of silver leaf discovered with a model shrine in a small MBII temple situated outside the gates of Ashkelon (most recently, see Caubet 2002: 215, fig. 6.2; Borowski 2002: 408), and literarily in the Tale of Sinuhe, as noted especially by Redford (1992: 86). See also Redford (1992: 77) for an artistic and incomplete Egyptian epigraphic discovery at Meir dating to the nineteenth century B.C. with the caption "cattle of the Asiatics." For their importance among Egyptians themselves, most recently see Brewer (2002: 434-38, 443-46), who noted evidence for the driving of large herds to graze in the less populated areas of the Delta (2002: 444), and Germond and Livet (2001: 55, 150), who illustrated that importance through reference to clay models of cows being placed with the dead as a characteristic feature of Middle Kingdom burials (2001: 55, fig. 55).

<sup>15</sup> The former also lists ʾi and ʾu after *tāw* (Cross and Huehnergard 2003: 224), as do abecedaries from that site (see especially Naveh [1987b: 30] on that ordering).

<sup>16</sup> The unexpected initial vowel of *il-pi* in the Aramaic name transliterated into cuneiform on a tablet dated to the Persian Period recently published by Jursa (2005) may stand intermediate between those forms if it stands for ʾelpil. The alternate, postulating an *i*-theme \*ʾilp-, as with other letter names, seems less likely given this solitary occurrence.

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Semitic consonant as the vowel *a*. But the Phoenician meaning of this letter as “ox” (*bous*) is attested as late as Plutarch (*HALOT* 1: 1).

### *F. The Small Discrepancy between the Name and Images of ʾālep*

This letter’s name, \**alp-*, “ox,” and its pictograph, an ox-head do not correspond exactly. While it is easy to understand why the depiction of the ox-head, F1, was chosen over that of a complete bull, E1, from the Egyptian graphic inventory—the desire for the simpler sign—the existence of the full representation underlines this slight discrepancy. One could appeal to the principle of *pars pro toto*, that a part—the head—stood for the whole—a complete bull—but such a principle appears to have been operative at most rarely with other alphabetic graphic forms and their names.<sup>17</sup> On the contrary, there is sometimes more to a pictograph than its name would suggest (see, for example, *yôd* and *kāp* below). Such a *pars pro toto* usage is, however, attested in Egyptian writing, where F1, “head of ox,” replaces E1, “bull,” in sacrificial formulae (Gardiner 1957: 461; Hannig 1995: 1043). When the earliest alphabetic writers borrowed the grapheme F1, “head of ox,” they—and less likely a later generation—named it after E1, “bull,” following this usage of F1 in the parent system of writing (cf. Driver 1976: 130-31).<sup>18</sup>

## II. *bêt*, \**bêt-*, “House”

### *A. Egyptian Antecedents of bêt*

Forms of Proto-Canaanite *bêt* derive from at least two Egyptian signs: O1/O1B, “house,” and O4/O4B, “reed shelter in fields.”<sup>19</sup> I shall

<sup>17</sup> See, perhaps, *bêt* derived from O4 below and one possible understanding of a new grapheme in Wadi el-Hol Text 2 (see Appendix 1). The letter *dālet*, “door,” would appear to represent another such instance since its pictograph is one leaf of a pair of doors, yet the full complex would correspond with the dual in Biblical Hebrew, *dēlātayim*.

<sup>18</sup> The acrophones of the first and second letters are also found in names for aspects of alphabetic writing (e.g., the acrostics, \**allepbêtā* [Jastrow 1903: 73]) or the whole system (e.g., Greek *alphabētos*, Latin *alphabetum* [Lambdin 1962: 89]).

<sup>19</sup> Gardiner (1916: 6 and pl. 2) first associated O1 and (South Semitic) *bêt*, although he was at a loss to explain the hieroglyphic antecedent of squared forms of Sinaitic *bêt*, once evaluating them as forms foreign to Egyptian hieroglyphs (1916: 14) and another

bêt, \*bêt- · 39

treat these two prototypes and their alphabetic derivatives separately, bringing them together only when discussing their stances, without prejudice as to which of these signs might have been borrowed first.

*B. Egyptian Forms of O1/O4B, “House”*

Standard hieroglyphic forms of O1, which depicts a house in plan, vary according to the space available and the signs with which it is grouped (Fischer 1988: 4). It is usually a horizontally positioned rectangle whose baseline is open at the middle. Žába (1974: sign list) recorded a roughly executed writing of the standard form of this hieroglyph from early Twelfth Dynasty Nubia. A slightly squatter illustration of this plan of a house, seen from the bird’s eye perspective typical of many Egyptian forms, comes from an Eleventh Dynasty stele of unknown provenance (*HT* 5: pl. 1).

More cursive forms of this hieroglyph, “squarish” or rectangular forms that are open at one corner, also occur. Forms open at their bottom left baselines are termed O1B by *Hieroglyphica* (2000: sign list), the idealization of which is traced below.<sup>20</sup> Goyon (1957: opposite 82) also recorded mirror-images of that form of O1B that open at their bottom right baselines from a well-incised Twelfth Dynasty rock inscription at Wadi Ḥammamat. Variants from that same inscription, which Goyon (1957: opposite 82, 182) included among his list of *signes cursifs lapidaires* also show a shortened right side.

time comparing them to a different hieroglyph, O6, “rectangular enclosure seen in plan” (1916: pl. 2). The only possible Proto-Canaanite derivative of O6, from Sinai 365a, can be otherwise accounted for, as a derivative of a hieratic variant of O1 (cf. Sass 1988: III). Commonly attested square forms of *b* can also be traced to that cursive sequence and not O6 (contrast Puech 1983: 579, fig. 8). To Grimme (1929: script chart) should go credit for the realization that both South Semitic and most Proto-Canaanite *bêts* derive from O1. Sayce (1910: 217) first noticed the resemblance between O4 and Phoenician *bêt*, the Old Canaanite intermediary of which Cross later identified on the Lachish Boustrophedon Text. Cross (1984: 72; fig. 3; 2003: 294, fig. 46.4) accurately predicted the presence of early borrowings of O4, confirmed by the present writer at dissertation stage in the Sinaitic inscriptions (Hamilton 1985: 38-39) and by Darnell et al. (2005: 77) at Wadi el-Ḥol (cf. Sass 1988: III-12; Darnell 2003: 168). A third prototype for this letter also probably needs to be postulated, most likely O20, “shrine,” but the evidence is not yet compelling (see “Unclassified *bêts*” below).

<sup>20</sup> A Middle Kingdom stele of unknown provenance would appear to transmit such a form of O1B (*HT* 3: pl. 16), but when I examined the original in London the baseline appears to be closed (a hieratic form on an incised stele, common in this period).

Alphabet: ʾ b g ḥ d h w z ḥ ṯ y k š l m ð n s ʿ p š/z q r θ ḡ t

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Hieratic writings of O1 vary from the Twelfth to early Eighteenth Dynasties. Forms similar to cursive hieroglyphs opening at their bottom right are common (James 1962: pl. 14; Möller I, 340). The Hekanakhte papers from Deir el-Bahri (James 1962), now dated to early in the Twelfth Dynasty (Goedicke 1988: xxiii; Parkinson 1999: 88), witness some hieratic writings of O1 in which the baseline is virtually closed, thus forming a square (see two models below drawn from Hekanakhte VII, *recto*, 6, 7 [James 1962: pl. 14]). These square models can no longer be considered innovations of the Hyksos Period (so Möller 1909: 17). Hieratic forms that are completely open along the bottom, forming an upright three-sided square or rectangle, are also attested (Möller I, 340).<sup>21</sup> Upright rectangles, often with an upswing to the baselines and a “tick” off their right corners, occur as well. And, on occasion, hieratic forms of O1 that are shaped like carats also appear.

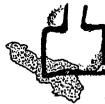
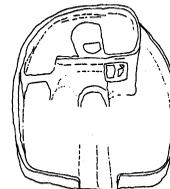
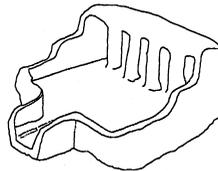
Fig. 2.4

Hieroglyph O1,  
“house”  
Žába 1974  
Lower Nubia  
Dyn. 12

Same,  
*HT* 5:  
pl. 1  
NP  
Dyn. 11

Outline of  
“soul house”  
from Petrie  
1907: pl. 10  
Dyn. 9-12

Outline of  
“soul house”  
from The  
British Museum  
Compass  
Dyn. 12



Sinai 359  
v

Sinai 346a  
v

<sup>21</sup> This form occurs on late Middle Kingdom papyri with semi-cursive hieroglyphs (e.g., Gardiner 1955: pl. 15, line 22) and on Sinai 165 at Serabit el-Khadim (personal examination; not accurately drawn in Gardiner, Peet, and Černý 1955: pl. 54).

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Fig. 2.5  
Hieroglyph O1B,  
from *Hieroglyphica*  
2000: sign list  
Idealization



Same,  
Goyon 1957: opposite 82, 182  
Wadi Hammamat  
Dyn. 12



Gezer  
v

Sinai 357  
Beit Arieh  
1978: fig. 6  
v

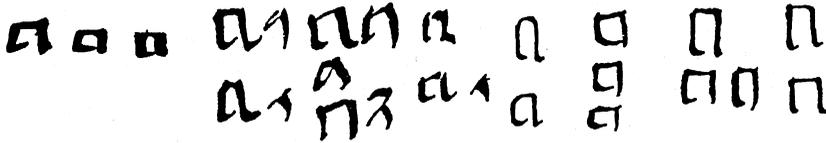


Sinai 352  
v

Sinai 357  
Beit Arieh  
1978: fig. 6  
l-r

Fig. 2.6  
Hieratic O1,  
“house”  
from James  
1962: pl. 14  
Deir el-Bahri  
Dyn. 12

Same,  
Möller I, 340  
Dyn. 12; 12/13; 13; Hyksos Period–early Dyn. 18



Sinai 346b  
bi  
v

Sinai 345  
l-r

Sinai 365a  
v

Epigraphic  
South Arabian  
*bêt*  
Jamme  
1955: 32  
v

Sinai 346b  
bii  
v

Sinai 349  
r-l

Sinai 362  
v

Same,  
rotated

Alphabet: ʾ b g h d h w z h t y k š l m ð n s ʿ p š/z q r θ g t

42 · *Origins of the West Semitic Alphabet**C. Proto-Canaanite Derivatives of O1/O1B*

The *bêts* of Sinai 359 and 346a originate in standard hieroglyphic forms of O1. Both the rectangular *bêt* from Sinai 359 and its antecedent hieroglyph, illustrated by Twelfth and Eleventh Dynasty writings above (Žába 1974; *HT* 5: pl. 1), open at the middle of their bases. The slightly more square looking plan of a house from Sinai 346a opens at the top, mirroring in an up-down fashion the standard hieroglyphic form.<sup>22</sup> Both of these letters have developed from their Egyptian prototypes through the addition of perpendicular lines to their openings. These extensions likely depict entranceways to the houses. This enhancement also occurs in multiple examples of clay models of Egyptian “soul houses” that are known from the First Intermediate Period to the Twelfth Dynasty (Petrie 1907: pls. 15-18; 25).<sup>23</sup> Such models of the houses of poor people were enclosed by walls and often have two stories. The outline of one with a pillared second story and an entranceway is drawn from Petrie (1907: pl. 25). Other “soul houses” contain no external entranceway but match the basic plan of the hieroglyph O1. A terracotta model of a house from the Twelfth Dynasty now in the British Museum (traced from <http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass>) shows food offerings for the poor in the afterlife in the lower courtyard (not represented above), a second courtyard on the upper left, and an opening in the middle of its baseline. I would suggest that some Semites modified the basic plan of O1 according to either this variation in models of “soul houses” or the actual pattern of the houses of poorer persons in Egypt. Thus while the addition of such pictographic entranceways is Semitic, its source likely stems from an Egyptian cultural context.

The *bêt* on the Gezer Sherd is comparable to a more cursive form of O1B in that both open at the bottom left. Two *bêts* from the vertical column of Sinai 357 likely derive from such a form as well, although the opening on the upper one is more precisely on the left side of its vertical and the lower one is slightly damaged in that corner (Beit Arieh 1978: fig. 6; Sass 1988: fig. 61). Mirror images of O1B often manifest a shortening of the right vertical in multiple attestations on a Twelfth

<sup>22</sup> This *bêt* was drawn from a digitized photo of the original glass negative taken closer to the time of the statue’s discovery, when this letter was in somewhat better condition than it is at present.

<sup>23</sup> I am grateful to Roberta Shaw, Assistant Curator, The Royal Ontario Museum for this reference.

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Dynasty mining inscription at Wadi Ḥammamat (Goyon 1957: opposite 82, 182). It is a matter of subjective judgment whether one should trace the *bêts* of Sinai 352 and the writing of that letter on the horizontal line of Sinai 357 (Beit Arieh 1978: fig. 6), which are open at the lower right hand corner, to such a semi-cursive hieroglyphic form or to nearly identical ones in the hieratic sequence. A very similar form from Sinai 346b (*bi*) is placed under a cursive writing (from James 1962: pl. 14, far left above) to illustrate this small interpretative difficulty.

All closed forms of *bêt* represent clear derivatives of hieratic forms of O1 attested as early as the Ḥeḳanakhthe papers from Deir el-Baḥri, dating to the early Twelfth Dynasty (traced from James 1962: pl. 14), as well as on a manuscript of the Second Intermediate Period (top line, third model from the right, Möller I, 340).<sup>24</sup> The two *bêts* of Sinai 345 illustrate this closed square model,<sup>25</sup> as does one writing of this frequently attested form from Sinai 349. The upright, closed rectangle shape of *bêt* on Sinai 365a stems from the hieratic series as well, as betrayed by the up-swing of its base line, although exact Egyptian correspondents are not attested until much later (Eighteenth Dynasty: Möller II, 340; Nineteenth Dynasty: Wimmer 1995: sign list). That letter is carved in sunk relief, an Egyptian hieroglyphic style (Davies 1954: 14; Malek 1999: 426), applied to a hieratic form.

The diamond-position of *bii* from Sinai 346b is not so odd when one considers the carat-shaped hieratic writings of O1 from the Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties (Möller I, 340). Yet the opening of this letter on the bottom of its right side is more comparable to semi-cursive hieroglyphic forms from Wadi Ḥammamat (Goyon 1957: opposite 82, 182) and provides another illustration of the small dilemma in tracing some early alphabetic forms of this letter to either the semi-cursive hieroglyphic or fully cursive hieratic sequences.

<sup>24</sup> I have in the past been overly influenced by Möller's insistence that this was an innovation of the Hyksos Period (1909: 17), and took closed square forms as an important chronological indicator of the date of writing of the Semitic Sinaitic inscriptions with this form. The publication of the Ḥeḳanakhthe papers negates that view, although neither James (1962: pal. 5) nor Goedicke (1988: 27a) included this precise form, important for early alphabetic research, in their sign lists. Given the attestation of such closed variants of hieratic O1, there is no need to posit a more radical etiology for them in hieratic forms of O4 (as do Darnell et al. [2005: 77]).

<sup>25</sup> Their form is not essentially rectangular (so Sass 1988: 111). The dot in the center of the *bêt* on the right side is modern, likely a drop of paint (Ullmann 1927: 313-15, n. 2), which showed no incision beneath it when I examined the original in London.

Alphabet: ʾ b g ḥ d h w z ḥ t y k š l m ð n s ʿ p š/z q r θ g t

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The origins of a rare three-sided box form of *bêt* quite likely, but not certainly stem from the hieratic sequence as well. This standard form of *b* in Epigraphic South Arabian scripts, in an upright posture, as exemplified by an earlier writing on a columnar text published by Jamme (1955: 32), match hieratic forms from the Twelfth/Thirteenth Dynasties closely (Möller I, 340).<sup>26</sup> But Proto- or Old Canaanite intermediate forms have been lacking. I would suggest that a three-sided box form on Sinai 362, following van den Branden's reading (1979: 219), provides just such an intermediary. Reversing a ninety-degree rotation, this letter matches upright hieratic rectangular forms (with no or little flourishes) of O1 known from the Old Kingdom onwards (not reproduced above; see Möller I and II, 340). The *bêt* on Sinai 362 is clear on the digitized photographs (cf. Sass 1988: figs. 71, 72) and placed under similar hieratic writings of the Second Intermediate Period for the reader's perusal. Two other early West Semitic three-sided box forms (on their sides) likely belong here as well, but have not been solicited as primary evidence because one is damaged and we possess no photograph of the original of the other, which is now lost.<sup>27</sup>

#### *D. Egyptian Forms of O4/O4B*

The hieroglyph O4 has the appearance of a minimal maze. What this sign depicts has been debated. Gardiner (1957: 493) termed it “reed shelter in fields” and thought it probably depicts a field house in plan. Fischer (1988: 11) called it a “courtyard” and similarly, Hannig (1995: 1068), *Hof*. Wilkinson (1992: 139) made a good case from Old Kingdom representations of the closely related signs O13 and O14 that “the walls and entrance gateway of some kind of enclosure are depicted in plan . . .” in forms of O4. Cognizant of this debate among Egyptologists regarding this sign's original identification, I shall tentatively abbreviate references to O4 as “enclosure.”

<sup>26</sup> Macdonald (1992: 419, ins. 01) recorded three-sided forms on their sides for Safaitic “square script” and Safaitic/Thamudic E as well as upright ones for Thamudic B, Dedanite, and Northern Minaic. See too Sass (1991: chart 1).

<sup>27</sup> Dijkstra (1990: 54) compared the three-sided form on the Lahun Heddle Jack with South Semitic forms of *bêt*—I think rightly—and invoked a comparison with a three-sided form from Lachish (1990: fig. 2), along with many extraneous elements. On the Lahun form, which is damaged on one side, see Appendix 1. On Lachish Sherd number 7, see Sass (1988: III, figs. 161, 162).

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Fig. 2.7  
 Hieroglyph O4,  
 “enclosure”  
*HT* 4: pl. 50  
 Deir el-Bahri  
 Late MK



Hieroglyph O4B, Same,  
 “enclosure”  
 Goyon 1957: 76  
*HT* 5: pl. 1  
 Wadi Hammamat  
 NP  
 Dyn. II



Lachish  
 Boustrophedon  
 Text



Grossman  
 Seal  
 v



Same,  
 rotated



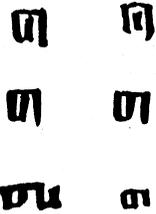
Wadi el-Hol  
 1.2  
 r-1



Same,  
 rotated

Fig. 2.8

Hieratic O4, “enclosure”  
 Goedicke 1988: 27b  
 Funerary Texts  
 Late I Int. Per.



Wadi el-Hol  
 1.2  
 rotated

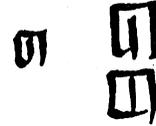
Same,  
 Möller I, 342  
 Hyksos Period to the beginning of Dyn. 18  
 Mathematical



Sinai  
 375  
 v



Westcar



Grossman  
 Seal  
 rotated

Hieroglyphic O4 is “one of the signs that is most apt to change its proportions, depending on the amount of space available” (Fischer

Alphabet: ʾ b g h d h w z h t y k š l m ð n s ˁ p š/z q r θ g t

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1988: 11). O4's outline consists of a horizontally positioned rectangle (sometimes long, other times shorter) that opens along half of its baseline. An internal vertical joins the end of its bottom horizontal but does not connect with the top horizontal. The base of O4 remains open on the left side, as exemplified by a late Middle Kingdom writing on a statuette from Deir el-Bahri below (*HT* 4: pl. 50).

The mirror image of that sign is termed O4B by *Hieroglyphica* (2000: sign list). A longer rectangular model is illustrated below from an Eleventh Dynasty stele of unrecorded provenance (*HT* 5: pl. 1). Another Eleventh Dynasty writing of O4B from Wadi Hammamat is also included to show a rare instance of this hieroglyph's middle vertical almost touching the top horizontal.<sup>28</sup>

Hieratic forms of O4 vary from the late First Intermediate Period through to the early Eighteenth Dynasty. Goedicke (1988: 27b) recorded at least four instances of hieratic writings from late First Intermediate Period funerary texts in which the middle vertical joins the top horizontal, a trait once thought to be an innovation of the Hyksos Period (Möller I, 342 above).<sup>29</sup> Apart from that closure in the middle and a rounding of some their corners, these look much like hieroglyphic forms of O4B that open at the bottom right. Some Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasty writings are very fluid, looped figures (not represented below—see Möller I, 342). During the Second Intermediate Period forms also appear that have a slight extension of the baseline on the right of the middle vertical (Mathematical, Golén. Papyri). All of the lines become connected to form a double box-shaped figure on another hieratic writing of O4 from that era (Westcar Papyrus).

*E. Proto- and Old Canaanite Derivatives of O4/O4B*

First correctly identified by Ussishkin (1983: 155), the *bêts* on the chronologically later Lachish Boustrophedon Text represent the typologically oldest derivatives of the hieroglyph O4 (Cross 1984: 72; 2003:

<sup>28</sup> For almost closed forms of O4B in semi-cursive hieroglyphic scripts of the late Middle Kingdom, see Gardiner (1955: pls. 18, line 22, and 20, line 104).

<sup>29</sup> For an unknown reason, Möller (I, 342) did not include this form among the hieratic writings of O4 from the Mathematical Papyrus (only in a footnote, p. 17). Since it is a potentially important one for early alphabetic studies, I have inserted it as the lowest form under "Mathematical."

Alphabet: <sup>ʾ</sup> b g h d h w z h t y k š l m ð n s <sup>c</sup> p š/z q r θ g t

*bêt, \*bêt- · 47*

294).<sup>30</sup> They correspond almost exactly to a more compact writing from Deir el-Baḥri dating to the Eleventh Dynasty (*HT* 4: pl. 50).

The *bêt* of the Grossman Seal derives either from a hieroglyphic form of O4, or, with its internal closure, from a similar hieratic form of that sign.<sup>31</sup> If it stems from a hieroglyphic prototype, this letter has developed internal closure in its middle. If from a hieratic precursor attested from the late First (Goedicke 1988: 27b) and the Second Intermediate Periods (Möller I, 342) that already manifested such closure, then this letter has developed a mirror-image stance. This seal's *bêt* has also developed through rotation.

Similarly, the *bêt* from Wadi el-Ḥol, the length of whose middle horizontal is debatable (cf. fig. 2.7 and Darnell et al. 2005: fig. 2, pl. 6.1), derives from one of two possible precursors. The first is a hieroglyphic O4B (Darnell et al. 2005: 77). As support, one may compare the writing of that sign from Wadi Ḥammamat with a minimal opening at its top center (Goyon 1957: 76). The second possibility, more likely in my view because of its slightly rounded corners, is a hieratic progenitor (late First and Second Intermediate Period attestations). This upright stance of this letter is, of course, a Semitic development.

The somewhat obscure *bêt* of Sinai 375, which appears to have the form of a double box that is open on the top right corner (Starr and Butin 1936: 33; Sass 1988: figs. 87, 88; cf. Leibovitch 1940: 106 and pl. 14 vs. fig. 15) almost certainly mirrors, in an up-down fashion, hieratic forms of O4 which have slight openings on the bottom right (see particularly Möller I, 342, *Mathematical Papyrus*, second and third writings from the top).

Like Semitic derivatives of O1, “house,” Proto- and Old Canaanite derivatives of O4/O4B, “enclosure” witness origins in both the hieroglyphic stream (Lachish Boustrophedon Text) and almost certainly the hieratic sequence (Sinai 375), with some forms (Wadi el-Ḥol 1.2, Grossman Seal) that could stem from either depending on how one accounts for small developments in curvature, closure or stance. This range of formal derivatives makes *bêt* another letter anchoring the graphic origin of the early alphabet in Egyptian scripts.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> A very similar form probably occurs on Sinai 374 and possibly one with a mirror-image stance and slight internal vertical on Sinai 353.

<sup>31</sup> A very similar, but damaged form and stance of *bêt* likely occurs on Sinai 364. Since this letter's lowest horizontal is very faint, others may disagree.

<sup>32</sup> Currently attested Old Canaanite scripts transmit continuations of O4, “enclosure,” and very rarely O1, “house” (Cross 1984: 72; 2003: 294). Contrast Parkinson's

Alphabet: ʾ b g ḥ d h w z ḥ t y k š l m ð n s ʿ p š/z q r θ ġ t

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F. *Unclassified bêt*

Fig. 2.9  
 Hieroglyph O20, “shrine”  
*HT* I: pl. 52  
 Thebes?  
 Dyn. II



Sinai	Sinai	Sinai	cf. Sinai	Sinai
374	380	367	359	361
v	Sass	<i>bêt</i> ,	<i>bêt</i>	v
	1978:	<i>‘ayin, bêt?</i>		
	fig. 10	v		
	h			

There remain four *bêt*s, from Sinai 374, 380, 367, and 361 that do not descend from variants of the Egyptian signs O1 or O4.

The faintly preserved *bêt* of Sinai 374, whose reading in *b<sup>c</sup>lt* is secure (see Sass 1988: 12, n. 8), appears to have a more complex form than the standard square as depicted by Albright (1966: fig. 8; Sass 1988: fig. 83). Two extensions of the side lines at the bottom and a small upturning curve are clear on a recent digitized photograph of the original glass negative of this inscription. The complete figure looks like an up-down mirror image of the hieroglyph O20, “shrine” (Gardiner 1957: 495) in that sign’s simplest form, as exemplified from an Eleventh Dynasty stele, questionably from Thebes (*HT* I: pl. 52).

A previously unidentified letter on Sinai 380 (Sass 1978: fig. 10; 1988:

modification (1999: 183, fig. 6) of Trigger’s stemmata (1998: 58, fig. 1) to include *bêt* as being only indirectly influenced by the sign O1, with no notation that most later forms of that letter derive from O4. See above for the continuation of one hieratic form in South Semitic scripts and possibly on one sherd from Lachish. Lemaire (2000: 109, Table 2) confused the derivational path in the opposite way by comparing a form of O4 with a hypothetical Semitic form of O1.

*bêt, \*bêt- · 49*

fig. 103) has a similar but rotated form, with a rounded end and at least an internal T-shaped formation. Such would be close to the internal configuration usually seen within fonts of O20, “shrine” (see Gardiner 1957: 495; Hannig 1995: 1069; *Hieroglyphica* 2000: sign list). If Sass’s perception that there are no extensions of the now horizontal top and bottom lines beside the dome is correct, such a lack sometimes occurs in much later representations of this sign as well (Wilkinson 1992: 142, fig. 4; Nineteenth Dynasty). Traces of an extension on the top right (see Sass 1978: pl. 51.2; 1988: fig. 104 is illegible), however, are suggestive of a more standard form of that sign.

The *bêt* of Sinai 367, reading with Colless (1991: 26), is most easily understood as a hybrid of such a domed figure and a derivative of hieroglyphic O1 with an added entranceway, as attested clearly on Sinai 359. The reading of the former is secure as a *bêt* (see a new linguistic decipherment below under *dālet*). The two spots within it are simply damage marks (not eyes, leading to an extremely difficult if not impossible identification of this letter as a *rêš*, with an otherwise unprecedented derivation from a hieroglyph depicting a frontal view of a head, against, for instance, Sass [1988: 131]). There is the distinct possibility that this hybrid form was viewed as an unsuccessful writing soon after it was written. Photographs (Sass 1988: fig. 82) appear to show a three-sided, open box figure to the right of the next letter, *ʿayin*. Such a form, now postulated as one of the shapes of *bêt* derived from hieratic O1 (see above), could represent a correction of the ill-executed hybrid in the main column.

One of the *bêts* on Sinai 361 manifests a slightly pointed top and at least a T-form within it (so Albright 1966: fig. 8; see Sass 1988: fig. 70). The digitized photo shows a more complex internal configuration, the etiology of which is unknown.

There are thus four writings of *bêt*—each difficult in its own way—that suggest that forms of O20, “shrine,” were also employed by West Semitic writers at Serabiṭ. One awaits clearer evidence before indentifying that sign as a source for a letter whose other Egyptian prototypes are certain (cf. Darnell et al. 2005: 77).

*G. Stances of Proto- and Old Canaanite bêt*

The *bêt* on Sinai 359 continues the stance of hieroglyphic O1 on a vertical column, while that on 346a, on a line that reads from left to

Alphabet: ʾ b g ḥ d h w z ḥ ṭ y k š l m ð n s ʿ p ṣ/ẓ q r θ ḡ t

*50 · Origins of the West Semitic Alphabet*

right, is an up-down mirror image of its hieroglyphic antecedent. Although such a stance could have come about to differentiate this sort of *bêt* with extensions depicting an entrance way from otherwise formally similar writings of *rêš* (which occurs on the same block statue), it may be that this Semitic writer was applying a rarer principle used in the Egyptian orientation of signs, turning this letter towards the representation of a deity on the front of a portable object (Fischer 1976: 17). This *bêt* opens towards the head of the statue, which likely represents an image of the goddess Baalat.

The *bêts* on the vertical columns of the Gezer Sherd and Sinai 357 open at or near their bottom left corners. The *bêts* from Sinai 352 plus 346a, *bi* and *bii*, open at the bottom right, also on vertical columns. Square forms of *bêt* deriving from hieratic O1 occur on both vertical columns (see Sinai 351, Appendix 1; Sass 1988: fig. 38) and horizontal lines (e.g., Sinai 345, 349). The rectangular form found on Sinai 365a is written on a vertical column of letters.

The *bêts* on the Old Canaanite Lachish Boustrophedon Text retain the original stance of their hieroglyphic precursor, O4, opening on the left on two lines that read in both directions (Cross 1984; 2003: 293-96). Wadi el-Hol 1.2 and the *bêt* of the Grossman Seal both show development in their stances through quarter turn rotations from those of their Egyptian horizontal precursors. Since the former occurs on a horizontal line and the latter on a vertical column, an explanation of these rotations in order to use space economically seems unlikely for this letter. The *bêt* on that seal also exhibits sideways mirroring if it comes from the hieratic sequence of O4. The double-box form of *bêt* on Sinai 375 retains the horizontal posture of its hieratic antecedent on a column of letters.

Changes in the stances of four unclassified *bêts* from Sinai 374, 380, 367, and 361 cannot be charted without more certain knowledge of their prototype.

### *H. Letter Name*

The name of the second letter of the alphabet originates in the common Semitic noun *\*bayt-*, “house.” The vocalization of this acrophone in all languages derives from a single form in which the *ay*-diphthong contracted to *ê* (Nöldeke 1904: 134): Ethiopic *bēt*; Greek *bēta*;

Alphabet: *ʾ b g h d h w z h t y k š l m ð n s ʿ p š/z q r θ g t*

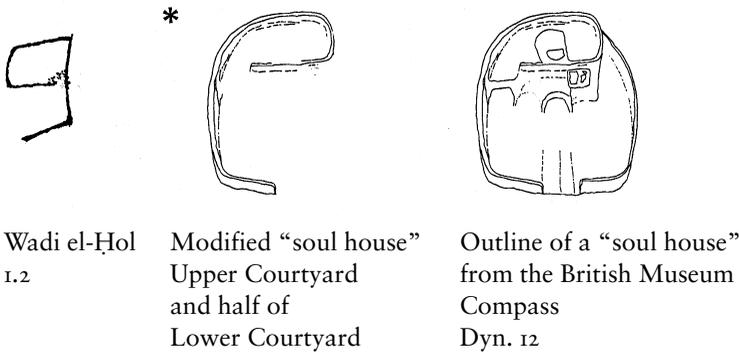
*bêt, \*bêt- · 51*

Hebrew in Mishnaic sources *bêt*; LXX and Eusebius *bēth*; Samaritan Hebrew *bît* (*î* represents a regular Samaritan reflex of Judean/Jewish *ê* in the letter names—so Cross orally); Syriac *bēt*; and Jewish Aramaic *bêtā*<sup>33</sup>. It was apocopated to *be* at Ugarit (Cross and Lambdin 1960: 23-5; Cross 2003: 315) and *bilbé* in the Late Babylonian school tablet (Geller 1997-2000: 144; Cross and Huehnergard 2003: 225).<sup>33</sup> The acrophone *\*bêt-*, “house,” names one Egyptian graphic antecedent, O1/O1B, “house,” exactly.

*I. The Small Discrepancy between the Name \*bêt- and the Prototype O4/O4B*

While one could posit that *\*bêt-*, “house,” supplies a generic appellation for the other certain source of this letter, O4/O4B, which depicts either the walls and an entranceway to some kind of enclosure (Wilkinson 1992: 139) or a courtyard (Fischer 1988: 11; Hannig 1995: 1068; cf. Gardiner 1957: 493), this would be stretching the semantic range of that Semitic noun to its limits.<sup>34</sup>

Fig. 2.10



<sup>33</sup> Setting Arabic *bāʾ* aside, which clearly arose through rhyming, there is no evidence for this letter name being clipped from a form with an uncontracted diphthong, *\*bayt-* > *\*ba* and thus none to support Hallo’s proposal (1996: 40) to trace the end of Assyrian (*LÚ*). *A.BA* to this acrophone.

<sup>34</sup> See especially Hoffner (1977: 107-13) for a review of the uses of this noun and the extensive secondary literature on it.

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One way to account for this small discrepancy is by graphic association. West Semites may have reinterpreted that sign as a house following again one of the house-plans known from clay models of “soul houses” in Egypt from the First Intermediate Period through to the Twelfth Dynasty. When drawing the outline of a terracotta model of such an early Twelfth Dynasty “soul house,” one with a second story courtyard on its upper left (traced from <http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass>), I noted that its contours on the top and left side are similar to that of the recently discovered *bêt* from Wadi el-Ḥol. After removing the right side of the outline of this soul house (see fig. 2.10 above for a representation of the full model), it appears quite similar to the essential shape of that letter’s form and new stance.<sup>35</sup> Whether West Semitic speakers named derivatives of O4/O4B \**bêt*-, “house,” after the design of part of such a model or following the plans of some of the actual houses of poorer people in Egypt with which they were familiar, I do not know. Postulating such a re-interpretation of this Egyptian sign as a \**bêt*-, “house,” according to actual or model plans of houses seems preferable to stretching the range of a well-known common Semitic noun to fit what Egyptologists think the most likely identity of the original sign might have been.

Another way to account for this small discrepancy is to look to how O4 is identified by a determinative in the parent script. Freu (2000: 94) noted that determinative used in Egyptian for O4, whatever that sign originally depicted, is O1, “house.” If a West Semite knew of that usage in the parent writing system, he or she could have extended it by terming derivatives of O4, \**bêt*-, “house.” Such a postulation presupposes some degree of literacy in Egyptian by a West Semite either when initially naming that letter form \**bêt*-, or secondarily by extending that acrophone from derivatives of O1, “house,” over to those of O4, “enclosure” (depending on which sign was chosen first).

In my estimation, either of these postulations is equally possible. Both reflect contact by a speaker of a West Semitic language with aspects of Egyptian culture.

<sup>35</sup> See Petrie (1907: pls. 15-18) for other models, many of which extend the upper courtyard along the full length of the top and thus would require less modification than the particular example solicited above.

III. *gîmel*, \**gaml-l*/\**giml*-, “Throw-stick”A. *The Egyptian Antecedents of gîmel*

The letter *gîmel* derives from the Egyptian sign which Gardiner (1957: 513) defined as: “(1) throw-stick, (2) club used as a foreign weapon of war” (hereafter “throw-stick”).<sup>36</sup> Since one does not see certain alphabetic derivatives of this sign until inscriptions dated approximately to the early twelfth century B.C., it is uncertain whether the archaic stance of this hieroglyph, numbered T15 by Gardiner, or its newer hieroglyphic stance, sign-number T14, and/or hieratic forms of Egyptian “throw-stick” were borrowed.

Hieroglyphic forms of T14 and T15 consist of two parts, rendered as outlines or single lines, that point either to the right or left. An outlined form of T14, pointing rightward, is idealized below (Žába 1974: sign list). Semi-cursive writings of T14, formed with two single lines with curvature at their junctures, can be illustrated from a late Middle Kingdom statuette from Deir el-Baḥri (*HT* 4: pl. 50), facing right, and a Twelfth Dynasty mining inscription at Wadi Ḥammamat (Goyon 1957: opposite 80, 180), pointing left. T15, which Gardiner (1957: 513) identified as an Old Kingdom form, differs from T14 by showing an oblique downstroke, illustrated again by an idealization of this hieroglyph by Žába (1974: sign list). The slightly oblique angles of the down strokes on these semi-cursive throw-sticks from Wadi Ḥammamat likely transmit a vestige of this older form (despite Gardiner’s Old Kingdom designation).<sup>37</sup>

Twelfth Dynasty hieratic forms of “throw-stick” also retain the archaic stance of hieroglyphic T15 (Möller I, 457). Later writings show

<sup>36</sup> Sass (1988: 112, n. 80) credited Eisler (1919: 108) with first signaling the origin of this letter in Egyptian “throw-stick.” Zauzich (1973: 155-56) introduced hieratic forms of that sign into the discussion. For a photograph of Middle Kingdom throw-sticks with various lengths and curvatures, see Hayes (1953: 279, fig. 181). For examples of throw-sticks set in the hand of Semites, see the pectoral of Ammenemes III from Dahshur (Wilkinson 1992: 178, fig. 2) and over the shoulder of the fragmentary colossal statue from late Twelfth or Thirteenth Dynasty Tell el-Dab’a (Bietak 1996: 20, fig. 17, pl. 4C).

<sup>37</sup> See Valbelle and Bonnet (1996: 124, fig. 146) for a Twelfth Dynasty writing of T14 from Serabiṭ. Žába (1974: sign list) also recorded an early Twelfth Dynasty derivative of T15 from northern Nubia. Because this writing appears to have been written upside down, I have not included it as an exemplar.

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the vertical downstroke of T14. A tiny tick is sporadically added to the highest stroke from the Twelfth Dynasty onward, thus making it a three-part form. All of these cursives point to the right.

Fig. 2.11

Hieroglyph T14, “throw-stick” Žába 1974 idealization	Same, <i>HT</i> 4: pl. 50 Deir el-Baḥri late MK	Same, Goyon 1957: 180 Wadi Ḥammamat Dyn. 12	Hieroglyph T15, “OK form of the last” Žába 1974 idealization
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Beth Shemesh  
Sass 1988:  
fig. 170  
v

Same,  
rotated

Fig. 2.12

Hieratic forms of “throw-stick”

Möller I, 457

Dyn. 12;

12/13;

13;

Hyksos Period to beg. of Dyn. 18



Izbet Ṣarṭah Abecedary  
Cross 1980: fig. 13  
l-r

Same,  
Kochavi 1977: fig. 6

Alphabet: ʾ b g ḥ d h w z ḥ ṭ y k š l m ḏ n s ʿ p š/z q r θ ḡ t

*gîmel*, \**gaml-l*/\**giml*- · 55*B. No Early Attestations of gîmel*

No certain *gîmel* has been identified on texts written before the early twelfth century B.C.<sup>38</sup> The first certain attestations occur on the Beth Shemesh Sherd (Albright 1936: 9) and the 'Izbet Şarṭah Abecedary (Kochavi 1977: 7-8).<sup>39</sup> While neither of these letters is perfectly preserved, their contrastive forms and stances are clear. Both Old Canaanite letters continue single-lined forms of Egyptian throw-sticks.<sup>40</sup>

The damaged *gîmel* on the Beth Shemesh Ostrakon (reproduced from Sass 1988: fig.170) shows two strokes: a long diagonal from the left of which hangs a short downstroke (that may have been secondarily extended by blotching of its ink [Sass 1988: figs. 172, 174]). While its shape would conform to either hieroglyphic type of throw-stick, this *gîmel* may ultimately derive from the more archaic hieroglyph T15 because of its stance. By reversing its rotation a quarter turn, this *gîmel* would more closely resemble an oblique stance of T15 (mirroring the idealization from Žába 1974) rather than the newer posture of T14. The form of this letter, however, more closely resembles the more rounded top semi-cursive forms of T14 from Middle Kingdom Deir el-Baḥri (*HT* 4: pl. 50) and Wadi Ḥammamat (Goyon 1957: 180).

The *gîmel* on the 'Izbet Şarṭah Abecedary has three parts, two of which are clear: from the top of a long vertical stroke a short line juts upward. The length of the downstroke on the right is debatable. Kochavi (1977: fig. 3) saw that third part as a short but significant line, while Cross (1980: fig. 13) counted but the slightest tick as original and discounted the rest as damage (see the photographs reproduced in Sass 1988: figs. 176, 177). After viewing this ostrakon, I would tend to agree with Cross's interpretation of the length of that line (but I would also quickly add that either perception is possible). With only a tick for a

<sup>38</sup> See Sass (1988: 113) for a review of various proposed *gîmels* in the Sinaitic inscriptions and Hestrin, Sass, and Ophel (1982) for the rereading of one side of the Lachish Prism as a hieroglyphic text, which negated Albright's attempt (1966: 4) to identify one of the signs as a *g*. Seger's proposal (1983: 479) to identify several of the Gezer Jar Signs as possible Proto-Canaanite *gîmels* is dubious, as is his identification (1983: 480) of the rotated *rēš* of the Grossman Seal as a *gîmel* (see fig. 2.69 below). Colless's identifications (1988: 33, 35; 1990: 3) are not persuasive (see especially figs. 2.31 and 2.59 below).

<sup>39</sup> See Cross (2003: 209, n. 11) for the lowering of the dates of these inscriptions.

<sup>40</sup> See Appendix 1, Sinai 363, 351, and 365b, for possible but damaged writings of this letter (the last two potentially rotated ninety degrees).

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third stroke, this Old Canaanite *gîmel* would look much like hieratic throw-sticks with three parts from the Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties or the Second Intermediate Period (Möller I, 457). If it were conceived as being a bit longer incision, then this letter could well have undergone some development in the more than half millennium between the borrowing of the Egyptian “throw-stick” sign and its appearance on this learner’s abecedary (cf. Sass 1988: 113). That third stroke may have been independently introduced onto a hieroglyphic prototype, such as the late Middle Kingdom writing of T14 from Deir el-Baḥri (*HT* 4: pl. 50), either in imitation of some iconographic representations of this weapon (see Cross 1980: 9 and n. 15; 2003: 221) or as a random accretion (Cross, personal communication). A derivation of this late three-part form of *gîmel* from the early to mid-second millennium B.C. hieratic sequence is thus possible, but not certain.

Although by anyone’s estimate there are many centuries separating the beginning of alphabetic writing and the first occurrences of *gîmel*, the minimal developments in its first attestations (perhaps a lengthened or introduced third stroke on one form and definitely the rotation of another) allow one to postulate its source in forms of the Egyptian sign(s) T15/T14 with confidence (cf. Sass 1988: 112-13).

### C. *Stances*

The *gîmel* on the ‘Izbet Šarḫah Abecedary retains the upright position of either style of the Egyptian sign, T14, and points towards the right on a line that reads from left to right. The *gîmel* on the Beth Shemesh Sherd has rotated a quarter turn to face downward on a vertical column.

### D. *Letter Name*

Although transmitting languages vary in their vocalizations of *gml*, this acrophone surely means “throw-stick” and corresponds with its Egyptian graphic prototype(s). Akkadian attests the cognate noun *gamlu(m)*, “throw-stick” (contrast Driver 1976: 163f. and HALOT 2: 168). Languages show alternations in the \**qaṭl-* or \**qiṭl-* vocalizations of this acrophone (similarly, Nöldeke 1904: 134; Cross and Huehnergard 2003: 225, 227, n. 12).

Alphabet: ʾ b g ḥ d h w z ḥ ṭ y k š l m ḏ n s ʿ p š/z q r θ ḡ t

ḥarm, \*ḥarm- · 57

Most languages' names reflect an *a*-theme \**gaml*-: in abbreviated form as *ga* at Ugarit (Cross and Lambdin 1960: 25; Cross 2003: 315); most archaically in Ethiopic *gaml* (sometimes *geml* as well); and the developed, dissyllabic name *gāmal* in Syriac. Greek *gamma*, sometimes *gemma*, also comes from \**gaml*-, but the “assimilation” of the *lambda* to the *mū* is without explanation. Similarly, Samaritan Hebrew's *gaman*, in which one finds an *n* for an original *l*, is puzzling, despite the occasional interchange of these letters in some Semitic words (cf. *dant* in Ethiopic for \**dalt*-).

Other traditions stem from an *i*-theme monosyllabic biform, \**giml*-: *gîmel* in Jewish tradition—LXX *gimal* and Eusebius *gimel*—plus the shortened form *gi* in the Late Babylonian school tablet (Cross and Huehnergard 2003: 225). The vocalization of *gîmel* in Hebrew represents a frozen archaism, with its short *i* secondarily lengthened; one would expect \**gēmel* according to regular Masoretic patterns and one manuscript of Eusebius transcribes such a vocalization (Gifford 1903: 474). Arabic *ġim* reflects a comparable, though clipped frozen form.

The alternation between \**giml*- and \**gaml*- provides clear evidence for the vocalic updating of this letter name by at least one linguistic tradent, presumably to accord with its own vocalization of the related noun for throw-stick.

IV. *ḥarm*, \**ḥarm*-, \**“Wick”*A. *Egyptian Antecedents of ḥarm*

The letter *ḥarm* derives from hieroglyphic forms of V28, “wick of twisted flax.”<sup>41</sup>

The standard form of V28 manifests three intertwining, rounded loops that terminate in loose ends (e.g., Gardiner 1957: 525; Fischer 1988: 11; Hannig 1995: 1092), but reduced and angular variations of this hieroglyph are also attested. Fischer (1988: 11) noted: “The uppermost loop is

<sup>41</sup> Sass (1988: 117) credited Cowley (1916: 20) with identifying this letter form (then valued as both \**ḥ* and \**ḫ*) and hieroglyph, a graphic correspondence also tentatively compared by Gardiner (1916: 14, pl. 2). Hieratic forms of V28, which show zigzag tops (fig. 1.1 above; Möller I, 525), are dissimilar to alphabetic *ḥ*, a value first correctly assigned by Albright (1935b: 337). Wimmer and Wimmer-Dweikat's recent (2001: 108-9) re-introduction of a value of \**ḥ* for this letter is surprising. My treatment of *ḥarm* and its Egyptian prototype is very dependent on the insightful analysis of Butin (1936: 53, 56).

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often larger than the others.” Žába (1974: sign list) recorded a standard form of V28 with three even loops from an early Twelfth Dynasty inscription and a more angular writing from a different Middle Kingdom Nubian text. Butin (1936: 53) found forms with only two loops, subsequently termed V28C (*Hieroglyphica* 2000: sign list), on some Egyptian inscriptions in the western Sinai. Sinai 165, a Middle Kingdom stele found at Serabiṭ el-Khadim, serves to illustrate two such forms, one of which shows a slightly flattened top (drawn from a photograph made at The Royal Ontario Museum after an examination of the original). A Twelfth Dynasty inscription from Abydos (*HT* 2: pl. 2) contains a pair of three-looped writings of “wick of twisted flax,” one of which has quite asymmetrical loops and a very flat top, while the other a more pointed top.<sup>42</sup>

Fig. 2.13  
Hieroglyph V28,  
“wick of twisted flax”  
Žába 1974  
Nubia  
Dyn. 12; MK

Hieroglyph V28C,  
Sinai 165  
Serabiṭ el-Khadim  
MK

Hieroglyph V28,  
*HT* 2: pl. 2  
Abydos  
Dyn. 12



Sinai  
365b  
v?



Sinai  
349  
r-l



Sinai  
353  
v



Wadi el-Hol  
1.15  
r-l

<sup>42</sup> *Hieroglyphica* (2000: sign list) enumerated a two-loop form with a pointed, diamond shaped top as V28E.

ḥarm, \*ḥarm- · 59*B. Proto-Canaanite Forms of ḥarm*

Only four Proto-Canaanite writings of *ḥarm* are passably preserved and certainly identified.<sup>43</sup> From Sinai 365b comes a very angular writing of *ḥarm* that appears to have only two loops. (It is uncertain if the line attached to the bottom left was originally part of this letter's form.) Still its triangular top is comparable to an angular, three-loop V28 recorded by Žába (1974: sign list). The *ḥarm* on Sinai 349 exhibits two rounded loops, with a larger top one (see Fischer 1988: 11 on this feature), very similar to writings of V28C found by Butin (1936: 56) on Egyptian stelae from Serabiṭ el-Khadim, exemplified by two writings from Sinai 165 above. The damaged form of this letter on Sinai 353 also clearly has but two loops, the upper one of which possesses a flat top, much like that on a longer form of V28 from Twelfth Dynasty Abydos (*HT* 2: pl. 2). The three loops of Wadi el-Ḥol 1.15 are very uneven and even more angular than the pair of V28s on that Egyptian stele. The head of this letter also comes to a point, much like one of the writings of the Egyptian “wick” sign on that Middle Kingdom inscription from nearby Abydos (*HT* 2: pl. 2).<sup>44</sup> While one could appeal in either inscription to the equivalent of an inept writing (cf. Darnell et al. 2005: 82), it may be that one is seeing influence from the actual object, a wick of twisted flax (see Fischer 1988: 11 reproduced in fig. 2.14 below), on the form of this sign and its dependent letter. All four writings of this letter fall within the formal parameters of actual attestations of V28/V28C in the parent script.<sup>45</sup>

*C. Stance of ḥarm*

The hieroglyph V28, its variant V28C, and the alphabetic letter *ḥ* all stand upright, no matter whether the latter occurs on horizontal lines (Wadi el-Ḥol 1.15; Sinai 349) or on vertical columns (Sinai 365b and 353).

<sup>43</sup> Compare Sass's estimate (1988: 118) of seven to nine occurrences. See Appendix 1, Sinai 356 and 363, regarding two disputable occurrences of this letter and *qôp* below for a letter on Sinai 376 read by Albright (1966: 29), Rainey (1975: 107, 110), Sass (1988: 118, n. 83), and Darnell et al. (2005: 82) as a *ḥarm*.

<sup>44</sup> Its diamond shaped head may relate to that feature on V28E (*Hieroglyphica* 2000: sign list), but the latter shows only two loops.

<sup>45</sup> Sass (1988: 118-19) correctly concluded that there was no chronological significance to the use of three- or two-looped variants in alphabetic texts based on their usage in Egyptian inscriptions; see, for example, lines 7 and 8 of Sinai 53 from the Twelfth Dynasty (Valbelle and Bonnet 1996: 122, fig. 145; Sass 1988: fig. 291).

Alphabet: ʾ b g ḥ d h w z ḥ ṯ y k š l m ð n s ʿ p š/z q r θ g t

60 · *Origins of the West Semitic Alphabet**D. Letter Name*

Fig. 2.14  
Old Kingdom lamp and wick  
Fischer 1988: 11

Ethiopic alone preserves the complete name of this letter, *ḥarm* (later *ḥarm*: Dillmann 1857: §9; Cross and Lambdin 1960: 23; Cross 2003: 315; Darnell et al. 2005: 82). Its Akkadian transcription at Ugarit was *ḥa* (Cross and Lambdin 1960: 23; Cross 2003: 315). No language transmits a nominal form \**ḥarm-* whose meaning would correlate exactly with this letter's images. Late Biblical Hebrew *ḥērem* and Jewish Aramaic *ḥermā*<sup>2</sup>, both of which mean “net,” Mishnaic Hebrew *ḥārām*, “fishermen” (from “makers of nets” [*HALOT* 1: 354]), as well as modern Arabic *tahrīm(un)*, “lace, lace-work” and *tahrīma(tun)*, “lace, lace-work, open-work, filigree” (Wehr 1979: 236)<sup>46</sup> supply the closest cognates since they name fibers that are manipulated. Apparently on the basis of its graphic similarity to the hieroglyph V28, Albright (1966: fig. 1) reconstructed the meaning of this letter's name as “hank of yarn,” where, for unknown reasons, he refused to venture beyond *ḥa-* as its Semitic name. This translation would seem to stem from Griffith's early description (1898b: 43) of V28 as a “hank of fibres (of flax?)” rather than Gardiner's more specific label, “wick of twisted flax” (1957: 525). Fischer (1988: 11) illustrated this use of twisted flax well in a representation of an Old Kingdom lamp (fig. 2.14). Given the nominal forms traced to the root \**ḥrm* in much later Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, it is likely that the acrophone \**ḥarm-* specifically denoted the pictograph of a lamp wick.

<sup>46</sup> I am indebted here to the work of Kaltner (1996), who insisted that modern and classical sources of Arabic be differentiated when working with potential cognates in ancient West Semitic languages.

dālet, \*dalt-/dilt- · 61V. *dālet*, \**dalt-/dilt-*, “Door”  
and \_\_\_\_\_, [\**dag-*], [“Fish”]A. *The Early Development of d*

Some scholars have claimed that earliest *d* has the image of a fish (e.g., Cowley 1916: 20; Cross and Lambdin 1960: 25; Albright 1966: fig. 1; Sass 1988: 114; Cross 2003: 315). Others have asserted that *d*'s pictograph looks like a door (e.g., Gardiner 1916: pl. 2; Sethe 1917; 1926: 442; Ullman 1927: 316; Grimme 1929: script chart; Butin 1932: 139; Puech 1983: 578-80; Colless 1988: 35; 1991: 7-8; tentatively, Briquel-Chatonnet 1998: 58; Tropper 2003: 175, Abb. 2). I propose to take up an idea offered very hesitantly by Cross and Lambdin (1960: 25; Cross 2003: 316) that two alternate graphemes for *d* were developed in the early period, one shaped like a fish and the other shaped like a door.<sup>47</sup>

The case for *d* as “door” is strong but not without difficulties. One can trace every language’s name for this consonant back to some vocalization of *dlt*, “door.” Three pictographs in the early Sinitic corpus look very much like varieties of the Egyptian sign O31, “door” (so too Sass 1988: 118). And at least two graphemes on inscriptions from Canaan, the Shechem Plaque and the much later Raddana Handle, derive from Egyptian “door”-prototypes without postulating any significant development in their forms. Six of these proposed *dālets* have been read as *ḥêts* (e.g., the Lahun Heddle Jack [Eisler 1919: 172; Dijkstra 1990]; Sinai 376 [Cross 1967: 16\*; 2003: 323]; Sinai 367 [Albright 1966: 27]; Sinai 362 [Albright 1966: 25]; Shechem Plaque [Böhl 1938: 25]; Raddana Handle [Cross and Freedman 1971: 20; Cross 2003: 297-98; Sass 1988: 119]). Unfortunately four of these letters occur in inscriptions that are not well preserved or complete enough to permit linguistic decipherment to decide which of these consonantal values is correct. While this letter occurs in a complete text on the Lahun Heddle Jack, a plausible linguistic decipherment is achieved using either value: <sup>ʔ</sup>*ḥ*ʕš*b*, “(The Divine) Brother has created” (Dijkstra 1990: 55-56) or <sup>ʔ</sup>*d*ʕš*b*, “(The

<sup>47</sup> Not only is the identification of the proto-alphabetic sign(s) for *d* at issue here, but those for *sāmek* and *ḥêt* as well (see especially Sass 1988: 113-14, 118; Tropper 2003: 175, Abb. 2).

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Divine) Father has created” (a new proposal).<sup>48</sup> The latter is preferable paleographically. The deciding factor, from my perspective, occurs in Sinai 367, a complete but damaged stele. If one reads *dālet* as the second letter one arrives at a simple and banal decipherment for the whole text: *yd<sup>c</sup>b<sup>c</sup>l*, likely a proper name meaning, “Baal/the Master knows/cares (for me).”<sup>49</sup>

The arguments for identifying nine pictographic fish as *d*'s are persuasive, but leave several questions about later forms of *dālet* unanswered. While five of these fish occur on texts in which *d* represents the most attractive consonantal value (Sinai 346a, 357, 375, 376—see Albright 1966), a certain reading of an albeit damaged fish grapheme on Sinai 358 by Rainey (1975: 115) provides the most secure identification of this grapheme as *d*.<sup>50</sup> Difficulties begin when one attempts to trace triangular forms of later *dālet* (attested first on the ʿIzbet ʿAṣṣa Ostraccon and el-Khaḍr Arrowheads [Cross 1980; 2003: 216-22]) from fish prototypes. One would have to posit the loss of every part of a fish-grapheme except its tail to achieve triangular shapes of *dālet* (cf. Sass 1988: 114). Such would constitute a formal development at a rate unprecedented for any other letter. Moreover, very few pictographic fish exhibit such closed triangular terminations. On the contrary, I would posit that later triangular *dālets* derive from *d*'s other grapheme, “door,” in incremental developmental stages.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> See Olmo Lete and Sanmartín (2003: 15) for listings of the well-known theophoric element *ʾd* in Ugaritic and Rainey (1975: 115) for its occurrence in Sinai 358.

<sup>49</sup> The theophoric element derives from Colless (1991: 26), although we differ in our readings of the first half of this text. For parallels to this name in Amorite, Biblical Hebrew, and probably Ammonite, see: *ya-da-AN* (Huffmon 1965: 209; Gelb 1980: 21, 108); *yhwyd<sup>c</sup>* (*HALOT* 2: 396); and *yhwyd<sup>c</sup>* (Aufrecht 1989: 147).

<sup>50</sup> The long standing question, whether the fish pictographs represent *sāmek*s may now be answered negatively. I will posit below that Old Canaanite *sāmek* image was that of a pillar; although attestations are rare and poorly preserved, the images of *sāmek* appear to have developed little during the first half millennium (or more) of alphabetic writing (contrast, most recently, Colless 1991: 5). Whether South Semitic revalued the fish pictograph as *sāmek*, however, remains an open question (see, most conveniently, Naveh 1987b: 132).

<sup>51</sup> I hope to develop this in detail in a future work. In brief, two lines of development appear to converge in the creation of Old Canaanite/Early Linear Phoenician *dālet*. In one developmental sequence, the horizontals of the door dip inward at first slightly (the *d* on the Raddana Handle) and then more markedly to form an isosceles triangle attached to a vertical. Most of those developmental stages are hardly hypothetical since they occur in South Semitic forms of *d* (see, *inter alia*, Sass 1991: Chart 1; and MacDonald 1992: 419, fig. 01). In the other sequence, the two lines of the bottom corner of the

Alphabet: ʾ b g h d h w z h ʿ t y k š l m ʾ n s ʿ p š/z q r θ g t

*dālet, \*dalt-/dilt- · 63*

Yet the most troubling aspect of recognizing the fish-pictograph as *dālet* remains, “Why would it be called ‘door’?” I speculate that “door” was the original form and that “fish” was introduced as an alternate pictograph because some writings of *dālet* and *ḥêt* could be confused easily (as I believe they have been by many paleographers). This is a novel assertion because I will posit below the first identification of writings of *ḥêt* on texts dated prior to the early twelfth century B.C. (on Sinai 375a, one of which is badly damaged). That letter’s early form is similar to the chronologically later but typologically primitive form of *ḥêt* on the Byblian Spatula. In short, one has the beginnings of the data necessary to differentiate early writings of *ḥêt*, “fence” from *dālet*, “door.”

*B. Egyptian Antecedents of dālet*

Proto-Canaanite forms of *dālet* derive from hieroglyphic forms of O31, “door” (Gardiner 1916: pl. 2; Davies 1990: 131, Table 2), although two letters may show cursive features stemming from the hieratic sequence. This hieroglyph depicts one leaf of a double door (Davies 1958: 37), illustrated in fig. 2.15 below by a representation of the double doors of heaven from a Nineteenth Dynasty tomb at Thebes (Wilkinson 1992: 146, fig. 3).

More detailed models of O31 have the shape of long rectangles, with extensions that represent door hinges, one more square, the other more pointed for the pivot (see Davies 1958: 37). This sign could rest horizontally, its usual position (Wilkinson 1992: 147), or stand vertically, be either wide or narrow. The number of internal crossbars could also vary considerably. Gardiner’s idealized exemplar (1916: pl. 2) shows seven bars within an upright form. An actual semi-cursive hieroglyphic form of O31 on the late Twelfth or Thirteenth Dynasty Papyrus Ramesseum VI from west of Thebes manifests three clear crossbars (Gardiner 1955: pl. 19, line 47; Parkinson 1999: 91, fig. 15). Ullman (1927: fig. 2) selected a horizontal hieroglyphic prototype with two internal crossbars from Egyptian inscriptions in the Sinai, a form

rectangle become one, thus forming a large triangle (with a right angle in one upper corner, as in the *d* on the ‘Izbet Šarḥāh Abecedary). This second line of development appears then to have influenced the first, allowing the omission of the vertical and the creation of the simple form of an isosceles triangle (as found on many later arrowheads and more rarely in South Semitic scripts).

Alphabet: ʾ b g ḥ d h w z ḥ ṭ y k š l m ð n s ʿ p š/z q r θ g t

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Fig. 2.15

*Dālets* with Hieroglyphic Features

Hieroglyph O31, "door"	Same, from	Same, Ullman	Same, <i>HT</i> 2:	Doors of Heaven
Gardiner 1916: pl. 2 idealization	Gardiner 1955: pl. 19 Ramesseum Dyn. 12/13	1927: fig. 2 Sinai 53 Serabiṭ Dyn. 12	pl. 1 Abydos Dyn. 12	Wilkinson 1992: 146, fig. 3 Thebes Dyn. 19



Shechem  
Plaque  
v?

Same,  
h?

Sinai  
362  
v

Sinai  
376  
v

Sinai  
367  
v

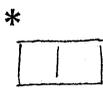
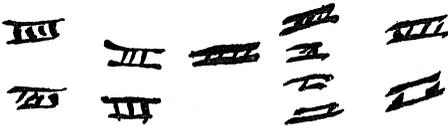
Fig. 2.16

*Dālets* with Cursive Features

Hieratic O31, "door"

Möller I, 364

Dyn. 6, 10/11, 11/12, 12, 12/13



Shechem  
Plaque  
h?

Lahun  
Heddle  
Jack  
h

Same,  
rotated  
modified from  
Petrie 1890:  
pl. 27.85

Alphabet: ʔ b g ḥ d h w z ḥ ṭ y k š l m ḏ n s ʿ p š z q r θ ḡ t