

Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel

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ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE RELIGIONS
OF CANAAN AND ISRAEL

by

Beth Alpert Nakhai

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ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE RELIGIONS
OF CANAAN AND ISRAEL

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Cover illustration: Reconstruction of the contents of the 13th century
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Dedicated to Farzad and Mandana, with much love

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ABBREVIATIONS

Dtn	Deut 12–26
DH	Deuteronomistic Historians (Deut, Josh, Judg, 1–2 Sam, 1–2 Kgs)
KK	1 Kgs 5:22–2 Kgs 25
J	Yahwist
E	Elohist
P	Priestly
D	Deuteronomistic
SSK 4	1 Sam, 2 Sam, 1 Kgs 1–4

PREFACE

Seven years have elapsed since this work was first accepted as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Arizona. Whether the number seven is as significant in modern times as it was in antiquity remains to be seen! That said, these seven years have been important ones for archaeologists and biblical scholars. Excavation in Israel and Jordan is taking place at a phenomenal pace. Had I ever imagined the work involved in updating my discussion of sites to accommodate the many new discoveries at well-known sites—and in adding newly discovered sanctuaries and shrines to an already extensive list—I would have struggled harder to meet my editor’s initial publication deadline!

During these seven years, two critically important controversies have gripped our field, and the resolution of each will have important implications for our understanding of the Iron Age. “Revisionism” posits a date exilic or later for much of the biblical narrative, while the “Lower Chronology” moves much of what has been understood as United Monarchy into the Divided Monarchy. Since neither issue was pressing at the time I wrote my original text, I have given them scant attention here.

These seven years have been important for yet another reason, and that is the proliferation of critical new scholarly works. They include, but are not limited to, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Freedman, ed. 1992); *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavation in the Holy Land* (Stern, ed. 1993); *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, Volume I: From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy* (Albertz 1994); *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (Levy, ed. 1995); *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (Sasson, ed. 1995); *Community, Identity, and Ideology: Social Sciences Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (Carter and Meyers, eds. 1996); *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (Meyers, ed. 1997); and *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Keel and Uehlinger 1998). I only regret that I was unable to more fully absorb each of their significant contributions.

There are many people whose help has been invaluable to me over the years. First, I would like to thank my one-time dissertation advisor, now a colleague and always a friend, William G. Dever. J. Edward Wright, Chair of the Committee on Judaic Studies, deserves special thanks for his support, encouragement and friendship.

Other faculty, not all still at the University of Arizona, have been most helpful, some while I was writing my dissertation and some in subsequent years. In particular, I would like to thank Albert Leonard, Jr., Shoshana Green, Leonard Dinnerstein, Susan Ackerman, Peter Machinist and Norman Yoffee.

Ruth Dickstein and her colleagues at the University of Arizona Library made it possible for me to complete my research in while in Tucson. Gary L. Christopherson, Director of the Center for Applied Spatial Analysis, and Marcy H. Rockman, Research Associate, created the four maps that appear in this book. Jeanne Davenport, Administrative Associate for the Committee on Judaic Studies transformed my typed manuscript into camera-ready copy. Without her skillful work, this volume would never have seen the light of day, and I am most grateful to her!

Others outside Tucson have provided me with much support and inspiration. My teachers at Harvard Divinity School helped broaden my horizons in many invaluable ways. Victor H. Matthews, ASOR Book Series Editor, and Albert Leonard, Jr., Chair, ASOR Committee on Publications, have guided this work to completion and I extend them my heartfelt gratitude. Thanks, too, to Billie Jean Collins, ASOR Director of Publications.

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My debt to my family cannot be adequately expressed. Without the loving support of my parents, Esther Racoosin Alpert and Seymour Alpert, and my sisters Amy R. Alpert and Abbe F. Alpert, this project would never have come to fruition. The inspiration of my beloved grandmother, Rea Cohen Racoosin, is always with me. Two especially wonderful people, my husband Farzad and our daughter Mandana Lily, have lived with this effort daily. This book is dedicated to them, with much love.

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I am grateful to all for their advice and encouragement. Any errors are, of course, mine alone.

October 2000
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INTRODUCTION

The religion of ancient Israel has fascinated participants and observers alike since the days when King David ruled in Jerusalem. Documentation of Israelite customs and beliefs may have begun as early as the tenth century B.C.E., soon after those groups that would become Israel first joined together to form a nation. The continuing—if somewhat disjointed—effort to record aspects of their social, political and religious history eventually resulted in a long and complicated document known variously as the Tanakh, Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. The chronological focus of this great work was the First Temple period, although some pieces may predate the Temple's construction and others derive from Second Temple times. Intertestamental literature, including the books of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha and the Dead Sea Scrolls, relates to religious practices of the Jewish community during the Second Temple period, when Judah was under Persian, Greek and finally Roman rule. The New Testament is a useful source of information on early Judaism, and ancient historians such as Herodotus and Josephus have presented their own unique perspectives on the religion of Israel.

Many of these early texts themselves became the source for nearly two millennia of commentary by Jewish, Catholic and, eventually, Protestant theologians and scholars. At the same time, interest in the land of Palestine as the locus of the Bible cyclically waxed and waned. Byzantines under Constantine explored Christian and Jewish holy places and so did Europeans during the Crusades. Napoleon's explorations in Egypt triggered a renewed fascination with the antiquities of the biblical world and since then the amount of interest has increased exponentially. So, too, has interest in Israel's Near Eastern ancestors, the Canaanites and others.

In the nineteenth century, new fields such as sociology, anthropology and comparative religious studies, as well as new approaches to the study of the Bible, began to enrich our understanding of the religions of Canaan and Israel. At the same time, a growing interest in exploring Palestine—the land, its antiquities and its inhabitants, its ancient sites

and modern villages—led to the development of the modern field of “biblical archaeology” (Dever 1985b; 1993a; and references therein).

For the most part, the impetus for these many explorations of ancient Israel was rooted in the religious convictions of modern explorers. Their motivation for investigating the religion of Israel’s Canaanite ancestors was often their own deeply held religious beliefs. One consequence of this theological orientation has been that, despite advances in the field of archaeology, texts have traditionally provided the primary point of reference for studies of Canaanite and Israelite religions.

This book seeks to demonstrate that archaeological data provides a strong and independent witness to the religious practices of Canaanites and Israelites in the second to mid-first millennia B.C.E. Scholars have conventionally used archaeology to support—or in some cases to disprove—biblical narrative. However, as is shown here, the archaeological world, unbiased by the theological stance of its one-time inhabitants, provides independent data critical for reconstructing ancient religious practice and even belief.

Perhaps more significantly, these data stimulate discussions of the integral part played by religion in the social and political worlds of Canaan and Israel, discussions critical to a full understanding of the world of Canaanite and Israelite religion. Those of us raised with a constitutional commitment to the separation of church and state must remember that this modern societal construction bears no resemblance to ancient society. In antiquity, religion, economics and politics were all deeply embedded within the structure of society.

This book presents its critical evidence in seven chapters. Chapter One offers a history of scholarship in the field of Canaanite and Israelite religion. Advances in the study of ancient religion and society have been made particularly by those who have thought of religion as an element of society at-large, rather than as an isolated set of ritual behaviors. The chapter demonstrates that inadequate attention has been given to archaeological data, despite the importance of these data to the study of religion. In addition, it shows that archaeologists most commonly use material culture evidence from religious structures and installations to reconstruct ritual behaviors rather than to investigate socio-political relationships. Finally, it suggests the potential of studies that rely upon archaeological data and also incorporate the witness of contemporary texts.

Chapter Two discusses the contribution made by anthropological studies to understanding the role of religion in society. Since the nineteenth century, anthropologists have suggested that, together with their spiritual dimensions, religions in ancient societies had social and political dimensions. For example, sacrifice (known to have been the religious rite *par excellence* of Canaanites and Israelites) should be thought of as more than a set of arcane rituals. It reflected various dimensions of the socio-political structure of the worshipping community. For example, the sharing of sacral meals provided a multipurpose forum for the convening of kin or other social groups. One of the most stimulating contributions made by anthropologists has been their ethnographic studies of worshipping communities. Chapter Two discusses some of these studies and looks at archaeological analyses that have drawn upon the contributions made by ethnographic and other anthropological studies.

Chapter Three looks at the ritual texts from Ugarit and at pre-exilic portions of the Hebrew Bible. Like Chapter Two, this chapter focuses upon the ritual of sacrifice and demonstrates its central role in the religions of Canaan and Israel. Examination of the ritual texts from Ugarit demonstrates that overall, sacrifice was the primary ritual in Canaanite religion. In addition, the royal sharing of sacral meals is well documented. In consequence, sacrifice becomes particularly relevant for understanding the functioning of social and political elements in Canaanite society.

Turning to Israel, the study assesses the witness of various biblical authors including the Yahwist and the Elohist, ninth century prophets, Deuteronomistic Historians and Priestly writers. It documents the increased tendency toward control over sacrifice and other religious practices and suggests that the *bāmôt* (במות), excoriated by biblical writers, were in fact a centralizing institution for Israelite and Judaeen monarchs. Control over religious practice was essential as royalty attempted to manage divergent clan and priestly groups.

In Chapter Four, the book turns to the evidence presented by archaeological data. Each of the next three chapters investigates the remains of sacred structures and installations, and of cultic paraphernalia. Emphasis is placed upon sites with representative or particularly significant architectural or artifactual assemblages. Chapter Four is concerned with the religion of Canaan in the Middle Bronze Age. It demonstrates that the development of religion in the first half

of the second millennium was related to the slow growth of elite clan groups. For most of the MB II, religion was not a function of urban society. Rather, the locus of public worship was more often the rural cult center. By the MB IIC, however, the stimulus provided by the growing wealth and authority of religious professionals triggered the development of a new urban elite.

Chapter Five presents archaeological data for religion in the Late Bronze Age. As Canaan recovered from the devastating battles of the mid-second millennium, regional pilgrimage sanctuaries were set up in a number of locations. In the large cities, religion continued to reflect clan structure and political relationships. Over time, Egyptian control over the region increased and so did the number of Egypto-Canaanite temples designed to serve Egyptian imperial needs. Ultimately, Egypt exploited Canaanite ritual processes—and in particular the ritual of sacrifice—at the expense of the indigenous Canaanite population.

Chapter Six examines Israelite sacred sites from the beginning of the Iron Age until the destruction of the First Temple. The discussion focuses on the way in which the monarchs of Israel and Judah organized religion in support of the state, in particular through the increasing institutionalization of the regional *bāmôt*. At the same time, the efforts of some clan and priestly groups to resist these centralizing efforts are seen in alternate places of worship. These were constructed in semi-public town sanctuaries, or in workshop and domestic shrines. In all these locations, sacrifice of goods remained the primary religious ritual.

The concluding chapter stresses the continuing importance of attention given to the details of religious practice as seen through an examination of the archaeological record, and also to the integration of textual, anthropological and archaeological studies. It demonstrates that in Canaan and Israel, elite groups (clan groups and priestly guilds) accumulated status and wealth through their control over religion, as they benefited from the steady stream of offerings left for the gods. Over time, they (and sometimes outsiders) learned how to manipulate religion to serve multiple non-spiritual goals. Ultimately, the battle over political control in Israel would be couched in religious terms. The HB and the variety of sacred places in the Iron Age both attest to the reality of this struggle.

CHAPTER ONE

**SURVEY OF PREVIOUS
SCHOLARSHIP**

In the past, discussions of Canaanite and Israelite religion have generally focussed on the theology and cult of the worshipping community, while devoting little attention to religion's socio-political components. One reason for this is the paucity of non-theological documents related to Canaan and Israel compared with those that come from surrounding lands. In those other regions, royal and temple archives filled with economic texts, correspondence, ritual incantations, legal documents and more are, by comparison, commonplace. Therefore, the economic, social and political elements of their societies are better known.

The Hebrew Bible, is, of course, the principle source for the study of Israelite faith, while the tablets from Ugarit provide a similar, although smaller, corpus of information about Canaanite beliefs. They, together with limited inscriptional material, provide much that is not accessible through anepigraphic sources. However, a brief review of previous scholarship demonstrates the pressing need for a reexamination of archaeology's ability to illuminate the ways in which religion functioned in Canaanite and Israelite society.¹

A DEFINITION OF CANAANITE

First, however, the question of the relationship among the cultures of the Levant must be addressed. Particularly relevant are an understanding of the terms "Canaan" and "Canaanite" and an assessment of their application to the regions and peoples of Bronze Age Western Asia. That different scholars have used these terms in different ways has created confusion. Therefore it is important to delineate the boundaries of ancient Canaan and to clarify the definition of those people called Canaanite. The relationship between Israelite religion and the earlier religion(s) of Canaan must also be explored.

The problem in part is one of geography, exacerbated by the long history of political and religious conflicts within Western Asia. In consequence, a myriad of terms has been used to describe the region under study. Recently Ben-Tor commented upon the absence of scholarly consensus regarding the vocabulary of regional geography. He listed commonly used terms (including Israel, Land of Israel, Syria, Palestine, Syria-Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Transjordan, Holy Land, Canaan and southern Levant), suggested that chronological problems affect their overall applicability, and was able to offer no solution to this quandary (1992: 2–3).

The boundaries of ancient Canaan must be delineated, for in modern times the term Canaan has been used imprecisely. Inasmuch as Canaanites lived within well-defined regional territories or city-states with political and economic ties that drew them variously toward Syria, Mesopotamia or Egypt, geographic and cultural boundaries can be established. Overall, the territory of Canaan has been described as “the Levant’s southern part, comprising Palestine, Lebanon, and southern Syria” (A. Mazar 1990a: 3) or “western Palestine (the area west of the Jordan River), whose northern boundary fluctuated between southern and central Lebanon” (Pitard 1998: 40). More specifically, “Canaan’s boundaries began in the south at Wadi al-'Arish and reached north to the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon Mountain ranges. The western border was, of course, the Mediterranean, and the eastern was Transjordan (mostly the Bashan) and the Jordan River and Dead Sea farther south” (Hackett 1997a: 409).

Hackett’s definition is derived from the parameters of usage in second millennium Egypt and Western Asia. It matches the area delineated in the eighteenth century Execration Texts from Saqqara; significantly, the first written reference to Canaan or Canaanite was found in a contemporary text from Mari. The term did not appear again until the late fifteenth century booty list of the Egyptian pharaoh Amenophis II. In later centuries, it appeared several times in the Amarna letters and in a text from Alalakh. It was also found in two texts from *ca.* the year 1200 B.C.E., a list of merchants discovered at Ugarit and the Egyptian Merneptah Stele (1997a: 408–9). Rainey (1996a) and Na'aman (1999), studying these and other documents, identified Canaan with the western Asiatic province administered by Egypt in the Late Bronze Age (Na'aman 1994a: 408; 1999: 36). They concluded (*contra* Lemche 1991) that Late Bronze Age peoples throughout the Near East were aware of

an entity called Canaan, one with specific and well-known geographic boundaries (Rainey 1996a: fig. 1). “The phantom of the ‘Great Canaan’ should disappear from the scholarly literature” (Na’aman 1999: 36).

In the biblical imagination, Canaan was the Promised Land, its boundaries remembered in the Iron Age as indicated by Num 34:1–12 (and reiterated in Ezek 47:15–20, *inter alia*).² The northern border of Moses’ Canaan, described in Num 34: 7–11, corresponded to the linguistic division between the northern (Akkadian) and southern (West Semitic) dialects of the Bronze Age (Rainey 1996a: 11–12). Additional passages further delineated the territory, which scribes also described by reference to the six, seven or ten pre-Israelite nations living within it. These included in somewhat varying combinations Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Rephaim and Girgashites (Gen 15:19–21; Ex 3:8; Deut 7:1; Josh 3:10; Josh 9:1–2; Judg 3:5, *inter alia*).³ The different groupings can be understood by reference to three critical concepts: the land promised to Abraham, the land of Canaan to be taken by Israel and the land of Israel as known from the United Monarchy. The boundaries of the Promised Land were related to the territory that New Kingdom Egypt dominated in western Asia. That this Promised Land was greater than the land of Canaan reflects the fact that it included territory to be settled by Abraham’s non-Israelite descendants as well. The repetitive delineation of territory in many biblical texts suggests its importance for Israelite historiography and for the Israelite scribal tradition (Kallai 1997).

The problem of defining Canaan is not limited to geographical issues; we must also grapple with the vocabulary of culture. In particular clarification of the ethnic marker “Canaanite” is important. Modern scholars often use Canaanite in a broad sense to describe the cultural continuum of third–second millennium peoples living in Syria-Palestine (western Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Entity), even though in antiquity this large area was never a single cultural or political unit (Pitard 1998: 40; Hackett 1997b: 411).

Modern scholars often identify Canaanites with the Amorites, originally semi-nomadic Semitic-speaking people who entered eastern Syria and northern Iraq in the late third and early second millennia (Knapp 1988: 130–31, 169). This “ethnolinguistic group” can most often be recognized in Middle Bronze Age texts when scribes affixed *MAR.TU* or *amurrû* to personal or tribal names, but sometimes these

terms referred to westerners in general and not specifically to Amorites (Whiting 1995: 1231–32). Their move southwest through Syria and into Canaan sparked the cultural resurgence of its Canaanite MB II (Dever 1976b: 12; 1977: 84–87; see also Hackett 1997b: 409–10).⁴ The Bible’s claim for genealogical ties between Canaanites and Amorites (Gen 10:16) and its occasional identification of Amorites rather than Canaanites as the people who occupied the Promised Land (Gen 10:16; Judg 6:20) seem to support this claim of shared origins.

Texts demonstrate that the Canaanites were aware of their identity as Canaanites, and that peoples elsewhere in the ancient Near East shared this awareness (Hackett 1997b). Their self-identification indicates that they thought of themselves as separate from the people of Ugarit (Rainey 1996a: 5; 1996b: 71), creating challenges for those who use Ugaritic texts to discuss Canaanite religion. Even so, Ugaritic texts almost always provide the essential datum for describing Canaanite religion because, “while the Ugaritians distinguished themselves from Canaanites, Ugaritic religious literature has enough links with later biblical literature to place Ugarit on a cultural continuum with Canaan. The copious amounts of material from Ugarit may, then, suggest what LB Canaanite religion was like” (Hackett 1997b: 413; see also Schaeffer 1939: 57–60; Coogan 1978: 9–10; Day 1992: 831–32).⁵

Several issues thus require resolution. One is geographic: Canaan will be used to refer to the Bronze Age territory extending from central Lebanon to Israel’s desert region, and from the Jordan Valley to the Mediterranean. Another is ethnic: Canaanite will be used to refer to those city-state residents who identified themselves with the appellation Canaanite. However, “citizenship” in the Bronze Age was claimed not only by reference to urban conglomerates but also to tribal or clan affiliation, and so Canaanite might not have been a meaningful term of self-identity for all people. The last is cultural: inasmuch as the residents of the city-states of Syria, including Ebla, Mari, Alalakh and Ugarit, shared elements of religion, architecture, language and material culture with those of Canaan, the term Syro-Canaanite will be used to describe this rather broad cultural continuum.⁶

A REVIEW OF PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

To understand the importance of a study of Canaanite and Israelite religions that focuses upon their socio-political dimensions, it is

necessary to review previous scholarly approaches. A brief survey of the literature demonstrates the critical need for a study that utilizes archaeological data as its basic resource, and that considers the place of religion in the social, political and economic world of ancient Canaan and Israel.

In the past, much archaeological work was motivated by an interest in biblical religion, and it viewed Israelite religion as a precursor for Christian faith.⁷ While there have always been secularists within the scholarly community, the overall preoccupation has been with the theological components of pre-Christian religions.⁸

In general, questions about the archaeological corpus from the Bronze and Iron Ages have been limited to biblical issues. They have included establishing the historicity of the patriarchs as it might be known from studying the Middle Bronze Age, the exodus from Egypt and the desert wanderings as they might be known from studying Late Bronze Age sites in the Sinai and Negev Deserts and in Transjordan, the conquest of Canaan as it might be known from studying the destruction of Late Bronze Age Canaanite cities, the emergence of Israel through the study of purportedly Israelite settlements in the Iron Age I and the nature of the Israelite monarchy through the study of biblically identified Iron Age II sites.

Traditionally, studies of Canaanite and Israelite religions have been dictated by the biblical texts and they have commonly explored the relationship between them, the degree to which the latter developed out of the former, the point at which monotheism became a part of Israelite religion, and the prevalence of so-called syncretistic tendencies among the Israelite population. Conclusions were commonly based on textual evidence, sporadically supplemented by artifactual data. Scholarly biases are often apparent.⁹ One result of this focus on biblical elements has been the perception of archaeology as a means of retrieving written documents while architectural and artifactual data have often been neglected. These factors, combined with the ever-growing body of archaeological data, make this study of Canaanite and Israelite religions and their place within society both timely and critical.

Scholarly approaches to the use of archaeology for the study of ancient Canaanite and Israelite religions were established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Despite significant advances in the field of archaeology, the conventions established during this era shaped scholarship for much of the twentieth century.

A number of early scholars noted the potential of archaeology for illuminating the culture of the ancient Israelites (Kittel 1895; 1896; Driver 1909; Cook 1908; 1930). Particularly significant are ideas developed by subsequent researchers, including the description of the early roots of Israelite religion as grounded in Canaanite thought, the distinction between the popular and the so-called higher religion of the Israelite people and the increased awareness of Israelite culture as grounded in the cultures of surrounding peoples.

In this period, Hancock proffered the claim that archaeology did not alter the picture drawn by the Bible (1916). The assertion that archaeology only confirmed the validity of biblical texts, but was otherwise not helpful for studying ancient Israel was often repeated. Increasingly, scholars paid lip service to the value of archaeology while ignoring the contribution of its physical evidence.

Additional obstacles to the full utilization of archaeological data included the difficulty in accessing inadequately processed and reported excavation materials (Robinson 1932: vii) and the negative evaluation of these materials by some excavators.¹⁰ In the light of such obstacles, it is not surprising that most scholars turned their attention to texts.

An important model that shaped the study of Canaanite and Israelite religions came from the developing field of comparative religious studies. Frazer used ethnographic studies of extant religions in his examination of ancient religious texts and employed an evolutionary model in which societies progressed from savagery to a high plane of moral and religious development. Over time, societies went through three phases, magic, religion and science, the last of which was considered superior (1919; 1925).

The growing importance of comparative religious studies and of studies in cultural patterning laid the groundwork for the “myth-and-ritual” approach to Near Eastern religions. Myths and rituals were understood to have been part of a widespread pattern of ancient Near Eastern religious thought and behavior (Hooke, ed. 1933; Hooke 1938). Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Canaanite and biblical texts were all used to reconstruct ancient religious rituals. The focus was on liturgy, worship, cult and ritual rather than on dogma or belief (Mowinckel 1946; Mowinckel in Sheehan 1981). Biblical folklore was considered the residue of what Israel had inherited from its neighbors, while Israel’s customs and superstitions were understood as reinterpretations of those customs and superstitions popular among the neighboring nations (Gaster 1950; 1969).

While significant for exploring Canaanite and Israelite religions within a larger Near Eastern context, this cross-cultural approach employed generalization at the cost of specificity. With setting ignored, accuracy was undermined. The focus on text precluded an understanding of context. Questions relating to cultural specifics were not explored.

In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim described religion as a social fact, a collective group experience. It was therefore not something determined by individual choice (1915). The sociologists' study of religion through the examination of the social group often utilized a linear, evolutionary approach, one that depicted the development of religion from a prelogical, primitive mentality to one more evolved, ethical, rational and individualistic (Causse in Kimbrough 1978).

While many scholars in the first part of the twentieth century did not seriously use archaeological data to study ancient Israelite religion, Graham and May (the latter a director of the Megiddo excavations) took a different approach. In *Culture and Conscience: An Archaeological Study of the New Religious Past in Ancient Palestine*, they sought to demonstrate that a careful study of material remains not only provided information concerning religious activities and rituals but also revealed insights into the spiritual dimensions of religion (1936). They examined religions from the Paleolithic through the Iron Age by reference to archaeological data and although restricted by their evolutionary approach, their utilization of archaeology to study ancient religions provided a scholarly balance and foreshadowed future developments.

Working similarly, Pritchard classified the known corpus of ceramic female figurines and used information from the Bible and other ancient texts to identify them by name (1943). In his opinion, archaeology provided "a vantage point that is completely independent of the written text for viewing the events and the cultic practices described in the many-stranded and often-revised tradition preserved finally in the biblical text" (1965: 323).

In the United States, the giant in archaeology and biblical studies for nearly half a century was W. F. Albright. In *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process* (1940), Albright laid the foundations for much of his later work. This book described the evolutionary growth of man's idea of God. In it, paganism was part of the divine preparation for Christianity. While acknowledging that information about Canaanite religion was important for understanding

that of Israel, Albright insisted that the earliest roots of Israelite religion were not West Semitic and, most importantly, that there was a decisive break between the Canaanite Late Bronze Age and the Israelite Iron Age I.

In later works, Albright reiterated his belief in the New Testament as fulfillment of the Old. It is therefore not surprising that his analysis placed biblical theology at a great distance from its putative pagan or “prelogical” roots. In addition, he further developed the theme that archaeology proves the historicity of the Bible (1942; 1954; 1960; 1963; 1968).

Albright’s reliance on texts to the virtual exclusion of other material culture remains is surprising, because he had engaged in field research in Palestine since his arrival there late in 1919. Indeed, his excavation at Tell Beit Mirsim in the 1930’s was a landmark project and his site report noteworthy for its inclusion of an innovative ceramic study (1943).

Albright’s influence over his students and over the scholars with whom he had contact at the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem and elsewhere, was enormous. While European scholarship remained concerned with theoretical issues, in the United States excavation materials, when considered, were often used as proof of biblical accuracy. While scholars differed over the degree to which Israelite religion was indebted to that of the Canaanites, they generally accepted an evolutionary perspective. In this view, Canaanites had been engaged in primitive and pagan rites but, by the time of the prophets, Israelite religion had evolved into a morally and ethically superior faith. Thus, New Testament Christianity was shielded from the contaminants of a pagan past (Burrows 1941; McCown 1943).¹¹ Biblical scholars drawn from the ranks of the Protestant ministry increasingly dominated archaeology in the United States, a fact that contributed to the growth of this critical approach (Dever 1974).

G. E. Wright took issue with Albright’s contention that archaeology functioned to prove the correctness of the biblical texts. He maintained instead that it provided the background for biblical studies (1960). “Archaeology in the biblical world covers virtually every ancient period. While in my judgment it is not an independent discipline, it is nevertheless a primary research arm of the historian of human culture and of human events” (1971: 167). Like those of Albright, Wright’s analyses relied primarily on textual data.¹²

European archaeologists challenged the popular notion that Palestinian archaeology should be considered a branch of biblical studies. In Great Britain, Wheeler's insistence on scientific field work and analysis led him to describe Palestine as "that land of archaeological sin," the place "where more sins have probably been committed in the name of archaeology than on any commensurate portion of the earth's surface" (1954: 16, 84).

Dutch archaeologists Franken and Franken-Battershill suggested that archaeology in Palestine be considered a complementary and independent discipline and challenged archaeologists to accept the standards of the social sciences in their fieldwork and analysis. Echoing Graham and May's earlier work on religion and cult, they suggested that "though of necessity excavators deal with material rather than spiritual evidence, there is no reason why a minutely detailed study of certain material remains should not yield evidence of certain spiritual traits, practices or taboos" (1963: 143)

In the preface to *A Primer of Old Testament Archaeology*, K. Kenyon wrote,

archaeology does not claim to be a discipline on its own. It is rather, today, a very highly specialised method of supplementing history in the very broadest sense. This widening of the term history concerns the periods for which there are none of the written records upon which history in the broadest sense depends, for which archaeology in effect writes the history; in a more exactly supplementary sense, archaeology provides a background for history in dealing with those periods for which some written records are available (1963: xv).

She reiterated the idea that "to the Bible the material remains revealed and interpreted by archaeology provide a background" (Kenyon 1978: 99; so too, Lapp 1969).

In *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, the French archaeologist de Vaux wrote that "archaeology, in the strict sense, *i.e.*, the study of the material remains of the past, is only an auxiliary science, which helps us to reconstruct the actual setting in which the institutions functioned" (1961: viii; see also 1970). In this way, de Vaux emphasized

Israelite society and its various religious, political, legal and even familial institutions.

At the same time Americans, even those with archaeological field experience, continued to view archaeology as a sort of biblical corrective, confirming biblical narratives or enriching understanding of the biblical text (Glueck 1960; Freedman 1965; Callaway 1966). They had yet to view their subject as “Israel” and to see both Bible and archaeology as independent interpretive tools for investigating its culture, history and religion.

In Israel, the archaeological survey was becoming increasingly important (Aharoni 1957; 1970; Glueck 1960). Aharoni pioneered the regional archaeological survey as a tool for evaluating biblical narratives. He focussed on the problem of Israelite settlement in Canaan and he developed a research design that enabled him to collect archaeological data relevant to this particular question (1957; 1970). Overall, the questions in regional surveys and in contemporary excavation projects (see, e.g., Yadin 1958; 1972) remained biblical. Yeivin described a reciprocal relationship between the Bible and archaeology; each helped in interpreting the other (1966). His inclination was to assign secular functions to possibly sacred materials (1973), a corrective against those overly eager to find cultic explanations for virtually any object or building.

Several important works by anthropologists appeared at this time. In his article, “Religion as a Cultural System,” Geertz suggested two stages for an anthropological analysis of religion (1969). The first required the analysis of systems of meanings as embodied in religious symbols while the second related these systems of meaning to social-structural and psychological processes. Archaeology has the potential to recover symbols, to advance from descriptive to systemic analysis and to correlate different types of systems and processes. The idea of using symbols to discover social structure was important, as was the idea of emphasizing process over stasis. Carefully constructed research designs (see Clarke 1968) can further these goals.

Beginning in the 1970s, Dever developed these ideas within the context of Syria-Palestine, stating that the goal of archaeology is to recover material culture, from which patterns of thought, belief and behavior can be reconstructed. Archaeological artifacts must be the primary sources for study; the Bible, secondary (1971; 1974).

In the same decade, a growing number of archaeologists used

architectural and artifactual data to study Canaanite and Israelite religions. Analyses centered on Canaanite religion (Negbi 1976; Herzog 1980; Tadmor 1982), on Bronze/Iron Age cultural continuity (Negbi 1976), and on the effect of external influences (or the lack thereof) on the formation and development of Israelite religion (Giveon 1978; Shiloh 1979; Tadmor 1982). Less frequent were discussions of Israelite cult (C. L. Meyers 1976) and of the relationship between the “official” Jerusalemite religion described in the Bible and the “folk” religion of other members of the Israelite population. Questions about theology and about socio-political aspects of religion were sometimes raised.

Site reports continued to include traditional descriptions of pottery, architecture, small finds and epigraphic materials. Now they also incorporated technical descriptions, comparative analyses and locational analyses, as well as data on ethnography, demography, settlement patterns, agriculture and faunal remains (Stern 1984; Finkelstein 1988).

Increasingly, explicit criteria were applied to archaeological studies of ancient religion. Renfrew developed a methodology for analyzing excavated materials from sacred sites and applied it to his excavation of the Late Bronze Age sanctuary at the Aegean site of Phylakopi (1985; and see chapter 4). Similarly, Dever demonstrated archaeology’s potential for illuminating of the cult of ancient Israel (1983). Archaeologists could penetrate beyond literary traditions to retrieve information about Israelite religious practices by utilizing the methodology of the “New Archaeology”¹³ and by emphasizing the independent, external value of artifactual data over and above the subjective witness of textual evidence. Analysis of this information increases the capacity for writing social and economic histories and thus for reconstructing the background for biblical accounts (Dever 1987a; 1991).

Holladay used archaeological data as the primary resource for his analysis of Israelite and Judaeon religion. His discussion of these data assumed that religious activities are patterned and therefore apparent in the archaeological record. An “historically informed hypothetical model of religious organization in a typical Syro-Palestinian national state of the Iron II period” provided a conceptual framework for the many divergent facts (1987: 251). The collected data were evaluated in relationship to the proposed model.

D. N. Freedman wrote pessimistically about the potential for archaeology to contribute to biblical studies. He claimed that “the

combination of the Bible and archaeology is somewhat artificial; the two have not really matched up very well” (1985: 6). Therefore, in his opinion, texts should provide the primary source of information about ancient religions (see also Haran 1978).

However, as will be demonstrated, an approach that integrates social science studies with archaeological and textual investigations can be most productive (see Meyers and Meyers 1989). Recent studies (including some mentioned above) have demonstrated the enormous potential that carefully controlled archaeological analysis and synthesis have for expanding our knowledge of religion in Canaan and Israel. That ancient religion was a reflection of politics, of economics and of social structure—and not just a matter of rituals and belief systems—makes recourse to archaeology all the more important.

SUMMARY

New questions designed to exploit the potential of archaeology must be raised. In the past, the agenda for studying ancient Near Eastern religions was set by reference to biblical texts. This approach was flawed because it denied the independent witness of material evidence and because it failed to acknowledge that this evidence was often much closer in time and in space to the peoples explored than are the generally late and purposefully biased texts which comprise the Hebrew Bible.

Most studies of ancient religion failed to incorporate the extremely diversified corpus of archaeological resources, although it contains information invaluable for reconstructing the religions of ancient Canaan and Israel. Inasmuch as the ancient texts represent only several of the many strands of religious behaviors and beliefs in Canaan and Israel, archaeology is indispensable for the study of Canaanite and Israelite religions from very important perspectives such as those of society, politics and economy.

NOTES

¹ Schiemann’s comments are to the point:

It is our contention that an archaeology based on rigorous recovery and recording procedures bears the greatest promise to provide new information related to an organismic view of the ancient West

Semitic religious life. Otherwise we seem to be stuck with a literary-dominated and therefore lopsided and static concept of this religious heritage, to which archaeology continues to add an example of this or that but essentially would not be missed if it were absent (1978: 136).

² In the HB, the earliest (although not the first) reference to Canaan is found in Judg 5: 19, in the description of Deborah and Barak's battle with the "kings of Canaan at Tanaach."

³ The genealogy of Canaan, described in Gen 10:15–20, included additional groups among these descendants of Noah.

⁴ At the same time, Canaanite culture of the Middle Bronze Age incorporated many indigenous and traditional elements, thus evincing continuity with its Early Bronze Age predecessor (Dever 1977: 82–84; A. Mazar 1990a: 104–5).

⁵ Rainey cautioned that "Ugaritic tradition, Phoenician tradition and Israelite tradition, though sharing a common world of imagery, are not the same" (1996b: 71).

⁶ The direct relevance of Ugaritic texts for the study of biblical religion must be questioned. The culture of Israel, religious and other, developed from Late Bronze Age traditions, and so Syro-Canaanite religion had an impact upon that of Iron Age Israel. However, while the religion of Ugarit illuminates Syro-Canaanite religious belief and practice, no explicit connection between LBA Ugarit and biblical authors can be documented. Studies of biblical poetry suggest some early parallels (Cross 1973: 112–44), but it may turn out that they would be better correlated with Canaanite city-states such as Hazor and Megiddo. It was, after all, these (and similar) city-states from which many Israelites originated. Excavators at these sites expect to uncover palace and temple archives, and when that happens, the transmission of Canaanite religious traditions to the people of Israel will be better understood (see, e.g., Ben-Tor 1997c: 124–26; 1999a: 2*–3*; see also Rainey 1965: 125).

⁷ See, e.g., Albright 1940 and McCown 1943.

⁸ See, e.g., Gray 1962; Fohrer 1972; Freedman 1985.

⁹ See, e.g., Bright (1972: 116): "Canaanite religion ... presents us with no pretty picture. It was, in fact, an extraordinarily debasing form of paganism, specifically of the fertility cult."

¹⁰ In *A Century of Excavation in Palestine*, R. A. S. Macalister, director of the large and prestigious excavation at Tel Gezer, described many types of archaeological evidence and incorporated studies of topography, political history, cultural history and ethnography (1925). While this might seem ideal, his negative and judgmental approach to the excavated data was discouraging.

For example, of the excavator working in Palestine Macalister wrote: "He

must be content to turn over, month after month, the sordid relics of a sordid people, only occasionally striking a spark of excitement from them” (1925: 208). Regarding the excavated cultures: “It is no exaggeration to say that throughout these long centuries the native inhabitants of Palestine do not appear to have made a single contribution of any kind whatsoever to material civilisation. It was perhaps the most unprogressive country on the face of the earth. Its entire culture was derivative” (1925: 210).

¹¹ This perspective was not limited to Protestants. Y. Kaufmann, an Israeli Jewish scholar claimed that Israelite religion bore no relation to those of the surrounding cultures, despite vestigial pagan superstitions surviving in Israelite cult (1960).

¹² Rowley 1946; Gordon 1953; Orlinsky 1954; Pfeiffer 1961; Gray 1962; Habel 1964; Hahn 1966; Krauss 1966; Ringgren 1966; Segert 1967; Vriezen 1967; Orlinsky 1972.

¹³ The “New Archaeology” movement of the 1980s, a movement developed by archaeologists in the United States, challenged excavators to: (1) consider social systems; (2) understand the processes behind the formation of archaeological remains; and (3) base their work upon commonly accepted scientific principles including the development of research designs prior to excavating (see Dever 1983; 1988; and references in both).

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

As we saw in Chapter One, one of the weaknesses of most studies of the religions of Canaan and Israel has been their tendency to remain focussed within individual academic disciplines. Textual scholars have traditionally ignored the witness of the physical world and archaeologists have often resorted to texts only when challenged by conflicting material evidence. Advances in related fields (including prehistory, archaeology in Europe and the Americas, sociology and anthropology)¹ have been infrequently utilized, despite the fact that they can contribute positively to the study of religion in Canaan and Israel.

If we are to consider Canaanite religion as other than a series of arcane religious rites, if we are to consider Israelite religion as anything other than the precursor of contemporary faiths, and if we are ever to understand the fundamental roles played by these ancient religions within their own societies, then we must look beyond text-and-archaeology and explore the “outside world.”

Possibilities abound. One is challenged by an awareness of the fundamental differences in critical method between social scientists and scholars of religion. According to F. Reynolds, these differences include: 1) the concentration of anthropologists on ethnographic studies of “non-literate,” “tribal,” “folk” or “village” traditions while scholars of religion focus on “classical” or “modern” forms of religion as expressed in literate traditions, and 2) the concentration of anthropologists on religion as an element of culture or society while scholars of religion focus on religion as religion (1984: 2–3).

Over the past century and more, the study of sacrifice has served anthropologists and sociologists as a conduit to the sacred world at large. Sacrificial rites, and teachings about them, have provided a means

of discussing the social structure and the belief systems of those groups that engage in this ritual act. Analyses of sacrifice have become arenas in which theories of social behavior can be presented and tested. An increased awareness of how the study of sacrifice has promoted our understanding of other societies contributes to our task at hand: an exploration of the roles of religion in Canaan and Israel.² These two factors, the resources presented by ethnographies, and the insights into the relationship between sacrifice and social structure, enable a study of sacrifice based in anthropology and sociology to present a spectrum of insights not easily accessible through traditional textual and archaeological studies.

SOCIAL SCIENCES APPROACHES TO SACRIFICE

The origins of sacrifice are too couched in mystery to be clear to us in the modern world. However, several four-part schemata explaining its institutionalization have been proposed. One approaches sacrifice from a phenomenological stance:

1. Sacrifice as a gift which should be followed by a return gift ...
2. Sacrifice as parting with something of one's own for the benefit of another ...
3. Sacrifice as the repetition of a primordial event ...
4. Sacrifice as a form of symbolic sanctification ... (van Baaren 1964: 1–2).

An alternative schema summarizes anthropological contributions to the study of sacrifice. Sacrifice is understood “(1) to provide food for the god ...; (2) to assimilate the life force of the sacrificial animal ...; (3) to effect union with the deity ...; (4) a gift to induce the aid of the deity ...” (Milgrom 1981: 764). These concepts will be explored in the following review of approaches to sacrifice as a form of social behavior.

Frazer's multi-volume *The Golden Bough*, first published in 1919, is a comparative collection of folktales and mythologies. In his evolutionary scheme, primitive peoples depended upon magic until they realized that it was not a successful means of manipulating their environments. Religion then developed, in order to place the whimsicality of the world into the hands of others (i.e., gods). Science, like magic, was based upon the belief that the world could be successfully understood and manipulated (Anderson 1987: 6–7).

Sacrifice, in Frazer's opinion, developed from magical practices. The king or tribal chief was believed to have sacred or divine powers that assured the tribe's well-being. As the ruler aged, these powers diminished, thus jeopardizing tribal well-being. To forestall complete disaster, the king was made a scapegoat and sacrificed, thereby removing his weakness from the tribe. The subsequent installation of a new king rejuvenated both monarch and deity (1925; Faherty 1974: 129).

Nowadays, social scientists disregard elements of Frazer's work on account of its inaccurate and overly general comparisons and its use of now disfavored models. In its time however, Frazer's formulation of the death and rebirth of the divine king made a significant contribution to the study of ancient Near Eastern religions, particularly among Scandinavian and British "myth-and-ritual" scholars of the mid-twentieth century.

In his 1871 book entitled *Primitive Sacrifice*, E. B. Tylor developed the idea that sacrifice was a gift to the gods, intended to minimize hostility and to secure divine good favor. Over time, the concept of sacrifice developed into homage and finally into emotional self-sacrifice (Faherty 1974: 129). As used by Tylor and other anthropologists, the term "gift" carried with it an "element of exchange." An offering made to a god would be reciprocated by the granting of the god's good favors to the supplicant. This assumes a working relationship between deity and worshipper (Bourdillon 1980: 18). Many of Tylor's theories have been disproved, but his equating of sacrifice with gift has been of enduring significance.

G. Gray was a biblical scholar influenced by Tylor's definition of sacrifice. In his 1925 *Sacrifice in the Old Testament: Its Theory and Practice*, he analyzed cultic terminology in the Bible, identifying sacrifice as a gift or tribute. He suggested that, *inter alia*, עֲבֹדָה ('*āvôdâ*), the basic term for religious worship, and מִנְחָה (*minḥâ*), commonly translated as grain offering, derived from the vocabulary of vassaldom and treaty relations. From this Gray concluded that in the Bible, sacrifice was a gift intended to elicit life, sustenance and protection from the gods (Levine 1971: xxviii–xxxiii). B. Levine summarized Gray's contribution: "The terminology thus suggests the servant-lord relationship as that which underlies the sense of sacrifice as gift or tribute. It is the orientation of needs, relative to power, which explains the dynamics of cultic activity" (1971: xxx).

Levine, likewise concerned with cultic terminology and with the concept of biblical sacrifice, concurred with Tylor and Gray:

The evidence is mounting in support of the gift theory. That is not to say that any unitary conception can account for all the phenomena, for the entire gamut of experiences that were embodied in Israelite ritual. What we are discussing is an organizing principle, on the basis of which we can accurately view all the diverse factors involved in cultic activity in their proper perspective. As an organizing principle, the proposition that the God of Israel desired the sacrifices of his people as a form of tribute to him as their sovereign, in return for which he would grant them the blessings of life, seems to convey the theory of Israelite sacrifice (1971c: xxxi–xxxli).

More recently, G. Anderson advocated the sacrifice-as-gift theory (1987). Like Gray, Anderson studied biblical terminology but his goal was to isolate vocabulary indicative of the social functions of the Israelite cult. For instance he compared the development of the words מנחה and שׁ (šay), both of which mean “gift” in the original Northwest Semitic. Within the context of local dialects, these secular words had come to have special cultic meanings. The cultic meaning which שׁ had in the Canaanite Late Bronze Age, as demonstrated by *ostraca* from Lachish, was never replicated in the HB. Alternately, מנחה developed a dual meaning in Hebrew, one in which the intersection of the political and cultic spheres of the Israelite world was illustrated. According to Anderson, this process of specialization and classification of religious vocabulary was typical to all cultic centers in the ancient Near East (1987: 53–54).

Beidelman cautioned that while sacrifice can be conceived of as gift, one must avoid a simplistic view of what was involved in reciprocity (1987: 547–48). In his analysis of the social and political dimensions of Israelite sacrifice, Anderson did not limit his presentation of sacrifice to the confines of the gift theory. Rather, he examined “those places where it [sacrifice] intersects with social and political history” (1987: 24; see also 1992b).

An interesting discussion of the distinction between gift and sacrifice is found in Georgoudi's ethnographic description of the modern Greek *kourbânia*. Although disavowed by high-ranking Greek Orthodox clergy, these animal sacrifices nonetheless receive the approbation of local religious authorities in a number of Greek villages. This is in part because distributing meat to the poor is seen as an exemplary act of Christian charity. Within the framework of sacrifice, this act acquires the devout of any debt to the saint to whom the sacrifice is made. Georgoudi concluded that "if church canons did not truly succeed in establishing a distinction between *gifts* offered to the church and clergy, which were permitted and even recommended, and *sacrifices*, which were constantly forbidden, it is undoubtedly because these things were organically linked in everyday practice" (1989: 201).

In *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, first published in 1889, Robertson Smith attempted to determine the nature of ancient Israelite sacrifice by studying the religious rituals of pre-Islamic Arabian tribes. He assumed that Israel was initially composed of kin-based tribes; their religion metamorphosed as they settled down within the urban world of Canaan. Although his ideas were based on many now-discounted theories, several of his "fundamental theoretical positions" are of enduring importance (Yoffee 1978: 309–10).

Among these is Robertson Smith's observation that sacred offerings were collected and distributed differently in tribal groups and in state polities (Anderson 1987: 23). Therefore, the form that religious rituals took in any society was to a great degree determined by that society's social structure. The enactment of sacrificial rituals must be connected with the social group practicing those rituals.³ Religious practice was viewed from an ideational perspective as well as from a sociological one. Rituals symbolizing social organization were understood to express the organization's most fundamental beliefs (Hahn 1966: 49; see also Leach 1985; Douglas 1975).

Another of Robertson Smith's contributions was his idea that sacrifice was an act of communion, essential because it provided a forum in which clans joined together for sacral meals. Spiritual unification between a social group and its god was effected through the sharing of a sacred feast. In this, he was at odds with Tylor and others who thought the first purpose of sacrifice was as gift and tribute. He believed that gift and tribute sacrifices developed after the sacrifice for the commensal meal (Beidelman 1974: 54–56).

According to Robertson Smith, an additional dimension of sacrifice was piacular. Atonement for inappropriate acts was made through the enactment of sacrificial rituals that sought to reestablish harmony between a community and its god. The ingestion of the supernatural thus provided a forum for expiation as well as for renewed solidarity between deity and social group (de Vos and Suarez-Orozco 1987: 318).

Robertson Smith's discussion of sacrifice was based upon the theory of "survivals." This theory claimed that certain "functionless crude or superstitious elements of belief or custom ... found in civilized societies" were "fossilized remains, so to speak, of a time when the whole society had lived at the cruder level of culture suggested by these survivals" (Rogerson 1978: 23).⁴

Several of Robertson Smith's ideas have had a profound effect on the study of Israelite origins. These include his assumption of an analogous relationship between Arabian nomads and ancient Israelites, and his description of a two-phase process of Israelite development, during which tribes advanced from their original nomadic configuration to become settled urban dwellers.⁵ However because his work was based upon theories of evolutionary development and of "survivals," theories no longer considered accurate ways of discussing social change (Beidelman 1974: 51),⁶ Robertson Smith's conclusions have been called into question. For example in his study of the biblical vocabulary for non-Levitical sacrifice, Thompson argued that Robertson Smith incorrectly assessed the purpose of the commensal meal for pre-exilic Israel. Rather than a forum for joyous sharing, sacrifice was a time of solemnity best explained by notions of expiation and propitiation (1963: 249).

Recently however, some ethnographers examining modern-day sacrificial rituals have found evidence that supports at least some of Robertson Smith's earlier hypotheses. The Buid live in the mountains on the Philippine island of Mindoro. In the sacrifice called *fanurukan*, pigs are used to "establish a relationship of contiguity between the human and spirit worlds" (Gibson 1986: 182). As part of this ritual, the sharing of a sacral meal unites god and worshippers and binds members of the community in an act of fellowship (Gibson 1986: 183).

Among those Greek Orthodox villagers practicing *kourbânia*,

the dominant element, which gives neo-Greek sacrifice its own physiognomy, is displayed ... in

the communication among men established by the common meal, in the strong bonds created by the “common table” among the diners, whether they belong to one or several communities. Their equal sharing of the same blessed fleshly food makes all of them equally the beneficiaries of the boons requested in the prayers. The importance of this element emerges in the cooking of the meat and the ways it is distributed (Georgoudi 1989: 199).

It is clear that the creation of a sense of fellowship among worshippers must be considered a major component of the communal sacrificial meal.

In *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, originally published in 1898, Hubert and Mauss described religion as a social phenomenon (1964). Its rites were designed to propitiate the gods and to further the interests of the social group. Unlike Tylor and Robertson Smith, Hubert and Mauss did not relate the various forms of sacrifice to an evolutionary model, but rather to a primitive, magical mode of thought designed to constrain the invisible powers (Hahn 1966: 61–62). Sacrifice created communion between the sacred and the profane.⁷ “The gifts presented to the gods established a system of communication in which trust and reciprocity could be built” (de Vos and Suarez-Orozco 1987: 321). As such, sacrificial offerings mediated between men and gods.

Hubert and Mauss discussed rites of sacralization and desacralization, in which the worshipper sacrificed in order to enter into or exit from an especially potent state (1964). This conceptualization has been further refined:

- 1) Sacrifice to obtain or maintain closer contact with God or with other individual spirits.
- 2) Sacrifice to achieve some degree of separation from such spirits.
- 3) Sacrifice to acquire for the sacrificer (or for the person sacrificed for) an increase, or input, of non-personalized “power.”
- 4) Sacrifice to achieve separation from, or the removal of, such diffuse force or power (Beattie 1980: 38–39).

A recent study of the biblical חַטָּאת (*ḥattāt*), traditionally translated as “sin offering,” capitalizes upon these insights. The חַטָּאת, part of a system of rites of passage, was understood to separate the sacrificer

from his previous condition. The עֹלָה (*olâ*) or burnt offering, on the other hand, aggregated the sacrificer to his new or renewed state. In a similar fashion, these rites of passage would “guarantee the regular alternation of times and seasons and, at the turn of the year ... regenerate the territory” (Marx 1989: 27), thereby re-establishing a once-lost *status quo* for an individual or for an entire community.

Although Durkheim did not specifically treat the ritual of sacrifice in *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915), his study of religion provided a foundation upon which many subsequent analyses were based. In his assertion that religion was a social “fact,” Durkheim elaborated upon the best contribution of Robertson Smith, the idea that the structure of a society determined the form of its religious rituals.⁸ Like Hubert and Mauss, Durkheim emphasized societal aspects of religion.

In equating religion with other social “facts” such as law, economy and the social group, Durkheim developed the idea that religious practice was part of a larger system and that the ways in which it functioned reflected the operation of the system as a whole. Religious practice was thought to always be a group experience. As such, it lacked meaning for the individual apart from his social unit (Hahn 1966: 60; Wilson 1984: 16).

Later anthropologists focussed upon these insights into the relationship between religion and social structure. Like Tylor and Frazer, Evans-Pritchard posited that religion derived as a response to basic questions about life (Morris 1987: 300). However, he avoided formulating laws by means of which all types of sacrifice could be classified but instead he “stressed the need to create a dialogue between anthropology and historical understanding” (Morris 1987: 188–89).

In *Nuer Religion*, Evans-Pritchard isolated two forms of sacrifice among the Nuer, a cattle herding Sudanese tribe. One was concerned primarily with social relations and the other with the moral and physical welfare of the individual. It was the latter sacrifice, the personal and the piacular, which concerned him (1956: 272). Evans-Pritchard related sacrifice to particular needs within the structure of Nuer society. He addressed the ways in which religious thought bore the general impressions of the social order while dismissing those such as Robertson Smith, Durkheim, Hubert and Mauss who related specific features of religion to social structure (Morris 1987: 198, 313).

According to Evans-Pritchard, the basic mechanism behind the

piacular sacrifice of the Nuer was substitution, different elements of which were emphasized variously depending upon the circumstance. “According to the situation and particular purpose one element in this complex of meaning may be stressed in one rite and another element in another rite, or there are shifts in emphasis from one part of the sacrificial rite to another” (Morris 1987: 282). Therefore, a multiplicity of variables had to be considered in any discussion of religious rites or theological tenets. There are “rather different ways of thinking of the numinous at different levels of experience. We found these different ways of thinking reflected in the complex notions involved in sacrifice” (Morris 1987: 316). Religion, and especially sacrificial rites, must be understood as originating from within the structure of individual societies.

In his investigation of the way sacrifices were collected and used by the Israelite community, Anderson considers the ritual life of a society to be embedded within its social structure. Anderson’s approach has benefited by an increasingly sophisticated understanding of Israelite origins, one that has challenged the traditional nomad-to-urbanite model. If there were no longer a sharp historical division between tribal and urban Israel, then the זָבַח (*zēbah*) could no longer be considered the sacrifice of nomads and the מִנְחָה the sacrifice of the urban dweller. Rather, any interpretation of these sacrifices must accommodate new understandings of the ways in which ancient Israel was constituted (Anderson 1987: 23–24).

Detienne describes the inextricable connection between sacrifice and the socio-political order in classical Greece. He points to

the first characteristic that justifies the central place of the blood sacrifice in Greek social and religious thought: the absolute coincidence of meat-eating and sacrificial practice But sacrifice derives its importance from another function, which reinforces the first: the necessary relationship between the exercise of social relatedness on all *political* levels within the system the Greeks call the city. Political power cannot be exercised without sacrificial practice (Detienne 1989: 3).

This, then, expresses “the solidarity between the domain of the political and that of the sacrificial” (Detienne 1989: 3). The link between

classical Greek sacrifice and the socio-political order was demonstrated by the Pythagorean and Orphic schools, which adopted vegetarianism in order to protest the “dominant politico-religious system” and to orient themselves within mystical movements (Detienne 1989: 6). Alternately, one mark of the foreigner was that he was unable to sacrifice without the mediation of a *polis* citizen. Without the ability to sacrifice, the foreigner was denied political rights such as participation in prestigious contests and assemblies (Detienne 1989: 4).

Hartog elaborates upon this as he reflects on the differences between ancient Scythian nomads and Greek city dwellers. If sacrifice is linked to the political order of the *polis*, which it both supports and expresses, what can sacrifice be among nomads? Seen from this perspective, sacrificial practice thus becomes a way of inquiring into human groups, of marking distances and suggesting “otherness” (1989: 170).

In other words, those who participate in our sacrificial practices are *us*, foreigners who share in our sacrificial practices are *like us*, and those who sacrifice differently are *not us*. The implications of these investigations into classical Greek sacrificial practices are interesting. Inasmuch as sacrifice can be considered a mechanism by means of which self (or one’s group) and other are defined and represented, it might serve as an effective means of discussing issues of ethnicity and group identification.

Douglas’s study of Israelite—specifically Levitical—dietary codes is interesting. Like Durkheim and Evans-Pritchard, Douglas thought that “the properties of classification systems are derived from the social systems in which they are used. The symbolic universe reflects the social world” (Lang 1985: 10). Therefore,

the Levitical insistence on the clear distinction between the polluting and the nonpolluting must be seen as a part of a larger pattern of social behavior. This society [Priestly Israel] uses clear, tight defining lines to distinguish between two classes of human beings, the Israelites and the rest. Since every outsider is considered a threat to society and religion, some parts of nature are singled out to represent an abominable intruder who breaches boundaries that should be kept intact (Lang 1985: 10)

Understood in this way, Priestly laws of sacrifice might be seen as a mechanism for separating Israelites from non-Israelites—and also for distinguishing between the Priestly group and others in Israel.

Many have found fault with Douglas' analysis of the Levitical codes in *Purity and Danger* (1969).⁹ Douglas herself anticipates some of their criticisms in several essays collected in *Implicit Meanings* (1975). In "Deciphering a Meal," she links dietary codes with regulations for sacrificial animals, demonstrating that both derived from concepts of purity and impurity. Rules concerning pollution, and by extension diet and sacrifice, were thus related "to the way in which people conceptually and symbolically structure their environment" (Morris 1987: 213).

In a study that profited from Douglas' work, D. Davies also analyzes levitical sacrifice. In his opinion sacrifice was embedded within the covenant between Israel and God and was immediately concerned with transgressions by both parties to this covenantal agreement (1985: 155). Although it begs the question of when and for whom the sacrificial rules applied, Davies' statement that sacrifice was "an institutional way in which the social and religious life of the nation was both conceived and ordered" underscores the quintessential importance of that rite for ancient Israel (Davies 1985: 161). The essays by Douglas and Davies present a systemic way of looking at sacrifice, one formulated upon the presumption that levitical rules for sacrifice reflected a comprehensive world-view.

In effect, these rules stated: we are the people who express our ideas of self and other through our own special conceptualization of purity and impurity; those who are us share our ideas by sacrificing as we sacrifice and by eating as we eat. In this way, levitical regulations can be understood as a Priestly effort to provide cohesiveness to Judah, possibly even to present a programmatic means for retaining national identity in defiance of a threatened or actual loss of nationhood. Eventually, these regulations came to stand in lieu of actual geographical borders.

According to Neusner, the approach advocated by Douglas served "not only to decipher the facts of a given culture, but also to state the large issues of that culture as they are expressed through minute details of the way of life of those who stand within its frame" (1979: 33). Furthermore, "things which seem trivial are transformed into the very key to the structure of a culture and the order of a society" (Neusner 1979: 35).

From his study of the Mishnah's sacrificial system, Neusner concludes that it resulted from the needs of Jews faced with the loss of their sacred places and their sacral leadership in the centuries that followed the destruction of the Second Temple. In response to the threat of assimilation in the Diaspora, rabbinic leaders reformulated the now-useless Temple-centered rites of their past, rites that had been conserved in the Priestly codes of the Torah. What they created was a distinct (albeit strictly symbolic) body of ritual, one that defined "us" and "others," one that shifted emphasis from the Jerusalem Temple and its priesthood to the people themselves and one by means of which Israel could retain its national integrity despite its overwhelming spiritual and territorial losses (1979: 150–53).

Building upon these insights, it would seem that the choice of sacrificial objects in Canaan and Israel itself reflected concepts of "self" and "other." Most commonly, sacrificial animals were domestic and agricultural offerings were cultivated. At Ugarit, foodstuffs offered as sacrifice were products of the local agrarian economy (de Tarragon 1980: 43–44). The concept of sacrificial ritual as a way of demarcating "us" and "others" may aid in explaining this choice. Domesticated animals and cultivated crops became "us" and wild animals and plants "other." Inasmuch as the sacrificial object had been produced through the hard labor of the sacrificer, what was sacrificed was the self.¹⁰

In this context, the virtual absence of raw materials as offerings in Canaanite and Israelite sanctuaries is interesting.¹¹ Precious objects were presented only in worked form, perhaps because the means by which raw materials were procured were complex and impersonal. Those who mined, transported and worked gold, for example, were not those who finally owned it. On the other hand, offerings of precious objects such as jewelry or delicate stone vessels were the personal possessions of wealthy individuals for whom their presentation would have symbolized a presentation of self.

The Socio-economic Dimension of Sacrifice

In the mid-nineteenth century, Marx presented his view of history as "a series of interactions between different social groups, each having particular economic interests" (Wilson 1984: 14). He denied that religion could be understood on its own terms, but rather, "only by examining in specific historical circumstances the linkages between religion as a form of ideology and socioeconomic life" (Morris 1987: 42). A century

elapsed before extensive research to better understand the socio-economic implications of sacrificial acts was conducted.¹²

Firth sought to explain the economic organization of sacrifice by focussing upon the ways in which ideas about controlling economic resources impact people's concepts of sacrifice. Two issues raised by Firth are of particular importance. First is the question of the allocation of resources. How are materials that are offered in sacrifice procured? In what ways does the choice of sacrificial offering reflect upon or place stress upon the economic well being of the individual and of the group? Second is the question of the implications of specific economic solutions for the ideology of sacrifice (1972: 326–27).

Firth cautions against adopting too materialistic an approach to the mechanisms involved in enacting sacrificial rites, since many sacrifices in any society are obligatory. Nonetheless, "there are enough examples of the prudent handling of resources to show that sacrifice does seem to be a matter of some economic calculation as well as ritual obligation" (1972: 327–28). In general, economic position affects the frequency and quality of sacrifice.

Bolle investigated the importance of economic priorities in dictating the choice of sacrificial animal. He studied the Khond of Orissa, India, a people believed to retain the recollection of human sacrifice that their ancestors practiced well into the nineteenth century C.E. Among the Khond, for an offering to be efficacious it had to represent an economic commitment. Human victims were acceptable only if they had been purchased and the act of purchase was stressed in formulas recited at the sacrifice: "We bought you with a price, and did not seize you. Now we sacrifice you according to custom, and no sin rests with us" (1983: 48). In the same way, when a Nuer substituted a wild cucumber for an animal victim, he stipulated that an animal later acquired could be offered as replacement for that sacrificed cucumber (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 203).

Firth distinguishes between sacrifices made by individuals and those made by groups. The decision to make sacrifices collective was, in his opinion, based upon two factors. One was ideological, as collective sacrifices reinforced group unity while the other was economic, as they also eased individual financial burdens. Although the sharing of costs and benefits may be related to the ideology of charity, "the emphasis upon the ritual unity of the sacrificing group may be a virtue which is closely allied to necessity" (1972: 330).

Gamble's analysis of faunal remains from the prehistoric sanctuary of Phylakopi on Melos, a Cycladic island, explores the economic implications of animal sacrifice from the perspective of a community that virtually forbade this rite. It did this not from ideological principles or theological concerns but rather from a pragmatic evaluation of local subsistence possibilities. That animal sacrifice was infrequent and involved few animals was underscored by the absence of large public spaces associated with the Phylakopi sanctuary (1985: 481).

The notion of substitution may be a mechanism to compensate for economic realities. One example of this is the Nuer, who

themselves freely explain that it is not so much what is sacrificed that is important as the intentions of those who sacrifice. If a man is poor he will sacrifice a goat, or even a cucumber, in the place of an ox, and God will accept it. A man should give according to his circumstances, and the sacrifice is not less efficacious because it is a small thing (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 278-79).

Alternately, the Buid do not permit substitution because it is believed that predatory spirits desire human life and that animals are no substitute for humans (Gibson 1986: 179). Among the Greek Orthodox too, substitution of sacrificial victims cannot take place, even if the potential substitute is of equal or greater value than the promised victim (Georgoudi 1989: 202).

At the same time, Georgoudi's discussion of the neo-Greek *kourbânia* offers an interesting insight into the process of substitution. Domestic animals are considered "members of the family," and soon-to-be-sacrificed animals are cared for tenderly, called by names such as "my sons," "my boys," and "my brave ones" (Georgoudi 1989: 198). Likewise, the pigs sacrificed by the Buid in the *fanurakan* sacrifice were cared for specially in deference to their imminent sacred role. They were intimately associated with the household raising them, for they were born and raised in the home and fed with the same food humans ate (Gibson 1986: 183).

The ultimate in self-sacrifice might be that which takes place on a spiritual rather than material plane. Yet even this has economic ramifications. According to Firth,

the greatest surrogate of all is the sacrifice of the mind and heart, the abnegation of individual judgement and desire in favour of devotion to more general moral ends This view is clearly compatible with our modern attitudes towards human personality, but one need not overlook entirely that removal of the notion of sacrifice from the material to the immaterial plane does away with an awkward problem of organization (1972: 331).

Still, economic calculations relating to sacrifice are not always of high priority. For Greek Orthodox villagers, the slaughtering of an ox and the distribution of its meat to the poor, within or even outside of the framework of the *kourbânia*, “is an exemplary act of Christian charity, an act so important that tradition naturally employs it to convey a man’s progress toward holiness” (Georgoudi 1989: 200–201). Here, Leach’s remarks are instructive.

The material body of the sacrificial victim may well be a serious economic cost to the giver of the sacrifice, but, at the metaphysical level, economics is not the issue. What matters is the act of sacrifice as such, which is indeed a symbol of gift giving, but gift giving as an expression of reciprocal relationship rather than material exchange (1985: 139).

Evidence from the Nuer supports this statement. “The emphasis is not on the receiving but on the giving, on the sincerity of intention” (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 278–79). A similar observation has been made about classical Greek sacrifice. “The action itself, engaging the supernatural in human concerns, was paramount” (Jameson 1988: 962). Beidelman also warns against interpretations of ritual too rigidly linked to social structure. Ritual acts are ambiguous and will always retain mystical elements (1987: 548).

Although embedded in social relations, rituals are more than simply a paradigm for them. Whether they are performed to strengthen a relationship with supernatural powers, or whether they comprise an attempt to be rid of evil influence, religious sacrifices in some way express moral values. Even when a religious sacrifice is performed

privately and for private ends, it reflects community values, including a common assessment of what can legitimately be given up for the end required. More commonly, however, sacrifices are public and serve to strengthen social ties as well as the beliefs and values of the community (Bourdillon 1980: 15).

Phenomenologically, these last cautionary notes are important although pragmatically they are of little help in understanding sacrifice in antiquity through the study of its material remains. Detienne has even questioned whether sacrifice remains a legitimate topic for analysis.

Today ... it seems important to say that the notion of sacrifice is indeed a category of the thought of yesterday, conceived of as arbitrarily as totemism ... both because it gathers into one artificial type elements taken from here and there in the symbolic fabric of societies and because it reveals the surprising power of annexation that Christianity still subtly exercises on the thought of those historians and sociologists who were convinced they were inventing a new science (1989: 20).

This may go too far. Still, the attempt to create an all-encompassing definition of sacrifice must be renounced. "Universal definitions of religion hinder ... because and to the extent that they aim at identifying essences when we should be trying to explore concrete sets of historical relations and processes" (Asad 1983: 252). Others, from differing perspectives, agree (see, e.g., de Heusch 1985: 23). In the absence of universal definitions, we must consider ways to explore the role of religion in specific contexts within specific ancient societies.

What is a fair goal for a study of religion? Douglas suggests that as we study religion, "we uncover a cogent set of conceptions and social events, which, when uncoded, tells us something important about ... how people cope with the dissonances and the recurrent and critical tensions of their collective existence" (Neusner 1979: 35). Georgoudi prefers to "see how the rite of popular worship interconnects with religious and social life ... and to comprehend, beyond its functionality, the values it carries for the culture in which it is alive" (1989: 203). Renfrew suggests that "the material record of human experience in different parts of the world and at different times contains information about the human mind" (1982: 26).

However before students of antiquity can explore spiritual complexities, they must illuminate religious behaviors within specific cultures. This goal can be furthered by the materials-oriented approach of archaeology. Physical *realia* (non-textual, textual and contextual) provide the primary data for archaeological analyses, and their study at individual sites and in discreet periods of time requires attention to details. At a synthetic level, the compiled data can be examined in relationship to other relevant assemblages and through these comparisons, issues of choice and decision-making processes can be better understood.

Assuming that “social systems maintain themselves for significant intervals of time in a steady state during which a high degree of cohesion and solidarity characterizes relationships among its members” (Harris 1968: 515), our most productive results come from examining the function of religion within individual, specific societies. Toward this goal, entities such as religious symbolism, the organization of rituals and the form and placement of religious and secular architecture provide a means for studying socio-political relations (S. G. Cole 1985: 49). The work of archaeologists thus becomes critical for investigating the contribution made by religion toward understanding not only the sacred but also the profane.

Anthropologically-based Studies of Sacred Sites

In his study of the Phylakopi sanctuary, Renfrew claims that religious beliefs form a “more or less coherent system or structure, to which the cult observances will relate” and that “structure in the belief system should engender pattern in cult practice, and it is this which we as archaeologists may hope to discern” (1985: 17). He therefore addresses those ritual features that he considered archaeologically identifiable. For Renfrew (1985: 25–26), the archaeological study of cult has the potential to illuminate three important aspects of religions: the behavioral (practice of cult), the societal (place of cult in religion and society) and the ideational (beliefs underlying cult). In his site report, he describes the material evidence for the Phylakopi cult, presented a model for understanding its ritual behaviors and suggested ways in which its study helped depict and interpret societal interactions on Melos and throughout the Aegean.

Alon and Levy used Renfrew's three aspects of religion as the foci for their investigation of religion at Chalcolithic Gilat in Israel's northern Negev Desert (1989: 170–71; see also Levy 1995 and references therein). They adapted Renfrew's list of criteria for identifying communal or public ritual acts in the archaeological record and devised a series of expectations to identify cultic activities at Gilat (including, with Renfrew, architecture and worship, ritual practices, religious experience, attention-focusing devices, cult images, repetition, and ceremonial centers and exchange; Alon and Levy 1989: 170–75).

Alon and Levy concluded that Gilat was a late fourth-early third millennium B.C.E. ceremonial center, one of the earliest known in the eastern Mediterranean. Trade centered in Gilat took place in a network of local, medium and long-range tiers. A sanctuary-affiliated elite traded religious services for material goods and especially for exotic cult objects. This process in turn fostered the growth of local elites (1989: 210–13)

SUMMARY

This review of the contributions of a century and more of sociologists and anthropologists to the study of religion concludes with words of cautious optimism for the potential that archaeology has for illuminating the role of religion in Canaanite and Israelite society. Despite their inability to reach overall consensus on the function and meaning of sacrifice, social scientists have been united in their insistence that religion in general, and sacrifice in particular, reflects various important aspects of society at-large. Investigations into ancient religion have many potential outcomes. They deepen our knowledge of social structure and further our understanding of ancient rituals and of the groups for whom these rituals reflected complex sacred and secular interactions.

As we saw in Chapter One, most scholars of ancient religion have paid little attention to religion's social, political and economic components. However, by capitalizing upon social science insights concerning the study of religion, and by applying these insights to textual, architectural and artifactual data, archaeologists can significantly enhance our awareness of the roles religion played in Canaanite and Israelite society.

NOTES

¹ See Carter and Meyers, eds. 1996 for a collection of classic and recent essays on the contribution of the social sciences to the study of the HB. See Carter 1996 for an overview of the subject.

² An excellent discussion of the private and personal dimensions of the sacrificial rite, including a review of the contributions of eminent psychoanalysts such as Freud and Piaget, is found in *Sacrifice and the Experience of Power* (de Vos and Suarez-Orozco 1987). My own study focuses upon the rite of sacrifice as it operates within the social group rather than for the individual.

³ See, e.g., Anderson 1987. Anderson demonstrated that urban Canaanite royalty, pre-state Israel and monarchical Israel each had different modes of collecting tithes and redistributing accumulated agricultural goods (1987: 24, 77–90).

⁴ In Israelite sacrifice, for example, the “survival” was a remnant of the totemic stage of social organization, during which time communion with the totem god was established as the totemic group ate its totemic object. The purpose of sacrifice, and particularly of sacrifice in which worshippers partook of the sacrificed animal, was to establish communion with the deity by ingesting it (Rogerson 1978: 26).

⁵ See, *inter alia*, the works of A. Causse (Kimbrough 1978) and de Vaux (1964).

⁶ For a rebuttal of the doctrine of “survivals,” see Georgoudi 1989. She demonstrates that, contrary to accepted scholarly opinion, the neo-Greek *kourbânia* should not be viewed as a survival from ancient Greek sacrifice; rather, it should be understood within the context of Christian, and especially Orthodox, ideology.

⁷ See also Georgoudi 1989: 199.

⁸ For a discussion of Robertson Smith’s influence on Durkheim, see Beidelman 1974: 58–61, 67.

⁹ See, among others, Carrol 1985; Lang 1985: 9–10, n. 18; Morris 1987: 208–9.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Beattie 1980: 30–31, in which he claims that domestic animals were sacrificed because they most closely symbolized home and thus the person on behalf of whom the sacrifice was being made.

¹¹ For further discussion of these sanctuaries, see chapters 4 through 6.

¹² For contemporary Marxist approaches to archaeology, see Gathercole 1984; Miller and Tilley 1984; Spriggs 1984; Spriggs, ed. 1984.