

BOOK REVIEWS

Anson F. Rainey. *Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets: A Linguistic Analysis of the Mixed Dialect Used by Scribes from Canaan*. 4 vols. Handbuch der Orientalistik, Erste Abteilung: Der Nahe und Mittlere Osten, vol. 25. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996. xxiv, 204; xx, 415; xiv, 280; viii, 198 pp.

For the student of the history of the Hebrew language in its earliest phase, the importance of the Amarna tablets has been well known for more than a century. Soon after these texts were discovered at Tell el-Amarna, Egypt, in the late nineteenth century, scholars realized that the Akkadian of these documents, written in the fourteenth century B.C.E., was not pure Akkadian. Moreover, early research determined that the Akkadian of the Amarna tablets was heavily influenced by the local language of the Canaanite scribes who wrote these texts, that is, Canaanite. As such, the Amarna tablets became a major resource for recovering the earliest stage of the Hebrew language, what might be called “Pre-Biblical Hebrew.”¹

But after a century of Amarna research, from its beginnings when the study of Akkadian grammar was still in its infancy, and through the discovery of Ugaritic and other Semitic texts, no complete grammar of Amarna Akkadian, with attention to the Canaanite interference, has ever been published.² Instead, scholars have had to rely on dozens of studies and monographs, including some very important unpublished dissertations. Accordingly, this multivolume study by Anson F. Rainey, who has been among the most productive scholars in Amarna research during the past few decades, is a most welcome contribution.

Here, in three volumes (the fourth provides bibliography and indices), the interested reader will find as complete a description of the Amarna language as could possibly be accomplished. One cannot overstate the excellence of this work: both in the quantity of the data included, with every item well

1. Thus C. Brovender, “Hebrew Language, Pre-Biblical,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1971), vol. 16, cols. 1560–68.

2. The pioneering works of F. M. Th. Böhl, E. Ebeling, and E. Dhorme were remarkable accomplishments, but they were written at a time when the knowledge of Akkadian grammar was still developing and thus could be used only with great caution over the past eighty years.

illustrated, and in the quality of the presentation, through clear and concise discussions of the grammatical issues.

Volume 1 includes short sections on orthography and phonology, after which the morphosyntactic analysis of the Amarna language commences. The remainder of the volume treats pronouns, nouns, and numerals; volume 2 treats the verb; and volume 3 treats the particles and adverbs. For each grammatical item introduced, Rainey presents the two sides of the Amarna “interlanguage” (his term), both the standard Akkadian and the divergent material reflecting the Canaanite influence. For example, for the third-person masculine singular pronominal suffix, Rainey notes that “throughout the corpus of letters from Canaan, the normal Akkadian suffix *-šu* is employed” (vol. 1, p. 76), but he also discusses in detail the few examples that employ *-ú* and *-hu*, both of which represent the corresponding West Semitic form *-hū*. After presenting the morphology of each form, Rainey discusses the syntactic issues involved.

Volume 2 is the largest of the volumes, both because the verb usually requires the most treatment in a grammar of any language, and because in the case of the Amarna interlanguage, the knowledge gained from the verbal usage has had the greatest impact on West Semitic studies. Rainey’s previous studies of the Amarna verb and its impact on Hebrew studies are well known to Hebraists. But most of that work is devoted to the prefix conjugation, or *yqt* form, and to the best of my knowledge Rainey has not concentrated on the suffix conjugation, or *qtl* form. Accordingly, it is worth noting his conclusion regarding the latter usage: the Amarna evidence shows clearly that the “*qtl* conjugation pattern did not originate in an expression of completed action”; therefore “a more inappropriate term than ‘perfect’ could hardly be imagined!” (vol. 2, p. 366).

Notwithstanding Rainey’s attention to the Canaanitisms in the corpus, it should be noted that often he does not explain certain usages, nor does he turn to Biblical Hebrew (and other Iron Age Canaanite dialects) as frequently as one might have expected. As an example of the former: Rainey merely notes that the Akkadian first-person common singular accusative independent pronoun *yāti* “is rare, being supplanted almost entirely by the 1st c.s. accusative suffix” (vol. 1, p. 55). Is this due to the fact that Canaanite lacks a corresponding form? Readers must decide for themselves.

I append here a few comments from the perspective of a scholar who works primarily on the Bible.

Rainey notes that the second-person masculine singular independent

pronoun is *at-ta* “without exception” (vol. 1, p. 56) and thus explains the form *at* in EA 34:7 (cf. EA 124:35 *at-m[a]*) as a scribal error to be restored as *at<-ta>*. But we might wish to consider accepting the form *at* as genuine in light of three biblical passages, Numb 11:15, Deut 5:27, Ezek 28:14, which have אה as masculine. Note especially Ezek 28:14, in a pericope addressed to Tyre, and compare with EA 34 from Alashia and EA 124 from Byblos.

EA 83:37 reads *ù uš-ši-ra-šu šu-ut* “so release him, especially him!” Rainey refers to this as “an especially interesting syntagma [with] the independent pronoun in apposition to the accusative suffix for reinforcement” (vol. 1, p. 65). Mic 7:3 is a difficult verse, but I believe that the phrase הוה הוה נפשו הוה presents essentially the same syntagma (albeit following a genitive). We may be dealing with a northern Canaanite usage: the end of Micah is most likely the work of a northern prophet, and EA 83 originated in Byblos.

Rainey cites the unusual usage of *ištu qāt(i)*, literally “from the hand (of),” but meaning “due to” or “because of” in EA 297:16, “for which a close biblical parallel was not found” (vol. 3, p. 59). May I suggest that this usage is paralleled in 2 Kings 9:7, where the expression מִיַּד אִיזְבֶּל, coming at the end of the verse, and thus at quite a distance from the verb נָקַם, means “on account of Jezebel” (cf. NAB’s “shed by Jezebel,” in contrast to NJPSV’s “thus I will avenge on Jezebel”).

Rainey’s magnum opus presents the scholar of Semitic languages with a detailed description of Amarna Akkadian, an important interlanguage of interest to both Assyriologists and West Semitists. While it does always not keep an eye focused on the Bible, it nonetheless provides all the necessary data for the Hebraist or biblicist who wishes to utilize this crucial corpus for explaining issues relevant to Biblical Hebrew. We are all in Rainey’s debt for this magisterial work.

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John M. G. Barclay. *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (312 BCE–117 CE)*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996. xvi, 522 pp.

The last decade has seen the appearance of a considerable body of important work on individual diaspora communities in the ancient world. Barclay boldly undertakes a survey of the five best-attested Jewish communities