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# THE ORIGIN OF THE TERMS "CANAAN," "PHOENICIAN," AND "PURPLE"<sup>1</sup>

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## I

FOR a long time the name "Canaan" was considered Semitic. Then this name appeared in cuneiform texts from Tell el-Amarna and Boğazköy as *Ki-na-aḥ-ni*, *Ki-na-aḥ-na*, *Ki-na-aḥ-ḥi*, *Ki-na-a-aḥ-ḥi*, and *Ki-na-ḥi*, i.e., both with the suffix *-ni/-na* and without it. The suffixed form, corresponding to Hebrew, Phoenician, and Egyptian *Knʿn*, occurs in Amarna letters from Phoenicia (Tyre and Byblos); the non-suffixed form, similar to *Chna*, the mythical ancestor of the Phoenicians in Philo of Byblos, was used outside Canaan. Progress in grammatical analysis of the Hurrian language caused Julius Lewy to interpret "Canaan" as a Hurrian word, formed with the Hurrian suffixes *-ḥ(h)i* and *-na*.<sup>2</sup> It was also revealed that, in the Akkadian-written texts of Nuzu, a predominantly Hurrian city, the word *kinahḫu* designated "red purple dye."<sup>3</sup> E. A. Speiser understood this term as an adjective derived from "Canaan," the native name of Phoenicia, a country famous for purple production.<sup>4</sup> W. F. Albright, on the other hand, explained the word *kinahḫi*<sup>5</sup> as a genuine Hurrian adjective which precisely meant "purple,"<sup>6</sup> "Canaan" thus being a Hurrian appellation of Phoenicia as the country of purple dye.<sup>7</sup>

New epigraphic discoveries in Egypt, Ugarit, and Alalah revealed early occurrences of the name "Canaan" already in its classical form *Knʿn*, the spelling of which is incompatible with Hurrian phonetics.<sup>8</sup> S. Moscati, on the basis of the new facts, concluded: "*Knʿn* is the original form and *kinahḫu* the derived one; the name Canaan . . . is autochthonous; the characteristic industry of dying fabrics in red took its name from

<sup>1</sup> Read at the 174th Meeting of the American Oriental Society New York City, April 9, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Julius Lewy, "Influences hurrites sur Israël," *RÉS*, 1938, pp. 49 ff. W. F. Albright arrived independently at similar conclusions, published four years later (cf. n. 7).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. E. A. Speiser, in *One Hundred New Selected Nuzi Texts*, transliterated by Robert H. Pfeiffer, with translations and commentary by E. A. Speiser (= *AASOR*, XVI [1935-1936]), 49, 121 f., 143; see also n. 4.

<sup>4</sup> E. A. Speiser, "The Name *Phoinikes*," *Language*, XII (1936), 121-26.

<sup>5</sup> Considered as the original Hurrian form, *kinahḫu* being the Akkadianized nominative.

<sup>6</sup> Understood as *\*kna-ḡḡi* < *\*ikna-ḡḡi*, where *\*ikna-* was supposed to be the Hurrianized form of Akkadian *uknû*. Ugaritic *iqnaʿu*, "lapis lazuli" or "blue purple." There were two objections to this hypothesis: (a) double *-ḥḥ-* transliterated the Hurrian voiceless velar spirant corresponding to West Semitic *ḥ*, not the voiced one rendered in Ugaritic by *ḡ* (*ḡ*), cf. E. A. Speiser, *IH*, §§ 54-59; Albright realized this difficulty but did not resolve it; (b) in the Nuzu texts, *kinahḫu* as wool coloring was clearly distinguished

from *uḡnû*, "blue purple," and designated a different dye, as indicated by B. Maisler (Mazar), "Canaan and the Canaanites" (see p. 16), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> W. F. Albright, "The Role of the Canaanites in the History of Civilization," 1st ed., in *Studies in the History of Culture* (Menasha, Wisconsin, 1942), p. 25, n. 50.

<sup>8</sup> The Hurrian explanation implied that "Canaan" passed to the West Semites as *\*Knḡn* before it was spelled *Knʿn* in the Hebrew-Phoenician script, which did not graphically distinguish *ḡ* from *ʿ*. In Egyptian, the West Semitic and Hurrian *ḡ* was transcribed by *g* or *q*, so one would expect *\*Knḡn* or *\*Knqn*. But although the Ugaritic script had different letters for *ḡ* and *ʿ*, nonetheless the ethnicon "Canaanite" was spelled *knʿny* (Gordon, *UM* 311:7). The Memphis stela of Amenophis II (ca. 1430) has *Kinʿanu* for "Canaanites" just as the Karnak inscription of Seti I has *pʿ-Knʿn*. Moreover, in so Hurrianized an environment as Alalah, "Canaan" was written *Ki-in-a-nim*<sup>k1</sup> (Inscription of Idri-mi, ll. 63, 64), *Ki-in-a-ni* and *Ki-en-a-ni* (*AT* 48:5; 154:24; 181:9), transcribing *Kinʿan-* with a weakly pronounced *ʿ*. The *ʿ* is peculiar to West and South Semitic and to Egyptian; it does not occur in Hurrian.

the region—as, e.g., muslin from Mossul—and not vice versa.”<sup>9</sup> W. F. Albright conceded that “the Hurrian explanation seems to be ruled out, though the ending *-n(i)* may still be non-Semitic.”<sup>10</sup>

The original non-suffixed form of “Canaan” may thus be restored as *\*Kina<sup>c</sup>u*, a qīṭal formation from the West Semitic root KN<sup>c</sup>, normally becoming *Kinahhu* in Akkadian transcription, with the gemination of the last consonant which frequently took place in the spelling of non-Akkadian words and geographical names,<sup>11</sup> like *Amurru*, *Simurru*, *Mitanni* (nominative *\*Mitannu*), *Ḫilakku*, etc. As a geographical name, it was regularly used in the genitive: māṭ *Kinahhi*, like māṭ *Amurri*, māṭ *Mitanni*, māṭ *Subari*, etc. Since the suffixed form *Kina<sup>c</sup>-nu* (in cuneiform documents written in the genitive, with the ending *-ni/-na*<sup>12</sup>) was the one used in West-Semitic-speaking regions (including Phoenicia, where no Hurrian influence can be detected), the ending *-n-* is to be taken as an attested, though rare, Semitic noun-forming suffix,<sup>13</sup> rather than as a Hurrian definite article.<sup>14</sup>

It remains to establish the West Semitic etymology of “Canaan.” E. A. Speiser only noted that “the origin and etymology of *Kn<sup>n</sup>* and its cognates are not strictly relevant to the present problem,”<sup>15</sup> i.e., to the derivation of the name “Phoenicians.” According to B. Mazar, of the two Biblical usages of *k<sup>n</sup>na<sup>c</sup>an(i)*, the common noun “merchant” is the original and the ethnicon “Canaanite,” the derived one, “Canaan” being “the country of merchants.”<sup>16</sup> However, nothing in the root KN<sup>c</sup> suggests any relation to commerce, not excluding the hapax *\*kin<sup>c</sup>ā* or *\*k<sup>n</sup>na<sup>c</sup>ā* (Jer. 10:17) which Mazar interpreted as “merchandise.”<sup>17</sup> It is inherently more probable that the ethnicon “Canaanite” acquired the connotation “merchant” in Biblical Hebrew because of the renowned commercial activities of the Phoenicians.<sup>18</sup> W. F. Albright now proposes either to follow B. Mazar or to assume “a lost Semitic word *\*kn<sup>c</sup>* for ‘murex,’” in order to save the signification “purple-dye country” for Canaan.<sup>19</sup> If such a word for “murex” ever existed in Semitic, it has been so completely lost that no hint whatsoever allows one to make this kind of assumption. It was formerly supposed that “Canaan” might signify “lowland”; but the root KN<sup>c</sup> does not have the intransitive meaning “to be low.” S. Moscati, rejecting for good reasons all of the previously suggested etymologies of “Canaan,” did not adduce any of his own.

<sup>9</sup> Sabatino Moscati, “Sulla storia del nome Canaan,” *Studia Biblica et Orientalia*, III (1959) (= *Analecta Biblica*, Vol. 12), 268.

<sup>10</sup> W. F. Albright, “The Role of the Canaanites in the History of Civilization,” 2d ed., in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (1961), p. 356, n. 50.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. W. von Soden, *Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik*, § 58.

<sup>12</sup> For numerous examples of genitive in *-a*, cf. the indices of personal names in J. Nougayrol, *PRU* III and IV.

<sup>13</sup> Carl Brockelmann, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen*, I (1908), § 218.a, lists *K<sup>n</sup>na<sup>c</sup>an* among nouns with the suffix *-n*, along with Hebrew *šippōren*, “nail,” and a few analogous formations in other Semitic languages. Same approach in Arthur Ungnad, *Hebräische Grammatik* (1912), § 121. III.2.b.

<sup>14</sup> A. Goetze, “Cilicians,” *JCS*, XVI (1962), 52,

still lists *Kinah-na* among geographical names which end in the Hurrian plural article *-na*; Albright preferred the singular form of this article, *-ni*.

<sup>15</sup> E. A. Speiser, *op. cit.* (see n. 4), p. 123, n. 12.

<sup>16</sup> B. Maisler (Mazar), “Canaan and the Canaanites,” *BASOR*, No. 102 (April 1946), pp. 7–12.

<sup>17</sup> In the sentence *ispī mē-ereš kin<sup>c</sup>ātēk*, “gather up from the ground thy *k*.” It is true that the Targum renders it by *s<sup>h</sup>ortā*, and Symmachus by *emporia*. But the Septuagint has simply *hypostasis*, “anything set under, a stand, base, bottom, sediment,” which agrees both with the meaning of the root KN<sup>c</sup> (see next paragraph of the text) and with the context in which the noun occurs in Jer. 10:17. It evidently designates any bundle, load, or burden set down from the shoulders or animal-back to the ground.

<sup>18</sup> As it has been generally presumed earlier and is now stated by Moscati, *op. cit.* (n. 9), p. 269.

<sup>19</sup> W. F. Albright, *loc. cit.* (n. 10).

The established semantics of the root  $KN^c$  provide us, however, with an acceptable explanation of the name "Canaan." In Biblical Hebrew, it is found only in niph'al ("to be subdued" or "to lower oneself") and in hiph'il ("to subdue"). In Aramaic, it occurs also in qal ( $k^ena^c$ , "to bow down, bend"). In Arabic, the verb  $kana^c'a$  has several semantically unconnected usages, of which those related to the Hebrew and Aramaic cognates are: (a) "to fold wings and to descend to earth" (said of a large bird), and (b) "to bow, to incline toward the horizon" (said of a star).<sup>20</sup> As applied to the sun, it would be exactly equivalent to the Latin "occidere," the derived form  $Kina^c'u$  or  $Kin^c'anu$  signifying the "Occident," the "Land of Sunset" or "Westland"—the West Semitic translation or counterpart of *Amurru*. This Akkadian term for Syria, partially adopted by the Syrians themselves, means "West." Its ideographic writing MAR.TU consists of MAR (dialectal Sumerian for GAR) = Akkadian  $\text{šakānu}$ , "to install, to place," and TU = Akkadian  $erēbu$ , "to enter," and its derivations:  $nirību$ , "entrance,"  $erēbu$ , "sunset."<sup>21</sup> The terms "Canaan" and "Amurru" were largely synonymous in the Amarna Age texts and in the Bible.<sup>22</sup>

## II

Of all explanations of the Greek *Phoinix*, "Phoenician," (plur. *Phoinikes*) and *Phoinikē*, "Phoenicia," the most convincing is certainly the derivation from *phoinix*, "purple," referring to the characteristic Phoenician trade. For Ed. Meyer, the most prominent defender of this theory, *phoinix* was a purely Greek word.<sup>23</sup> E. A. Speiser also shared the "interpretation of the Greek term as a strictly European development. That is to say, *phoinix* started out as a Greek appellative, presumably based on *phoinos*, 'red.'"<sup>24</sup> It was admitted that *phoinix* derives (through *phoinos* <  $*phon-io-s$ , "murderous, sanguinary, blood-red") from *phonos*, "murder," for which the Indo-European root was restored, on the basis of numerous cognates, as  $*g^uhono-s$ .<sup>25</sup> But the primitive sound  $g^u$  still existed in Mycenaean Greek as  $q$ . Now the adjective "Phoenician" for certain imported goods appears already in the Linear B texts as *ponika* (= *phoinika*), which also meant, along with the form *ponikija*, "painted crimson, dyed crimson,"<sup>26</sup> Ventris and Chadwick, therefore, correctly stated that *ponika* was "probably a loanword; not from *phoinos* 'blood-red,' which is from  $*g^uhonjos$ ."<sup>27</sup>

If, then, *phoinix* can no longer be considered a Greek word, its source must be sought, most probably, among the very people who were famous as crimson and purple dyers and whom the Greeks called *Phoinikes*. Now Hebrew *puwāwā*, Arabic *fuwwa*, is the name of *Rubia tinctorum* L., or dyer's madder, a herbaceous plant at home in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, one of the most common sources of red dye and imitation purple in anti-

<sup>20</sup> In the form  $kani^c'a$ , it means (a) "fall, or be thrown, face-down to the ground," (b) "approach, arrive (said of the night)." Cf. A. de Biebertstein Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire arabe-français*, II, 935 f.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. R. Labat, *Manuel d'épigraphie akkadienne*. Nos. 307, 597, 58; *CAD*, IV, 258–59.

<sup>22</sup> In EA 151:50,  $mātKi-na-aḥ-na$  designates all of Syria including Phoenicia, the Orontes valley, Ugarit, and even Danuna (Eastern Cilicia).  $mātKi-na-a[ḥ]-ni$  in EA 109:46 and  $mātKi-na-a-aḥ-[ḥi]$  in EA 30:1 have the same comprehensive meaning. In the Pentateuch, J and P call the pre-Israelite population "Canaanites," E and D, "Amorites."—"There is much confusion in tradition between Canaanites and Amorites, whose

language and culture differed so little, that it is hard to find a satisfactory criterion for use of these names," W. F. Albright, "The Biblical Period," in *The Jews: Their History, Culture, and Religion*, ed. by Louis Finkelstein, I (1949), 13.

<sup>23</sup> Ed. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, I (2d and 3d ed.), 1, 97; 2, 66.

<sup>24</sup> E. A. Speiser, *op. cit.* (n. 4), p. 123.

<sup>25</sup> Emile Boisacq, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (1923), pp. 1032 f.

<sup>26</sup> M. Ventris and J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (1956), pp. 344, 405.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405.

quity.<sup>28</sup> *Pwt* appears as early as Ugarit in a context that firmly establishes its meaning as "madder-dyed textile."<sup>29</sup> A Hebrew clan of Galilee (which was contiguous to Phoenicia) bore the name of *Puwwā*, or *Pūwā*,<sup>30</sup> and is quoted next to *Tōlā*<sup>c</sup>, "crimson" (Gen. 46:13; Num. 26:23; I Chron. 7:1 f.).<sup>31</sup> The gentilic of *Puwwā* is *Pūnī* (Num. 26:23), and there is no need to suspect an error: this is a formation of the same aspect as the Hebrew adjectives *ʾadmōnī*, "red," *qadmōnī*, "oriental," with the assimilation of the half-consonant *w* to the corresponding vowel *u* into a long *ū*. This form *pūnī*, adjective from *puwwā*, "red dye," provides us with the prototype of the Greek *phoin-ix*<sup>32</sup> and of the Latin *Poen-us*, *pun-icus*. It corresponds to the Greek word both phonetically and semantically. As a Semitic loanword, it is by no means exceptional in Mycenaean Greek, which contains several other words of Semitic origin.<sup>33</sup>

### III

*Phoinix* is not the only Greek term for "purple" that can be traced back to West Semitic.<sup>34</sup> Another possible case is *porphyra*, the very prototype of English "purple." It was supposed until recently that *porphyra* for "purple" was post-Homeric, but it turned out that as early as in the Linear B tablets the adjective *popureja* (= *porphyrea*) applied to purple-dyed garments.<sup>35</sup> Homer used only the verb *porphyro*, "to rise seething, to be agitated," referring to the turbulent sea or to the restless heart.<sup>36</sup> Was there any relationship between these two words?

Most attempts to derive *porphyra* from the verb *porphyro* were extremely contrived and unconvincing.<sup>37</sup> According to Ventris and Chadwick, "semantic connection [of *porphyra*] with *porphyro*, 'swirl,' is dubious."<sup>38</sup> Boisacq, earlier, was skeptical about

<sup>28</sup> See R. J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology*, IV (1956), 106 ff. Note in particular: "Much confusion has been caused by the untranslatable terms used by the ancients to design the different shades of scarlet, purple, and crimson. . . . A term like "purpura" (Gr. *porphyra*) may mean anything in the violet-purple-scarlet range. . . . Purple being so expensive (about \$7000.—lb) was of course imitated and we have many recipes for such substitutes" (p. 119); "Vitruvius' description of the imitation purple dyes made in his days (VII, 14.1-2): 'Purple colors are also made by dyeing chalk with madder and hyssinum'" (p. 131); dyeing with madder as reconstructed by Reinkin from the text of the Papyrus Holmiensis: "Dyeing purple with madder" (p. 136).

<sup>29</sup> RS 19.56 (Ch. Virolleaud, *PRU* V, No. 51) (4) *arḫ. kkrm* (5) *ʾmn. mat. kbḏ* (6) *pwt* (partition line) (7) *ʾmn. mat. pṭm*, "four talents eight hundred heavy (shekels) of madder (-dyed wool), eight hundred (heavy shekels) of linen." The word *pwt* is left without translation in *PRU* V.

<sup>30</sup> The mutual relation of the forms *Puwwā* and *Pūwā* is the same as between Ugaritic *hw* (pronounced *huwwā*) and Hebrew *hu* (still pronounced *hūwā* at the time of the Dead Sea Scrolls). The Ugaritic pers. n. *Pwn* (Gordon, *UM* 313:8) may be related.

<sup>31</sup> *Tōlā*<sup>c</sup>, properly "worm," designated the kermes insects from which crimson dye was extracted, and the dye itself (also called *šānī* in Hebrew, *tn* in Ugaritic); same use of the cognate *tultu* in Akkadian: cf. *ḫu-ru-ḫu-ra-ti ša tu-ul-ti*<sup>meš</sup> (genitive), "rouge extracted from worms," preceded by *sḫ* <sup>meš</sup> and

*sḫ ki-na-aḫ-hi*, "blue and red purple wool," in the Nuzu text SMN 538 (= No. 77 of the collection by Pfeiffer and Speiser, quoted n. 3 above), ll. 13-15. Is it only by coincidence that the name of Mount Tabor (*Tābôr*), situated in the same territory as the two clans *Tōlā*<sup>c</sup> and *Puwwā*, recalls *tabarru*, the comprehensive Akkadian term for "purple, scarlet" (probably a loanword)?

<sup>32</sup> The suffix *-ix* (= *ik-s*) is Greek. The diphthong *-oi-* is due to the normal transformation *\*phon-io-s* (no relation to *phonos* "murder"! ) > *phoinos*. The vowel *o* for Semitic *u* is quite common in Greek transliterations (especially in the Septuagint). Latin *punicus* may have retained the original vocalization (the Romans could have borrowed the word directly from the Carthaginians); the diphthongization in *Poenus* is an inner-Latin development.

<sup>33</sup> Ventris and Chadwick, *op. cit.*, pp. 91, 135.

<sup>34</sup> Albright, in the passage referred to in n. 7 above, suggested that Greek *kyanos*, "lapis lazuli" (whence *kyaneos*, "dark-blue"), was connected with Akkadian *uqnū* (Ugaritic *igni*), same meaning.

<sup>35</sup> Ventris and Chadwick, *op. cit.*, pp. 321, 405.

<sup>36</sup> Boisacq, *op. cit.*, pp. 805 f.

<sup>37</sup> Liddel and Scott, *Greek and English Dictionary*, pp. 1226 f., supposed that the common semantic element in *porphyro* and *porphyra* was the idea of darkness; others, conversely, tried to identify the idea of the rapid movement of the waves with that of brilliance, sparkling, variation of colors (quoted in Boisacq, *loc. cit.*).

<sup>38</sup> Ventris and Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

such a connection and even believed that "a Semitic origin [of *porphyra*] is probable, though unknown."<sup>39</sup> But Victor Bérard remarked in passing that for extracting purple from murices "il fallait deux jours de 'bouillon' (c'est le sens du mot *porphyra*)";<sup>40</sup> according to Pliny, even nine days of continuous boiling were required.<sup>41</sup> Thus the technology of purple production provides us with a single and persuasive etymology of *porphyra*. V. Bérard, despite his love for Semitic etymologies, did not follow Boisacq's conjecture about the probable origin of this word. But the underlying verb *porphyrō* does not seem to be of good Greek derivation; its meaning ("to swirl, whirl, flash, jerk, seethe") hardly allows us to consider it a reduplication of *phyrō*, "to knead, moisten," as is usually claimed in the dictionaries. Conversely, a verb of the same form and semantics exists in Semitic languages.

This verb appears as biliteral, PUR, or geminated, PRR, or reduplicated, PRPR: Arabic *fāra*, "to boil, be in ebullition (a cauldron or a bubbling spring); make boil," *farfara*, "to agitate, shake"; Hebrew *pūr/pārar*, "stir, rouse," *pārūr*, "pot for boiling," *pirpēr*, "shake"; middle Hebrew *pirpēr*, "move convulsively," *pirpūr*, "writhing, agony"; Aramaic *parpēr*, "move about restlessly."<sup>42</sup> The coincidence, both in form and in meaning, with the Greek verb *porphyrō* is hardly fortuitous. The noun *porphyra* corresponds to West Semitic \**parpūr* (> *pirpūr*), a nominal formation similar to *barbūr*, *ḥarḥūr*, *Ḥalḥūl*, *zarzūr*, etc.<sup>43</sup>

It would thus seem that the Phoenician<sup>44</sup> purple-fishers of the Bronze Age, who were attracted to the Aegean by its wealth of murex and who processed their catch on the spot,<sup>45</sup> transferred to the natives the technological term for the operation of "boiling" or "decoction," *parpūr* or *parpūrā*, which became with them, on the one hand, the general term for violent seething and agitation of water, on the other hand, the special term for purple dye, obtained by prolonged boiling.

The establishment of the West Semitic origin of *phoinix* and, probably, of *porphyra*, is interesting not only from the etymological point of view. It also serves as another confirmation of steady Greco-Semitic contacts during the Mycenaean Age. It now becomes more difficult to consider the toponyms and personal names *Phoinix*, *Phoinikê*, *Phoinikūs* as purely Greek, without any relation to the Phoenicians,<sup>46</sup> and to claim that the Greek traditions on Phoenician penetration of the Aegean were based on a misinterpretation of these names.<sup>47</sup> At the very least, the Greeks must have met the Phoenicians and borrowed from them the word for "red dye" before they could use it in their onomastica.

<sup>39</sup> Boisacq, *loc. cit.*

<sup>40</sup> Victor Bérard, *Les Phéniciens et l'Odyssée* (2d ed., 1927), I, 409.

<sup>41</sup> Forbes, *op. cit.*, IV, 114.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. the dictionaries by Lane, Kazimirski, Koehler and Baumgarten, Jastrow, and Dalman.

<sup>43</sup> The word *firfir* for "purple, violet" exists in Arabic but it probably has been borrowed from the Greek.

<sup>44</sup> For the Greeks of the second millennium B.C., the term "Phoenicians" certainly included the

Ugaritians, who possessed a thriving purple industry and were actively engaged in commerce with the Aegean.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. V. Bérard, *op. cit.*, I, 407-10.

<sup>46</sup> Speiser, "The Name *Phoinikes*," p. 121.

<sup>47</sup> J. Beloch, "Die Phoeniker am aegaeischen Meer," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, NF, XLIX (1894), 127; Ed. Meyer, *Gesch. d. Altertums*, II (2d and 3d ed.), Part 1, p. 254, n. 1; and several other authors.