



REVIEW

PHARAOH IN CANAAN: THE UNTOLD STORY

by Daphna Ben-Tor,
with contributions by Eran Arie, et al.
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Reviewed by JAEI Staff

This volume is a partial catalog of the exhibition of the same name held March 2 through October 25, 2016 at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (see our announcement of the exhibition in JAEI 9, June 2016, p. 97–98). *Pharaoh in Canaan* also serves as a highly worthwhile contribution to the literature on the many and richly diverse cross-cultural ties between Egypt and the many city states of Canaan from the end of the 4th millennium BCE until the collapse of the Egyptian Empire in Canaan in approximately the mid-12th century BCE.

But the focus—or rather foci—of the exhibition and its catalog are the two particular eras which most clearly reflect the interaction between Egypt and Canaan: the Middle Bronze Age, in which a relatively high degree of infiltration and settlement of Canaanites in Egypt occurred, and the Late Bronze Age, when Egypt exerted its greatest measure of political and military hegemony over Canaan.

The exhibition itself embraced nearly 700 artifacts from within these chronological parameters. The pieces ranged from small-scale scarabs and amulets and pottery sherds to large-scale statues, anthropoid coffins, and carved stelae—and even a reconstruction of the Ramesses II gate façade discovered in Jaffa. Some pieces were, in fact, from recent excavations in Israel that are published in this volume for the first time. Many of the artifacts were from the Israel Museum itself, and others were loans from the Metropolitan Museum, New York; the Louvre Museum, Paris; the Egyptian Museum, Turin; the Kunsthistorisches

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Museum, Vienna; and several other important collections.

While each selected piece receives a brief commentary in the catalog, the artifacts are effectively used to illustrate thematic points being made in the chronologically organized text. The body of the catalog is thus organized into four sections: “The Beginning: Early Contact between Egypt and Canaan,” “An Archaeological Enigma: Egyptian-Canaanite Relations in the Middle Kingdom,” “The Hyksos: Canaanite Rule in Egypt,” and “The Egyptian Empire in Canaan.”

Matters of chronological uncertainty are handled well. Both low and high date ranges are given where relevant for the understanding of major events

and periods, and discussions of individual chronological aspects usually give the relevant data for conflicting viewpoints.

In this way, the artifacts presented are seen in as clear a cultural context as is possible as well as in a historical continuum. This is often of great importance—as in the case of artifacts from southern and northern Canaan, which it is now known had very different relationships with Egypt during the Middle Kingdom period.

This situation is well reflected in the section of the catalog dedicated to Egyptian-Canaanite relations in the Middle Kingdom and elaborated in the following sub-sections:

Execration Texts
Egypt’s Relations with Byblos

Canaanite Infiltration and Settlement in the Eastern Delta
 Egyptian Middle Kingdom Scarabs of Officials in Southern Canaan
 Egyptian Middle Kingdom Statuettes in Southern Canaan
 Resumption of Contact between Egypt and Southern Canaan
 Early Production of Canaanite Scarabs

This same section provides a good example of the successful way in which *Pharaoh in Canaan* organizes and presents its material. The artifacts are viewed not in isolation but in terms of the most recent archaeological finds and our most current understanding of their chronological context. It is lamentable that modern exhibition catalogs still so often follow the approach of individual artifact focus, which does not take us much further than the copious notes associated with “cabinets of curiosities” of the past. To be fair, a chronologically synchronized approach can be effectively pursued only in exhibitions such as this one—where there are enough artifacts to effectively illustrate a historical continuum—but this catalog is an example of the contextual approach at its very best.

The following sections of the volume proceed to effectively situate the exhibition’s artifacts in their cultural-chronological timeline, and two interesting appendices cover “Egypt and Canaan in the Genesis-Exodus narratives” and “The Birth of the Alphabet from Egyptian Hieroglyphs in the Sinai Desert.”

Pharaoh in Canaan maintains a good balance in showing not

only the high degree of Egyptian influence in Canaan but also the reciprocal influence of Canaanite culture on Egypt and the resultant interplay that is evident in the two cultures. This is nicely sketched, for example, in the section on “The Influence of Canaanite Mythology on Egypt” followed by an interesting example of an Egyptian funerary stele on which the theophoric name of one Itu-Ba’al, the recipient of the stele, is written with the determinative sign for the god Seth reflecting the syncretism of the two deities.

The thirty or so small chapters that comprise the text of the bulk of the catalog are well-written and provide a number of details regarding the nature of the artifacts themselves as well as insights into their larger significance. Almost 100 illustrations accompany the text, and the images are clear and well sized. Ample maps and background charts are provided to clarify references for general readers and scholars from related fields, and a useful bibliography is also appended. The volume is beautifully designed and produced and reader-friendly in every way. The fact that the contents page lacks a heading is one of a very few and truly miniscule criticisms that can be leveled at this volume.

Overall, *Pharaoh in Canaan* is an extremely well-conceived and well-produced catalog that will be indispensable for any library of Egyptological or Near Eastern Studies and can be recommended to anyone with a scholarly or general interest in these areas. The editor and contributors are to be thanked for a volume that is both an important contribution to the literature of the field of Egyptian-Levantine interconnections, as well as one that is a pleasure to read.