

ancient Canaanites. A great surprise came to light about seven years ago when the French excavators discovered at Ras Shamra in northern Syria a great number of tablets with cuneiform writing of a previously unknown type. It took clever decipherers two or three years to figure out the type of writing in these tablets. In the main it has now been worked out, and it is clear that what we have here is several thousand lines of religious literature of the Canaanites before 1,200 B.C. No longer can we guess as to the religion of the Canaanites before the coming of the Israelites. Here is important material which must be taken into account. Unfortunately, the writing contains only consonants. There are no vowels. Fortunately, the language is very close to Hebrew. Great progress has been made in understanding these tablets. One of the earliest investigators said that the most striking thing about the material was that it has practically nothing in common with the religious teaching of the early books of the Old Testament. Many names and incidents mentioned in these tablets seem to be referred to by the prophets of later Israel when they were denouncing the heathen practices which the Israelitish people were adopting. The tablets will be of tremendous value for increasing our knowledge of the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, but up to the present the result of their study has been to make less and less likely any actual derivation of the Israelite religion itself, as taught by Moses in the Pentateuch, from the Canaanites whom the Israelites had been ordered to destroy.

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