

CHAPTER 16: CANAANITE RELIGION AND COSMOLOGY - THE GODS -

The many myths and deities of the Canaanite cultures from Anatolia to the borders of Egypt were original developed in isolation, and later merged into a single mythology as trade and intermarriage brought ideas as well as gods and people to different regions.

In Canaan, the god of Israel was identified with El, head of the Canaanite pantheon, and was worshiped as such, causing understandable friction between the Lord's priests and the priests of El. Each male Canaanite deity had a female partner, and some scholars have argued that Asherah was worshiped by the women of Israel throughout much of the Biblical period as "the bride of the Lord." During Israel's most cosmopolitan periods (the reigns of Solomon and his successors) the worship of Baal and other Canaanite deities was tolerated and accepted by many (although not the Biblical prophets), especially in the northern kingdom.

Canaanite worship was scattered and influenced by local cults; in one city, one aspect of Baal might be recognized as the supreme deity, in another city, a different aspect of Baal would be supreme, and in yet another, it might be El or a mixture of Baal and El; in one city Asherah could be the bride of Baal, while in another it was Anat (or both).

The Canaanite pantheon was worshiped by the Amorites, Canaanites, Phoenicians, Edomites, Philistines, and Aramaeans, and (to some extent) by less devout Israelites. The major difference between these cultures was the god they recognized as chief deity: in Philistia it was Melkart, in Moab it was Chemosh, in Aram it was Baal-Hadad, and in Ammon Milcom (also known as Melech) was the principal deity. Some Canaanite deities (such as Anat and Reshep) were adopted by the Egyptians.

Table 16-1 shows the members of the pantheon who received widespread worship.

ANAT (LESSER GODDESS)

The devoted sister of Baal-Hadad, this daughter of El and Asherah was the pantheon's warrior-princess, even fiercer than her brother in battle. When Baal was defeated by the evil god Mot, Anat descended into the underworld, Eresh, slew Mot, and used the god's entrails to resurrect Baal. She then planned to kill the rest of the gods for allowing Baal to go alone into danger, but was restrained by her reborn brother, who taught her the ways of peace.

Anat may have also been a precursor to the Greek goddesses Athena (in her warrior aspect) and Aphrodite (in her fertility aspect). She was widely worshiped in Egypt during the time of the Hyksos, and may have influenced the cult of Sekhmet. Anat's worship was widespread throughout Canaan. As with the Babylonian Ishtar, her temples were leading centers of temple prostitution.

In her fertility aspect, Anat was depicted as a nude figure standing upon a lion and bearing serpents and/or lotus blossoms.

Anat's holy weapon was the short-spear. Her holy animal was the lion. Anat's teraphim grants a +2 competence bonus to all Intimidate checks.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks of the Intimidate skill; *Market Price:* 80 gp; *Weight* 1-5 lb.

ASHERAH (INTERMEDIATE GODDESS)

Later known as Astarte, under the influence of the Babylonian Ishtar, she was the queen of Heaven and the loving, faithful wife of El; her only moment of unfaithfulness was when she offered herself to Yam-Nahar in order to alleviate his tyranny, an offer that so enraged Baal-Hadad that he challenged the evil god.

Asherah came from the sea and was venerated by the people of the Phoenician coast. She provided comfort for women and mothers. When

TABLE 16-1: CANAANITE DEITIES

Deity	Alignment	Domains	Typical Worshipers
Anat, Goddess of War	N	Earth, Protection, War, Fertility	Druids, Fighters, Qedeshot, Women
Asherah, Goddess of Fertility	NG	Animal, Fertility, Heaven, Plant, Water	Clerics, Sorcerers, Qedeshot, Women
Baal(-Hadad), God of Thunder	LN	Air, Strength, Thunder, War	Fighters, Sailors, Soldiers
Baal-Melkart, King of the City	LN	Sun, Strength, Protection, Fire, Plants, War	Tyrians, Carthaginians
Chemosh, God of the Moabites	N	Water, War, Travel	Moabites, Farmers
Dagon, God of the Philistines	N	Water, War, Plants	Philistines
El, God of the Sky	LG	Good, Law, Knowledge, Protection, Strength, Heaven	Fighters, Clerics, Farmers
Kosharoth, Helpers of Heroes and Gods	NG	Animal, Healing, Knowledge	Druids, Bards, Fighters
Kotar, God of Craftsmen	NG	Good, Protection, Strength	Fighters, Artisans
Melech, God of Murder	NE	Death, Evil, Trickery	Thieves, Assassins, Necromancers
Mot, God of Sterility	LE	Death, Destruction, Earth	Sorcerers, Clerics
Reshep, Lord of Plagues	NE	Pestilence, Thunder, War	Fighters, Assassins, Syrians
Shapash, the Sun Goddess	LG	Knowledge, Law, Sun, Travel	Clerics, Fighters, Messengers
Yam-Nahar, Monster of the Sea	CE	Chaos, Evil, Water	Sailors, Tradesman
Yarikh, the Moon God	N	Desert, Plant, War	Druids, Fighters
Zebub, Lord of the Flies	LN	Animal, Pestilence, Fire, Knowledge	Eكرونites

THE CANAANITE DANIEL

Daniel is also the name of one of the greatest heroes of Canaanite mythology, a cycle of legend that's far older (and much different) than the late Hebrew tale of the Exile. This Daniel was a devotee of Baal who mourned for seven days because (unlike his brothers) he was childless. Daniel's heroism was so renowned that El himself answered his prayer, and Daniel's wife Danatay gave birth to a beautiful and fierce son, Aqhat. At a feast to celebrate Aqhat's marriage, the gods gave Aqhat the gift of a splendid bow, which was coveted by the goddess Anat. When Aqhat refused to give away his bow to the goddess, Anat cursed him to die if he ever transgressed against the gods.

Despite the severity of Anat's curse, Aqhat wasn't very mindful of it, and so later that day, when it came time to sacrifice portions to the gods, he neglected to offer them the finest pieces of meat. The curse was immediately invoked and Aqhat was torn apart by eagles. Aqhat's younger sister Pughat disguised herself as Anat to track down the killers and slay them, and the mournful Daniel looked through their entrails for his son's remains. Unfortunately, he found only Aqhat's body and not his spirit, so the dauntless hero descended into Eresh to look for his son, where he encountered the rephaim. Alas, Aqhat was never restored to life.

El was uncaring, Asherah often interceded for those who petitioned him to intervene in a just cause.

Asherah's symbol was the Asherah pole, which was either a wooden idol planted in her temple or a tree planted in her name often next to an altar to Baal. The Israelite priests considered these objects an abomination on the same level as the idols of Baal, and kings who burned Asherah poles were considered righteous by the prophets.

Asherah's holy weapon was the staff. Her holy animal is a cow (wife of El, the bull).

Asherah's teraph grants a +2 competence bonus to all Heal checks.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks of the Heal skill; *Market Price:* 80 gp; *Weight:* 1-5 lb.

BAAL (-HADAD) (INTERMEDIATE GOD)

Baal was prince of the gods, rider of the clouds, son of El (or in some sources Dagon), and bravest of the gods. This storm god was the most widely worshiped of all the gods of Canaan.

Among his many heroic deeds were two great mythological battles: first against Yam-Nahar, then against Mot. Yam-Nahar was lord of the sea, who had been given divine authority by El but was using his power to become a tyrant. Yam-Nahar terrorized even the gods until he insulted El's wife Asherah. Baal refused to tolerate the insult, so wielding the divinely crafted maces Yagarish ("Chaser") and Ayamari ("Driver") he battled and defeated him. Mot was the god of death; their battle ended with Baal's defeat. As Baal took the rain clouds with him into Eresh, the world experienced seven years of terrible drought, until his sister Anat entered the underworld, defeated Mot, and used the death god's entrails to resurrect her brother.

Baal built his home on Mount Tsaphon, with the reluctant permission of El, who begrudged giving his son such a magnificent mansion. Its windows were specially crafted by the god Kotar to allow Baal to send his storms to earth.

Baal means "Master," and it's a title that's also been attached to the names of many deities (including the fly god Zebub, one of the Baal's many nemeses).

Baal's main festival was in early summer, a lament for his death (symbolic of the barren days of summer heat) followed by a celebration of his resurrection. He was closely associated with the Babylonian Bel-Marduk.



- CHAPTER 16: CANAANITE RELIGION & COSMOLOGY -

Baal's holy weapon was the long spear. His holy animal was the ram (although in some places where his worship has been mingled with El's, the bull is also sacred to him).

Baal-Hadad's teraph grants a +2 competence bonus to all Climb checks.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks of the Climb skill; *Market Price:* 80 gp; *Weight:* 1-10 lb.

BAAL-MELKART (LESSER GOD)

Melkart was the chief god and protector of the powerful cities of Tyre and its colony Carthage. Asherah (under the name Astarte) was his bride.

Melkart's temples were huge, constructed on large open areas. The greatest temple was constructed on an island created in the harbor lagoons by King Hiram, the same king whose engineers designed the Temple in Jerusalem. Melkart's temple was built around its two great pillars, one silver, one gold.

Melkart was linked by the ancient Greeks to the demigod Heracles; like Heracles he was depicted as a "champion of champions" who wrestled the gods, wore a lion skin, and founded great games (the Actia Melkartia). His manifestations included pillars, the planet Mars, and the eternal flame to which offerings (including human sacrifices) were made.

Melkart's holy weapon is a burning torch. His holy animals are the lion and the sea-horse.

Baal-Melkart's teraph grants a +1 competence bonus to all Strength-based skills.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks in two Strength-based skills; *Market Price:* 200 gp; *Weight:* 1-10 lb.

CHEMOSH (LESSER GOD)

Also known as Athtar (in Arabia) and Baal-Maon, Chemosh was the primary deity of the Moabites who lived southeast of the Dead Sea; Chemosh was worshiped along with the other members of the Canaanite pantheon. Some of Solomon's foreign wives erected altars to him in the Hinnon Valley south of Jerusalem. He was related to the Babylonian deity Shamash.

Chemosh's holy weapon was the half-spear. His sacred animal was the pig.

Chemosh's teraph grants a +2 competence bonus to all Diplomacy checks.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks of the Diplomacy skill; *Market Price:* 80 gp; *Weight:* 1-10 lb.

DAGON (INTERMEDIATE GOD)

Patron god of the Philistines, considered by some to be an aspect of El. This god was half-man and half-fish, and worshiped as the slayer of Lotan (Leviathan).

Dagon's holy weapon was the trident. His holy animal is a fish.

Dagon's teraph is often stored aboard Phoenician and Philistine ships in a small shrine. It grants a +2 competence bonus to all Profession (sailor) checks.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks of Profession (sailor); *Market Price:* 80 gp; *Weight:* 5 lbs.

EL (GREATER GOD)

El, literally "high" or "god," a title rather than a personal name, is the father of the gods, the qedesh ("holy one"). El lives on Mount Lel at the source of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, where he looked down on the world from his great throne. He is wise and splendid beyond description, but was also subject to human frailties such as a tendency to drink to excess. In his youth, he ventured out into the open sea, where he met Asherah and her companion Rohmaya. After offering them a roasted bird, they agreed to become his wives. Later they gave birth to Shachar and Shalim (Dawn and Dusk), bringing order to the world.

El was depicted as a bearded grey-haired patriarch with bull horns on his helmet. The Babylonians equated him to Enlil/Ellil. His greatest son (in most cultures) was Baal, but their relationship was often tumultuous, for El never favored Baal in his son's disputes with other gods, and

begrudged any god who does Baal a service. El was also the host of the ritual feast association, the Marzeah, which (among other events) sponsored an annual Feast of the Dead.

El's holy weapon was the iron-shod great staff. His holy animal was the bull. (Perhaps this is why the Canaanites saw the golden calf of the northern kingdom of Israel, as a legitimate symbol of both El and the Lord.)

El's teraph grants a +2 competence bonus to all Spot checks.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks of the Spot skill; *Market Price:* 80 gp; *Weight:* 1-10 lb.

KOSHAROTH, THE (LESSER GODDESSES)

These seven wise women were among the greatest servants of the gods. They were guardians of the marriage bed and childbearing. Traditionally, the Kosharoth were invoked when agreeing to a marriage price. They were also the friends of heroes, and came to Earth as swallows to secretly lend assistance to humanity's greatest champions.

The Kosharoth's holy weapon was the dagger. Their holy animal was the swallow.

The teraph of the Kosharoth grants a +3 competence bonus to all Perform (dance) checks.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks of the Perform (dance) skill; *Market Price:* 90 gp; *Weight:* 1-5 lb.

KOTAR-WA-KHASIS (LESSER GOD)

Kotar was the craftsman of the gods, a master smith who forged weapons for Baal, crafted divine furniture of silver and gold for Asherah, and built Baal's palace. He also opened Baal's window to allow storms to fall on the earth, which earned him the title "The Opener."

Kotar's holy weapon was the warhammer. His holy animal was the kingfisher.

Kotar's teraph grants a +1 competence bonus to all Craft checks.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks in two Craft skills; *Market Price:* 40 gp; *Weight:* 1-10 lb.

MELECH (LESSER GOD)

Not much is known about this evil god, except that he was greedy, desired human sacrifice, and wasn't liked at all by the Israelites, who wrote his name, Melech ("King"), with the vowels of shame ("boshet"), rendering it Molech. Most Canaanites only sacrificed to him when in dire need of his assistance (e.g., to defeat an invading army).

Melech's holy weapon was the dagger. His holy animal was the crow.

Melech's teraph grants a +2 competence bonus to all Knowledge (religion) checks.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks of the Knowledge (religion) skill; *Market Price:* 80 gp; *Weight:* 1-10 lb.

MOT (LESSER GOD)

The name of this god of sterility meant "Death." This most fearsome of the Canaanite gods held the scepter of bereavement in one hand, while in the other he grasped the scepter of widowhood, and his jaws and throat were said to be large enough to swallow the world. After Baal defeated Yam-Nahar, the prince of the gods haughtily sent a message to Mot demanding that he remain in the underworld city of Miry and not trouble the living world. Mot was insulted by this arrogant demand, which led to an epic battle between the gods. Mot defeated Baal and imprisoned him in Eresh, causing a drought as Baal was no longer available to bring storms to Earth. Fortunately Baal's sister Anat tracked the death god down and defeated him, then used Mot's remains to resurrect his brother. However Mot would be reborn seven years later, forcing Baal and Anat to start the cycle again.

Mot's holy weapon was the mace. His holy animal was the vulture.

Mot's teraph grants +1 point of damage to an *inflict* spell (three times per day).

- CHAPTER 16: CANAANITE RELIGION & COSMOLOGY -

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, *inflict minor wounds*;
Market Price: 38 gp; *Weight:* 1-10 lb.

RESHEP (LESSER GOD)

Reshep was a god of war and pestilence whose worship was particularly strong in Syria. His cult made its way into Egypt and he was worshiped as a minor war deity during the 28th Dynasty (after the conquests of Ashurbanipal).

He is depicted in Canaan as a warrior with a gazelle motif on his helmet, and in Egypt as a gazelle-headed man. He is subservient to Mot within the Canaanite pantheon, although his role varied over time, from pestilent scourge to fertility god (for one could ensure the fertility of the fields by convincing Reshep to stay away).

Reshep's holy weapon was the battle axe. His holy animal was the gazelle.

Reshep's teraph grants a +3 competence bonus to all Listen and Spot checks performed on a battlefield.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks of the Listen and Spot skills; *Market Price:* 180 gp; *Weight:* 1-10 lb.

SHAPASH (LESSER GODDESS)

Goddess of the Sun, Shapash saw all that happened on Earth by day, then guarded the souls of the dead by night. She was a major deity of the Ugaritic pantheon during the early 1st millennium BCE, but was then subsumed into a lesser role by the Canaanites, becoming El's messenger. Shapash also mediated disputes between other gods and was the goddess of justice. She had a large following in Arabia, and also had roots in Babylon.

Shapash's holy weapon was the shortsword. Her holy animal was the antelope.

Shapash's teraph grants a +2 competence bonus to all Diplomacy checks.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks of the Diplomacy skill; *Market Price:* 80 gp; *Weight:* 1-5 lb.

YAM-NAHAR (INTERMEDIATE GOD)

This wild, chaotic, Earth-encircling sea serpent (Yam means "Ocean") personified ocean waters, winter floods, and the storms of the Mediterranean. Baal eventually subjugated him, although they still

fought repeatedly (hence there were still storms at sea). (The Bible attributes the defeat of Yam, Tiamat, to the god of Israel.)

As Nahar, Yam was a river god who ferried people from the living world to the netherworld of Eresh.

Yam-Nahar's holy weapon was the long spear. His sacred animal was the barracuda.

Yam-Nahar's teraph grants a +2 competence bonus to all Knowledge (weather) checks.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks of the Knowledge (weather) skill; *Market Price:* 80 gp; *Weight:* 1-10 lb.

YARIKH (LESSER GOD)

This was the moon god of the Canaanites, a man with many titles, including illuminator of the heavens and lord of the sickle (a reference to the crescent moon). His wife was Nikkal, goddess of desert blooms, and his nightly dew caused her fragrant flowers to bloom in the desert. Yarikh was the patron god of the city of Jericho, which was named after him.

Yarikh's holy weapon was the sickle. His sacred animal was the dove.

Yarikh's teraph grants a +2 competence bonus to all Bluff checks.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks of the Bluff skill; *Market Price:* 80 gp; *Weight:* 1-10 lb.

ZEBUB (LESSER GOD)

Zebub (or Baal-Zebub; "Lord of the Flies") was the chief god of the city of Ekron. His priests had a reputation as seers and were consulted by rulers beyond Philistia, including the Israelites. He was an enemy of Anat and Baal-Hadad.

Zebub's holy weapon was the dagger. His holy animal was the fly.

Rotting meat was left as an offering in front of his teraph to attract flies. Zebub's teraph grants a +2 competence bonus to all Knowledge (dreams) checks.

Caster Level: 5th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Teraphim, creator must have 5 ranks of the Knowledge (dreams) skill, *Dreamer Feat*; *Market Price:* 80 gp; *Weight:* 1-5 lb.

- CANAANITE TEMPLES -

Early Canaanite temples consisted of a simple sanctuary room and a courtyard. In the sanctuary, facing the entrance, was a stone altar for sacrifices that was similar to the Israelite altar of burnt offerings (see p. 185).

Over time, Canaanite temples developed into more sophisticated buildings that included an exterior courtyard, an entrance porch, and a main room with an alcove (sometimes called the Holy of Holies) that held cult objects like incense altars, libation tables, offering stands, and figurines of bronze, silver, and gold. Some temples also had seated statues of the gods, and an Asherah pole, a phallic symbol devoted to the goddess Asherah, was erected at the front of the temple as a symbol of fertility. The contrast between using stone to depict male deities and wood for females was very important in Canaanite religious symbolism.

Among the services offered by the temples were the qedeshem and qedeshot ("holy ones"), or temple servants. These men and women were the representatives of the gods, charged with making the people more fertile. Prior to marriage, Canaanites presented their children to the qedeshot and qedeshem so they might lose their virginity in a holy ceremony. Far more than prostitutes, they were men and women of learning, revered as healers and highly respected in the community.

When temples were not available, stone altars could be set up in the highest place in the area. A cult object (such as a golden idol) was often set up in the area to mark it as a place devoted to worship and sacrifice.

Human sacrifice was rare but not unheard of among Canaanites. Typically, it happened only during the most extreme times of famine, drought, or war. Some deities (especially Melech) may have enjoyed it more than others.

CANAANITE PRIESTS

The Canaanite priesthood was a hereditary profession, passed down from father to son or mother to daughter, *etc.* Priests were known to the Canaanites as khenem (for game purposes, treat them as members of the cleric class). They wore long ceremonial robes, and shaved their faces to distinguish themselves from the (bearded) common people.

TERAPHIM

Along with temple worship, Canaanites employed small idols devoted to individual deities. These teraphim were typically placed in household shrines, and sacrifices of incense, food, and drink were made to them. A poor person would typically have a teraph of his patron deity, while a rich man might have dozens of teraphim, those of all the major Canaanite gods as well as minor and regional deities (including deities of other cities he might plan to visit).

THE PLANES

The Canaanites believed in a three-plane universe: the heavens, the underworld (Eresh), and Earth. Heaven was the place where the gods lived, although some deities took up residence away from the company of their peers. The dead, good and evil, were all thought to go to the same place, the dark, dry, dreary underworld of Eresh, ruled over by Mot from within his dismal city of Miry.