

Chapter I.

UGARITICA AND THE OLD TESTAMENT.

A. Ugaritic Literature

The discovery of the literature of Ras Shamra in 1929 has had an impact on Old Testament scholarship such as has resulted from few archaeological discoveries. The deciphering of the Ugaritic alphabet was done in record time after the discovery of the tablets, and since then our knowledge of the Ugaritic language and literature has increased rapidly. As an illustration of the extremely fast development in the field one may simply mention the fact that C. H. Gordon's Ugaritic Grammar of 1940 had to be replaced by the same author's Ugaritic Handbook in 1947. While the book of 1940 contains a glossary of 912 items we find 2308 numbers in the glossary of 1947 -- an increase of 150% in only seven years!¹ This becomes more remarkable when we realize that most of those seven years were war-years of strongly retarded scholarly activity and that exchange of information between scholars of different nationalities was limited and difficult.

Had the literature of Ras Shamra been discovered thirty years earlier it would have changed the work of a whole generation of Old Testament scholars and a whole library of books would have remained unwritten or would have been written differently. Very few scholars considered possible the existence of such a literature in Syria-Palestine from the second millennium B.C. In 1906 Hermann Gunkel wrote that the beginning of Hebrew literature must have consisted in very brief sayings (just a verse or so) because the people were not able to grasp more at one time.² Now we have a whole corpus of epic literature written down just after 1400 B.C. (with origins much earlier), and considerably antedating the early prophetic writings of Israel. Unfortunately