CHAPTER X

WEST SEMITIC MODES AND TENSES

The core of the peculiar jargon developed by the scribes of Canaan in the Amarna Age is the system of verbal modes and tenses. The Akkadian syntactic verb markers reflected in the EA texts from Canaan have been explored in the previous chapter. The next step is to demonstrate how the West Semitic system is employed and how it conflicts with the usual Akkadian norms.

It was Moran (1950a; 1951; 1960) who first deciphered the "code" by which the Akkadian verb forms of the Byblos dialect were made to express the nuances of the local Canaanite dialect of the scribes. Certain morphological features which have only been alluded to or taken for granted in the previous chapters will be seen to be temporal and modal indicators. It was these conjugational forms which Moran analyzed in their respective syntagmas to arrive at a system of modes and tenses that is both coherent within itself and commensurate with the known patterns of better attested dialects from a later period (particularly biblical Hebrew; Rainey 1986, 1988).

THE BASIC PATTERNS

It would appear that six basic patterns were originally in use in the NWS verbal system. They divide naturally into two modes, the former being concerned with tenses, the latter with volition. Each mode has three conjugations and a certain symmetry may be observed between their respective functions. Their arrangement and proposed nomenclature are (Rainey 1990):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATIVE</th>
<th>INJUNCTIVE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preterite</td>
<td>yaqtul, -û</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imperfect</td>
<td>yaqtulu, -ûna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energic</td>
<td>yaqtulun(n)a</td>
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Besides the plural suffixes given above, it must be remembered that the 3rd m.pl. forms have the t- prefix (Ebeling 1910:48-49, 51-52; Herdner 1938; Izre'el 1987; cf. supra, pp. 43-45). Justification for our choice of nomenclature will be presented in the ensuing discussion of each pattern. One could say that Ebeling had successfully identified the indicative preterite (Ebeling 1910:46-50) and energetic (ibid.:69-73) although he failed to see that the many indicative imperfect plurals were not necessarily energies just because they had the -ına suffix. He apparently did recognize the correct meaning of a few of the jussive yaqtul forms (e.g. the gloss ia-az-ku-ur in EA 228:19; Ebeling 1910:46) but did not draw the necessary conclusion that the jussive was the Canaanite counterpart to the Akkadian preative. He did, however, recognize that the Akkadian iparras was not paralleled by a Canaanite *yaqattal (ibid.:51-52; Mendenhall 1947:5-7).

The function of the respective conjugation patterns can best be demonstrated by citing contexts in which the same verb appears in two different functions. Thus, the ensuing discussion will frequently deal with not one but two of the patterns posited above. The synchronic relationships with Ugaritic (Rainey 1987:397-400) may be touched upon when necessary.

THE INDICATIVE MODE

PRIVATE.

This conjugation pattern is distinguished morphologically by the use of the standard personal prefixes plus -Ø suffix on all the attested singulars (no 2nd f.s. forms are documented) and on 1st c.pl. The suffix for 3rd m.pl. and 2nd m.pl. is -ū (in contrast to -ına of the imperfect).

IN MAIN CLAUSES. The yaqtul preterite was relatively rare in the Byblos texts; the predominant form for expressing action in the past was the suffix conjugation (Moran 1950a:30-31, 51-52; cf. infra, pp. 348-352). Therefore, Moran was inclined to accept the yaqtul preterites as Akkadianisms (Moran 1950a:51). In the next