

Babylonia and Assyria, of northern Syria and Cappadocia, and possibly even of Cyprus, as well as from the Egyptian governors and vassal-princes in Syria and Palestine, most of whom were of Canaanitish origin. The correspondence is written in the Babylonian cuneiform script, and, with a few exceptions, in the Babylonian language.

Canaan had been conquered by the Pharaohs of the eighteenth dynasty, and had become an Egyptian province. It is therefore strange at first sight to find that the official correspondence it carried on with the Egyptian government should have been in the Babylonian language and writing. The explanation, however, has been furnished by discoveries made in Babylonia itself. They show that in early times Canaan had been for centuries under Babylonian influence, both political and literary. The kings of Babylonia claimed rule in the land of the Amorites, as it was called, and the culture of the Canaanites was borrowed from Chaldea.

The continued use of the foreign language and writing proves how long and deep the influence of this culture must have been. Egyptian conquest had no power to shake it. The Egyptians were compelled to conform to the usage of their conquered subjects, and the Babylonian language and script continued to be, what they had been for centuries, the common medium of literary intercourse throughout the civilized world of the East.

This meant the existence of libraries as well as of schools. Libraries of clay books must have existed like those of Babylonia, where the literature of Babylonia could be stored up. Among the letters of Tel-el-Amarna there have also been found Babylonian mythological tales, in one of which the words and phrases are marked off from one another by red dots in order to facilitate the task of the foreign students. In this way the traditions and history of the Babylonians became known to the Canaanites, and the Babylonian accounts of the Creation and the Deluge were carried to Palestine. Besides the libraries, there must have been numerous schools. Not only had a foreign language to be learned, but a very difficult form of writing as well. The cuneiform syllabary contains hundreds of characters, each of which has several different phonetic values and idiographic significations, and even the help afforded by the pictorial forms of the Egyptian hieroglyphics is wanting. To learn the cuneiform script demands time and labor and patience.

When Professor Petrie was excavating on the site of the old Record-Office of Tel-el-Amarna, in 1891, he found some fragments of dictionaries which had been compiled by order of the Egyptian king. But the dictionaries would have been useless without teacher. And the teachers must have been numerous, if we may judge from the extent to which education was spread. The letters are written, not only by professional scribes, but also by civil and military officials, by princes and Bedâwin chiefs, and even by women, who seem to have