

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Journal of Biblical Literature* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_jbl-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jbl-01.php)

## CRITICAL NOTES

### A RECONSIDERATION OF SHAMGAR BEN ANATH (JUDG 3:31 AND 5:6)

The identity of Shamgar ben Anath has been a puzzle for a long time, due in part to the brevity and paucity of references to him in the OT. The name Shamgar, which is non-Semitic, is best understood as Hurrian in origin,<sup>1</sup> but the second part of the name, ben Anath, is clearly Semitic. It is usually taken to indicate his place of origin, viz., Beth Anath (or one of several other locations which have Anath as a constituent part of the name).

It is suggested, however, that ben Anath is a military name or title — a suggestion which would not be out of harmony with the military contexts of both appearances of the name in Judges. There are three lines of evidence which may be followed briefly to give strength to the suggestion, employing data from Ras Shamra, Egypt, and Mari respectively.

(1) *Ras Shamra*. The name *bn.ʿnt* occurs in a number of Ugaritic lists,<sup>2</sup> but unfortunately the contexts do not permit any speculation as to its significance. The significant evidence, however, comes from the role of the goddess Anat in the Ugaritic mythological texts. There she has various functions, and one of her prime functions is that of warrior goddess. The enigmatic text CTA 3 B (= *UT ʿnt II*), in which Anat engages in a veritable orgy of blood letting, has been variously interpreted; but part of the purpose of the passage may be simply to introduce Anat into the epic cycle in her true character.<sup>3</sup> Her character in this passage anticipates her subsequent warlike role against the enemies of Baal. Presumably the character of Anat in the mythological cycle is indicative of her role in the cult. Although little is known of the religious character of warfare in Ugarit,<sup>4</sup> Anat probably functioned not only as a fertility goddess, but also as a warrior goddess. The expression *bn.ʿnt*, then, may be either a name of a military family or a military title or epithet, based on the warlike character of the goddess.

(2) *Egypt*. The general character of Anat adduced from the Ugaritic texts can be strengthened by references to the goddess in Egypt. There she appears in both historical and magical texts as a goddess of war.<sup>5</sup> To take only one example, she is a goddess sup-

<sup>1</sup> B. Maisler, "Shamgar ben ʿAnat," *PEQ* 66 (1934) 192-94. The name appears in several Nuzi texts.

<sup>2</sup> See *PRU* II 43:12; 61:6.

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Professor John Gray for this suggestion.

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately the recently recovered "General's Letter" (RS 20:33; *Ugaritica* V 69-79) does not provide much information on the religious dimensions of warfare. See the general discussion of the subject in J. Nougayrol, "Guerre et paix à Ugarit," *Iraq* 25 (1963) 110-23.

<sup>5</sup> For historical texts, see J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* (Chicago: University Press, 1906) 4. 62; A. Erman (ed.), *The Ancient Egyptians: A Sourcebook of Their Writings* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) 281. For magical texts, see A. Massart, *The Leiden Magical Papyrus J.343 & J.345* (OMRO Supplement 34: Leiden: Brill, 1954) 25 and 85; cited by R. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-Palästinensische Gottheiten in Ägypten* (Leiden: Brill, 1967) 95. Cf. *ANET*, 250.

porting Ramses II in his military activities, particularly when those activities extend into Asia. The Egyptian data give some support to the interpretation of Anat's Canaanite role as a warrior goddess.<sup>6</sup>

(3) *Mari*. The third line of evidence is of a different kind from that adduced above. Among several groups of people known from the Mari texts are the Haneans; they are a semi-nomadic people roaming throughout the kingdom of Mari and are known also in Alalakh (IV). The Haneans recognized the authority of the king of Mari and on several occasions provided him with large contingents of military troops.<sup>7</sup> The point of interest, in this context, relates to the significance of the name of the people. It is possible that the term Hanean associates the people with the city of Hānat, some distance to the south of Mari.<sup>8</sup> Hānat was apparently a cult-center for the goddess Anat,<sup>9</sup> as is indicated by the use of the semantic divine determinative in the spelling of its name. In summary, the Haneans are probably to be associated with a cult-center of Anat, the warrior goddess, and were regularly employed for military purposes in the kingdom of Mari. Further, there was probably a Hurrian element included in the various peoples described as Haneans.<sup>10</sup>

It is tempting, but probably unwarranted, to suggest that Shamgar was a mercenary with Hurrian/Hanean origins.<sup>11</sup> A more cautious approach would simply be to posit the Mari evidence as an analogy. Just as the Haneans, associated with Anat, were often engaged as mercenary soldiers in warfare, perhaps also Shamgar ben Anath was a mercenary.<sup>12</sup> With the title or epithet *bn.ʿnt*, he would have been closely associated with the warrior goddess Anat.

<sup>6</sup> Reference might also be made to the warrior role of Ishtar in the Mesopotamian texts; Ishtar parallels Anat in many of her functions.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., the letter quoted by J. M. Sasson, *The Military Establishments at Mari* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1969) 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> The identification of the Haneans with Hānat has been disputed by I. J. Gelb ("The Early History of the West Semitic Peoples," *JCS* 15 [1961] 27-47), partly on the ground of the paucity of references to Hānat in the Mari texts, and partly because of its distance from Mari. However, considering the nomadic nature of the Haneans and the presence of Anat in the Mari pantheon, the objection is not entirely convincing.

<sup>9</sup> See H. Gese, M. Höfner and K. Rudolph, *Die Religionen Altsyriens, Altarabiens und der Mandäer* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1970) 156.

<sup>10</sup> See I. J. Gelb, "The Early History," 36-37.

<sup>11</sup> F. C. Fensham ("Shamgar ben Anath," *JNES* 20 [1961] 197-98) translates ben Anath as "Son of a Hanaean," suggesting that Shamgar was related to a semi-nomadic group of Hanaeans who migrated to Palestine. However, the extensive distribution of the cult of Anat in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt makes uncertain the specific identification of the name ben Anath with the Haneans.

<sup>12</sup> To press the analogy further, perhaps Anat continued to be associated with mercenaries in later years. If this were the case, it might clarify the appearance of Anat in the Elephantine papyri of the Jewish military colony in Egypt. It should be noted, however, that it has been debated whether *ʿanat* in the papyri is a divine name or simply a noun; see J. Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan*<sup>3</sup> (Leiden: Brill, 1965) 175. See further B. Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley: University of California, 1968) 170.

P. C. CRAIGIE