Decoding Canaanite Pottery Paintings from the late Bronze Age and Iron Age I

Classification and Analysis of Decorative Motifs and Design Structures - Statistics, Distribution Patterns - Cultural and Socio-Political Implications

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DESCRIPTION:
This book presents a systematic study of the decorative motifs and designs found on painted Canaanite pottery vessels excavated in Palestine and dating back to the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I. The study is based on an analysis of 3,225 painted vessels and sherds. One of its most important goals is to provide a taxonomy of the decorative motifs and designs found on the vessels. To achieve this goal, each of the motifs and designs is carefully described and codified as a unit within a system of classification grouping them into categories, sub-categories, classes, types, and sub-types.

Based on this classification system, statistical figures representing the frequency of occurrence of the decorative motifs and designs are produced. The degree of popularity and the temporal or spatial distribution of each of the motifs and designs are thus clarified. Based on the statistical analysis, tree iconography (representing particularly the date-palm, often called "tree of life") was confirmed to be the most prominent and representative feature of the Canaanite pottery painting tradition. The motif most commonly found on handles and best known as "Union Jack" mark is demonstrated to be a schematized representation of the date-palm. Canaanite tree iconography was probably associated with a fertility cult, but there is no direct evidence associating it with the goddess Asherah.

The cultural origins of painted pottery traditions, colors used for decoration, archaeological contexts where the decorative motifs come from and their socio-political meanings are also considered in detail. Although during the Late Bronze and Iron IA ages the inhabitants of Canaan were politically controlled by New Kingdom Egypt, Egyptian influence on their pottery painting tradition was insignificant. Western Asiatic features prevail much more in the main motifs and design elements, their iconography, design, and style. The archaeological contexts of painted Canaanite vessels indicate that the decorative motifs reveal the Canaanites' desire for blessing in present life rather than in the afterlife.

The rise and decline of the painted pottery phenomenon is most likely associated with socio-political changes. The Canaanite pottery painting tradition declined notably in the 11th century BCE, following the end of Egyptian rule in Canaan. In the 10th century BCE, tradition virtually disappeared, indicating the rise of a new socio-political order in Canaan.