The Origins of Israeli Mythology

We claim that Zionism as a meta-narrative has been formed through contradiction to two alternative models: the Canaanite and crusader narratives. These narratives are the most daring and heretical assaults on Israeli-Jewish identity, which is umbilically connected to Zionism. The Israelis, according to the Canaanite narrative, are from this place and belong only here; according to the crusader narrative, they are from another place and belong there. On the one hand, the mythological construction of Zionism as a modern crusade describes Israel as a western colonial enterprise planted in the heart of the East and alien to the area, its logic, and its peoples, whose end must be degeneration and defeat. On the other hand, the nativist construction of Israel as neo-Canaanism, which defined the nation in purely geographical terms as an imagined native community, demands breaking away from the chain of historical continuity. Those are the two greatest anxieties that Zionism and Israel needed to encounter and answer forcefully. *The Origins of Israeli Mythology* seeks to examine the intellectual archaeology of Israeli mythology as it reveals itself through the Canaanite and crusader narratives.

Professor David Ohana studies modern European and Jewish history. His affiliations have included Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Sorbonne, Harvard University, and the University of California, Berkeley. He is a full professor of History at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel. Ohana earned his Ph.D. at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1989. He is the recipient of a Fulbright fellowship and has been a senior Fellow at the Jerusalem Van Leer Institute, where he founded and directed the Forum for Mediterranean Cultures. Since 2000, he has been a Fellow at the Ben-Gurion Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism. Ohana's research areas include the intellectual and cultural history of modern Europe, political philosophy, comparative study of national myths, Mediterranean studies, Zionist ideology, and Israeli identity. He has written and edited numerous books in Hebrew, English, and French. Among the books he has written are *The Last Israelis* (1998), *A Humanist in the Sun: Camus and the Mediterranean Inspiration* (2000), *The Promethean Passion: The Intellectual Origins of the Twentieth Century from Rousseau to Foucault* (2000), *The Rage of the Intellectuals: Political Radicalism and Social Criticism in Europe and Israel* (2005), *The Myth of Niobe* (2009), the trilogy *The Nihilist Order* (2009), and *Political Theologies in the Holy Land: Israeli Messianism and Its Critics* (2010).
The Origins of Israeli Mythology

Neither Canaanites nor Crusaders

DAVID OHANA

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Translated by

DAVID MAISEL
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In memory of my parents Maxim and Annette who made this book possible.
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