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Myth, Power, and the Architecture of Modern Conspiracy: The Baal Cult Allegations and the Epstein Files

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ABSTRACT

In January 2026 the U.S. Department of Justice released more than three million additional pages of documents connected to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Among the released material, a wire-transfer record containing a corrupted or mislabelled field, rendered in circulating page images as “Baal name” rather than the expected “Bank name,” became the documentary anchor for a rapidly circulating online narrative connecting Epstein’s network to an alleged ancient Canaanite child-sacrifice cult and, via an unsubstantiated “Khazarian” genealogy, to contemporary Jewish identity. This paper undertakes a source-based examination of that narrative’s documentary origin, its amplification across social platforms, and the historical claims it invokes. Drawing on Ugaritic and Carthaginian archaeology, Near Eastern religious history, and current scholarship on the antisemitic “Khazar hypothesis,” the analysis finds the proposed continuity between Bronze Age cultic practice and Epstein’s twenty-first-century crimes to be unsupported by the available evidence and historically implausible absent any documented mechanism of transmission. The Khazarian variant of the narrative is further analysed as an instance of a recurring antisemitic substitution pattern, in which allegations of collective Jewish culpability displace scrutiny of specific, named, and demonstrably human enablers. Situating the case within current research on algorithmic content amplification, the paper offers a provisional account, presented explicitly as a conceptual model rather than a measured causal pathway, of how engagement-optimised platforms may reward emotionally intense, poorly verified content. It closes by arguing that mythological explanation, however psychologically compensatory, forecloses rather than advances accountability, and that archaeologists, journalists, and platform-governance researchers share a professional responsibility to contest such misappropriation through accessible, evidence-calibrated public communication.

Keywords: Canaanite religion; Carthaginian tophets; ancient Near Eastern archaeology; public archaeology; digital misinformation; conspiracy theory; antisemitism; algorithmic amplification

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1. Introduction: The Vacuum That Invites Myth

The exposure of Jeffrey Epstein's crimes shattered the assumption that wealth, status, and elite institutional access operate within predictable moral limits. As court documents, survivor testimonies, and investigative records entered the public record, they revealed a network of abuse and, alongside it, a deeper crisis of trust that extended beyond criminal accountability into the question of how societies interpret power itself. What made the Epstein case so disorienting was not only the scale of the abuse but the density of elite participation in it: the politicians, financiers, academics, and royalty who passed through his properties, many of whose relationships with him have still not been fully scrutinised. In the vacuum left by institutional evasion and incomplete justice, a proliferation of alternative explanations arose. That these explanations demanded serious engagement was not, in itself, irrational.

Among the most persistent and widely circulated of these claims is the allegation that Epstein and his associates were connected to an ancient cult devoted to Baal, a deity rooted in the religious traditions of the ancient Levant. The claim has spread through viral media ecosystems, political commentary platforms, and algorithmic amplification, turning fragments of archaic theological terminology into a sprawling conspiracy narrative of civilisational scope. It deserves rigorous investigation for what it reveals about the information environments in which modern societies process crisis and injustice, as much as for what it asserts about Epstein himself.¹

This analysis approaches the Baal cult allegations neither as an endorsement nor as a reflexive dismissal. It treats the claims as objects of analysis requiring evidential scrutiny, historical contextualisation, and methodological rigour, while maintaining a clear-eyed suspicion of the institutional actors whose conduct has repeatedly and demonstrably warranted it. The objective is twofold: first, to distinguish verifiable facts in the Epstein files from the speculative material that has grown around them; second, to examine how ancient religious concepts have been reinterpreted, severed from scholarly consensus, and repurposed for modern political and cultural discourse.

Conspiracy narratives characteristically emerge where institutional transparency appears insufficient or where justice moves at a pace incommensurate with

public outrage. In the Epstein case, that pace was not merely slow; on multiple occasions it was actively obstructed. The 2007 non-prosecution agreement brokered by Alexander Acosta, then U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, allowed Epstein to plead guilty to state prostitution-related charges and serve thirteen months in a county jail with extensive work-release privileges (U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida, 2008). The agreement was negotiated without notifying Epstein's victims, and a federal district court later found this to violate their rights under the Crime Victims' Rights Act (CVRA). On review, the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, sitting en banc, did not disturb that finding but held that the CVRA affords victims no freestanding civil right of action to enforce those rights outside an existing criminal proceeding, so the agreement itself stood (*In re Wild*, 994 F.3d 1244 (11th Cir. 2021)). The accurate procedural history, then, is a documented rights violation with no judicial remedy attached to it: a more precise, and in some respects more damning, account than the shorthand claim that the agreement itself was "ruled unlawful." Prosecutorial offices, financial regulators, and law enforcement agencies all failed at multiple stages of this process, and in some instances appear to have been circumvented outright. Given this weight of documented failure, the public's readiness to entertain darker, hidden explanations is not irrational. It is a predictable response to a demonstrated pattern of institutional evasion.

The investigation accordingly moves across disciplinary lines: historical scholarship on ancient Near Eastern religions, media analysis of digital amplification, and political-sociological examination of eroding institutional trust. By situating claims about Baal worship in their actual historical context, the analysis traces how narratives migrate across millennia and are reshaped, often beyond recognition, by present-day anxieties about power, moral corruption, and global influence. Debunking the supernatural framework, however, does not require, and must not become, a way of minimising the legitimate, well-documented suspicion that powerful people conspired for decades to protect one of their own.

This paper participates in the recovery of stigmatized knowledge by reconstructing the archaeological and historical record of Canaanite religion, a body of evidence frequently misrepresented in contemporary conspiracy discourse, and by analysing the institutional and algorithmic mechanisms that displace evidence-based understanding in favour of mythologically

¹Baal was a Canaanite storm and fertility god, later demonized in biblical and Christian traditions. His

mythology reflected agricultural cycles rather than "satanic" worship.

driven narratives. A note on provenance is warranted. Public commentary debunking the Baal-cult narrative began appearing within days of the January 2026 document release, most notably Antoun Issa's explainer for Deepcut News, "Was Epstein Linked to a Phoenician Child-Sacrifice Cult? What History Actually Says" (Issa, 2026), one of the earliest English-language pieces to identify the Baal/Ugarit explanation, the Carthage/to-phet evidence, and the Minaj-Owens-Wick amplification sequence discussed below. That article, together with subsequent fact-checking coverage verifying the DOJ release date and the evidentiary status of the cannibalism allegation (Snopes, 2026a), informed the authors' understanding of the narrative's public trajectory and is cited wherever its sequencing or analysis is drawn upon. This paper's distinct scholarly contribution lies elsewhere: in situating the episode within the specialist historiography of Baal, Molek, and Khazar reception rather than summarising it for a general audience; in identifying and naming the specific antisemitic substitution mechanism operating in the Khazarian variant, with reference to the dedicated scholarship on that trope; in setting out an explicit, if necessarily provisional, method for characterising the amplification pathway (see Materials and Method, below); and in connecting the case to the sociological literature on elite deviance and institutional impunity rather than to arm-chair clinical diagnosis. The author's related manuscript, 'The Misappropriation of the Ancient Near East' (currently under review elsewhere), addresses disciplinary responsibility within archaeology specifically. The present paper does not reproduce that analysis but shares a subset of the same primary evidentiary record, a relationship disclosed here for transparency.

2. Materials and Method

This research combines documentary source analysis with qualitative case analysis of public digital discourse; it is not a systematic or statistically representative content analysis, and the limitations noted here constrain the strength of any causal claim made below. Primary documentary material consists of the January 2026 Department of Justice document release concerning Jeffrey Epstein (U.S. Department of Justice, 2026) and associated federal court records; where a specific Bates number, file identifier, or archival location could not be independently confirmed, the article cites the broader DOJ release and states that limitation explicitly rather than presenting an unverified identifier as established fact. Social-media material was identified through the author's monitoring of English-language public discussion between February and August 2026, supplemented by contemporaneous fact-checking coverage (Snopes, 2026a, 2026b) and the Deepcut News

explainer (Issa, 2026) referenced above for sequencing. The three items discussed in detail, Nicki Minaj's post, Candace Owens's video, and Anya Wick's podcast episode, were selected because they are the items most frequently identified, by fact-checkers and by the platforms' own recommendation surfacing, as the principal amplification vectors for the narrative under study; they should be read as illustrative examples rather than as a representative sample drawn from a defined, systematically coded corpus, since no such corpus was collected. View counts are reported as of the most recent verifiable snapshot available to the authors (retrieval dates given with individual citations) and should be understood as dynamic figures subject to further change. Historical and theological material was selected from established, peer-reviewed or university-press scholarship on Ugaritic religion, Carthaginian archaeology, and Khazar historiography, and from the dedicated scholarship on the reception and antisemitic deployment of the "Khazar hypothesis"; where the manuscript engages Qur'anic material, classical and modern tafsir and Qur'anic-studies scholarship supplement the primary text. Figure 1 is an author-generated conceptual model of a proposed amplification pathway, not an empirically estimated causal diagram, and the surrounding causal language has been calibrated accordingly.

3. Documentary Trigger and Amplification

The allegations under examination originated in a specific documentary detail: a wire-transfer instruction included within the Department of Justice's January 2026 release of Epstein-related records, in which a field rendered in circulating page images reads "Baal. name:" where the standard form would read "Bank name:". The precise Bates/file identifier could not be independently confirmed in the public record available to the authors; the document is therefore cited to the January 2026 DOJ release rather than to a specific Bates number. The instruction appears, from its surrounding formatting, to be a wire-transfer memorandum originating from Epstein or an associated entity (public commentary has identified the sender as the COUQ Foundation) directed to JPMorgan Chase, with Wachovia Bank, N.A. named within the disputed field itself as the correspondent or recipient institution. The document is accordingly cited below as part of the DOJ's 2026 release rather than attributed to Wachovia as an originating source. The phrase was widely reproduced on X (formerly Twitter) beginning in February 2026, where it served as an ignition point for a cascade of interpretive claims.

Representative posts asserted ancient Canaanite connections: one circulating message claimed that Baal was "a demonic being that was worshipped in ancient

Israel,” linking Epstein’s network to alleged ritual child sacrifice; another invoked a structure on Epstein’s private island as evidence of devotion to Moloch, a distinct but related figure in ancient Near Eastern religious tradition. These posts share a consistent rhetorical structure: they assert evidential connection (“we now have evidence”), deploy ancient theological terminology as though it were forensic data, and conflate historically distinct figures, Baal, Moloch, Beelzebub, into a unified demonological conspiracy.²

Before proceeding to analysis, the most parsimonious explanation for the phrase deserves to be stated plainly, while distinguishing among the several non-supernatural explanations that public commentary tends to conflate: a typographical error made at the point of data entry, a scanning or optical-character-recognition artefact introduced when the physical document was digitised for release, and a later transcription error made by whoever first reproduced the phrase online are three distinct possibilities with different evidentiary implications, and the released material does not by itself allow the authors to adjudicate definitively among them. What can be said with confidence is that “Bank name” is the standard field identifier expected to precede an institution’s name in a wire-transfer instruction of this type, and that “Bank name” is the routine field label expected in this document type; because a matched comparison exhibit from the same record set could not be independently verified for this article, that comparison is treated as contextual rather than dispositive, and that no corroborating documentation anywhere in the released tranche links Epstein’s financial arrangements to religious practice. On the available evidence, the conspiratorial reading remains an inferential leap unsupported by the documentary record, whichever specific transcription pathway produced the anomalous field.

Jeffrey Epstein was born to Jewish parents, a biographical fact that viral accounts have treated as confirming evidence of the alleged Canaanite-Khazarian connection explored in the following sections. As that analysis demonstrates, this interpretive move is both historically illiterate and functionally antisemitic.

3.1. The Spark: Two Files and Viral Ignition

This is the theory that has spread across digital platforms since the U.S. Department of Justice’s release, on 30 January 2026, of more than three million additional pages of Epstein-related records (U.S. Department of

Justice, 2026), the largest single tranche made public to date, following earlier, smaller releases in 2024 and 2025. The theory does not arise from nowhere, nor does it rest on pure fantasy. It anchors itself, with considerable rhetorical confidence, on two specific items within that release. The first is the 2009 wire-transfer instruction discussed above, in which the disputed field appears. The second is an unverified allegation, apparently drawn from a 2019 FBI interview with an unnamed individual, describing a claim of cannibalism and “ritualistic sacrifice” allegedly involving Epstein’s circle, reportedly aboard a private aircraft (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2019; independently verified as present in the released files, though not as to its underlying truth, in Snopes, 2026a). This allegation remains entirely uncorroborated. It originates from a single, unnamed source, and no independent physical evidence, named witness, or documentary confirmation has emerged to substantiate it. Responsible treatment of the allegation requires identifying it as an object of viral circulation rather than as evidence bearing on Epstein’s conduct. The absence of verification is a reason to withhold evidentiary weight from the claim, not, as some public commentary has suggested, independent grounds for heightened suspicion that it is true.

Online communities moved quickly to connect these two threads. The name “Baal,” also the designation of an ancient Canaanite deity around whose worship allegations of child sacrifice had historically gathered, became the rhetorical bridge between a financial-document artefact and an unverified allegation of horrific violence. That bridge required a considerable act of interpretive faith, yet within social media’s engagement-driven circulation logic, emotional resonance frequently overwhelms evidential standards. Rapper and cultural commentator Nicki Minaj amplified the connection in a single post that had accumulated more than twenty-four million views as of March 2026 (Minaj, 2026), turning fringe speculation into a topic of mainstream digital conversation within days.

The narrative gained further reach when podcaster Candace Owens, in an episode titled “BAAL SO HARD: The Epstein Files,” published in February 2026 (Owens, 2026) and which had accumulated more than 2.6 million views on YouTube as of March 2026, stated that those implicated in Epstein’s orbit were “effectively pagan gypsies” (language widely condemned as both racist and historically baseless) “who have been wearing

²Moloch/Molek, associated with child sacrifice in biblical texts, was later conflated with Baal in popular usage despite denoting a historiographically distinct figure or votive category. Archaeological evidence suggests ritual

practices concentrated in Carthaginian colonial contexts rather than a stable, empire-wide cult (see Heider, 1985; Day, 1989).

the cloak of Judaism since the fall of the missing Khazarian empire.” She went on to invoke “ancient pagan festivals and ceremonies that center around the earth’s cycles of death and rebirth,” folding religious antiquity into a contemporary framework of conspiratorial accusation. This is not simply invoking history; it is weaponising it, deploying ancient theological categories in service of a specific, well-documented antisemitic substitution pattern discussed at length below (see The Khazarian Hypothesis; Shnirelman, 2002).

A further layer was added to the digital mythology by a podcast episode, apparently released in 2025, from a woman presenting herself as Anya Wick, who claims to have been born Anya Beth Epstein and to be Jeffrey Epstein’s niece (Wick, 2025). Wick alleges that the Epstein family participated in a “Phoenician satanic fertility cult.” No genealogical, documentary, or corroborative evidence has been presented to substantiate the claimed family connection, and the authors have not been able to independently verify Wick’s identity or stated relationship to Epstein; the authors could not independently verify Wick’s identity or claimed familial

relationship to Epstein, so the claim is treated solely as part of the narrative’s circulation rather than as evidence of kinship. The episode has nonetheless amassed over three million views on YouTube as of March 2026. The absence of verification does not establish that the claim is false; it establishes only that it remains unproven, a distinction responsible investigation must preserve. What the episode’s reach does confirm is the mechanics of the modern conspiratorial imagination: testimony of unknown reliability, wrapped in emotional intensity, multiplied by algorithmic preference for provocative content, and delivered to millions of viewers with no apparatus for verification or scrutiny.

Figure 1 presents an author-generated conceptual model of this escalation pathway, from the initial documentary artefact through to its antisemitic redirection. It is not an empirically estimated or measured causal diagram, and readers should not infer that the stages depicted occurred with the sequential certainty the visual format might otherwise suggest (see Materials and Method, above).

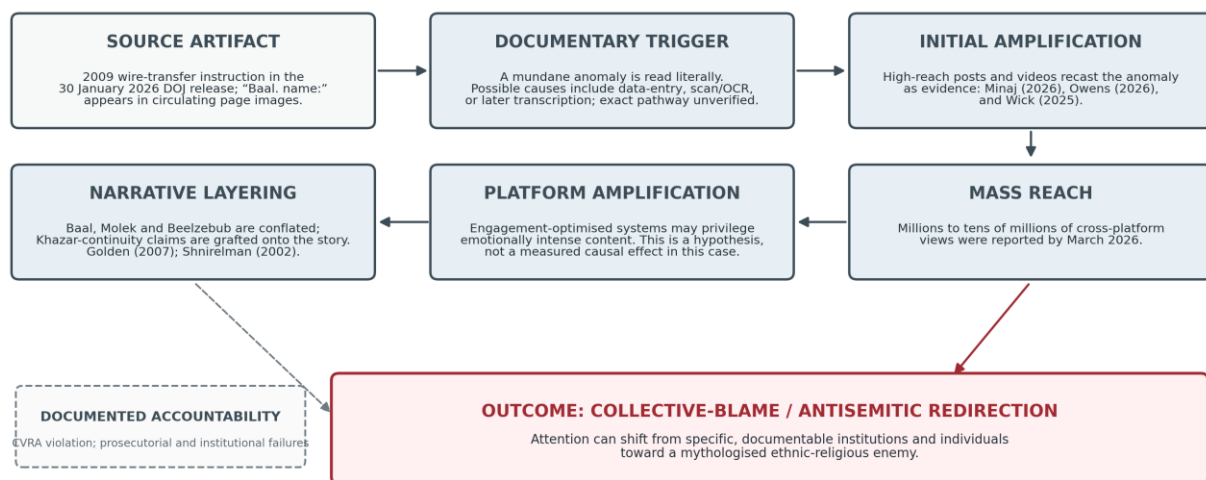


Figure 1. A Conceptual Model of Digital Conspiracy Amplification (Author-Generated). The diagram summarizes the interpretive pathway discussed in the text and should not be read as a measured or statistically derived causal model.

4. Historical Context and Continuity Claims

4.1. Baal in Historical Context: Separating Theology from Terror

Any honest engagement with the Baal allegations requires a serious encounter with history, which is precisely what viral commentary routinely declines to offer. Baal, meaning “lord” in Western Semitic tongues spoken across the ancient Levant, was a preeminent deity in Canaanite religious traditions widely observed across the territories of modern-day Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria for roughly three thousand years before the Common Era. The words “Canaanite” and “Phoenician” are often used interchangeably by commentators, though “Phoenician” was specifically the later Greek

designation for the seafaring people of the Levantine coast who established commercial and cultural colonies throughout the Mediterranean world; this paper retains that distinction throughout rather than treating the two terms as synonyms.

The most important primary text for understanding Baal is the Baal Cycle (Smith, 1994), a collection of mythological narratives discovered in the major archaeological find at Ugarit, in present-day Syria, in 1928. Far from presenting a deity of satanic malice, the Baal Cycle describes a storm god whose cyclical struggle with Mot, the god of death, maps directly onto the agricultural rhythms of the ancient Near East. Baal’s temporary defeat and descent into the underworld, followed by his resurrection, mirrors the arrival of rain after summer

drought: a narrative of renewal, fertility, and the restoration of life consonant with the existential concerns of agricultural civilisations. To label this mythology “satanic” is to retroactively impose post-Christian theological categories on a religious tradition that predates Christianity by more than a millennium. The figure also surfaces within the Islamic scriptural tradition, where the Qur’an recounts the prophet Ilyas confronting a community that had turned to the worship of Ba’l rather than God (Qur’an 37:123–132); classical exegetes read the episode as an instance of misplaced devotion rather than as evidence of any enduring cultic institution, situating Ba’l within a comparative theological lineage rather than an unbroken demonological one.³

A further terminological precision is necessary before turning to the archaeological evidence for child sacrifice, since public commentary, and less careful treatments of this material, have sometimes treated “Baal” as a single, stable figure interchangeable with the deities associated with child sacrifice. Ugaritic Baal (also called Haddu or Hadad), the storm-and-fertility god of the Baal Cycle, is not the same figure as Molek (or Molech), the deity or ritual designation associated with child sacrifice in biblical polemic (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2–5; 2 Kings 23:10), nor identical to Baal Hammon, the patron deity of Carthage to whom the tophet dedications discussed below are addressed. Scholars remain divided over whether molk/Molek denotes a distinct deity, a type of votive offering, or both across different periods and locations (Heider, 1985; Day, 1989). Baal Hammon, for his part, is best understood as a distinct West Semitic sky-and-fertility god who acquired particular prominence in the Carthaginian colonial context, whose cult is not simply continuous with that of Ugaritic Baal centuries earlier and hundreds of kilometres away. The later Christian demonological figure of Beelzebub represents a still further transformation, reflecting post-biblical polemical reinterpretation rather than any single stable ancient referent. Conflating these distinct figures, as much viral commentary does, obscures rather than clarifies the historical record, and this paper accordingly treats Baal, Molek, and Baal Hammon as related but analytically distinct figures throughout.

The question of child sacrifice, however, requires a careful and nuanced treatment, because the historical record on this subject is both real and frequently distorted. Archaeological discoveries in Carthage, a Canaanite colony established by settlers from the coastal city of Tyre in present-day Lebanon during the ninth

century BCE, have uncovered remains of burned children within sanctuaries bearing inscriptions that include the Canaanite term molk (typically translated as ‘sacrifice’ or ‘votive offering’), indicating an offering to the divine. These sanctuaries, known as tophets (sacred precincts associated with burning rites) (Xella et al., 2013), represent one of the most contested sites of debate in ancient Mediterranean studies, with scholars divided over whether the remains indicate religious sacrifice or the burial of children who died in infancy from natural causes. That scholarly debate is genuine and unresolved.

The Hebrew Bible’s repeated polemical condemnations of child sacrifice (e.g., Leviticus 18:21, 20:2–5; Deuteronomy 12:31; 2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31, 19:5) are sometimes read as evidence that such practices were universally rejected across the ancient Levant. That inference should be drawn cautiously: the polemical intensity and repetition of these condemnations arguably indicates that some form of child sacrifice, or a practice perceived as such, was a live and contested option within Israelite and Judahite religious life at various points, and not simply a foreign aberration viewed from a position of secure moral distance (see Day, 1989, for a detailed textual argument along these lines). What the biblical material does support is that child sacrifice was, at minimum, a genuinely contested and morally fraught practice within the ancient Levant generally, rather than a normative or unremarkable one, a materially different and more historically defensible claim than treating biblical condemnation as proof that the practice was exclusively a Carthaginian colonial deviation.

Historian Josephine Quinn, writing in her authoritative work *In Search of the Phoenicians*, offers a particularly important qualification: child sacrifice, even if it occurred in Carthage and related colonial settlements, was not a widespread or normative Canaanite practice in the Levantine heartland. Her research suggests that the sacrificing communities may represent a small, religiously distinct offshoot of Canaanite culture that consolidated specifically within the western Mediterranean colonial diaspora, at some remove from the social and religious norms of the Levantine coast. “No equivalent sites have yet been found on the Levantine coast or anywhere else in the Near East,” she observes (Quinn, 2018), suggesting that what emerged in the colonies represents a divergence from, rather than a straightforward continuation of, mainstream Levantine Canaanite theology.

³Mot, the Ugaritic god of death, represented drought and mortality. His cyclical struggle with Baal symbolized seasonal rhythms of life and renewal.

4.2. The Khazarian Hypothesis and the Problem of Historical Continuity

The most structurally fragile element of the conspiracy narrative is the claim that a continuous institutional thread connects ancient Canaanite child sacrifice to the crimes of Jeffrey Epstein via the medieval Khazarian empire (Golden, 2007). Candace Owens and others assert that Epstein and his associates were Zionist billionaires masquerading as Jews but actually adherents, across generations, of a Phoenician sacrificial cult that survived through the Khazarian polity. Systematic examination of this claim reveals the absence of any serious evidential foundation on which it could stand.

Khazaria existed as a semi-nomadic polity in parts of present-day Russia and the Caucasus between approximately the seventh and tenth centuries of the Common Era. That its ruling class converted to Judaism is attested in historical sources, though the extent and depth of that conversion remain subjects of genuine scholarly debate. What is not debated, because the historical evidence is unambiguous, is that Khazaria emerged well over a thousand years after child sacrifice as a documented practice had ceased in the ancient Near East, and approximately nine hundred years after the Romans destroyed Carthage in 146 BCE (Miles, 2010), extinguishing whatever vestige of the colonial sacrificing communities may have persisted. This narrow historiographical question, debated among specialists on Khazar history such as Golden (2007), should be kept distinct from the wholly separate and empirically discredited “Khazar hypothesis of Ashkenazi ancestry,” a nineteenth- and twentieth-century idea holding that most or all Ashkenazi Jews descend from Khazar converts rather than from the ancient Israelites. That broader ancestry hypothesis has been rejected by the great majority of historians, geneticists, and linguists, and its persistence in public discourse owes far more to its political utility to antisemitic and anti-Zionist actors than to any surviving evidential basis (Shnirelman, 2002).

The Khazarian hypothesis requires explaining a continuity across two thousand years of historical discontinuity, a bridge the existing evidence does not support and for which no credible mechanism of transmission has ever been proposed. It merits rejection not because elite networks are above suspicion (they are not) but because the specific mechanism of transmission it

proposes is, on the available evidence, historically implausible: no textual, archaeological, or institutional record documents any bridge connecting Bronze Age Levantine cultic practice, its attenuated colonial afterlife at Carthage, and a medieval Turkic polity a millennium and a continent removed from either.

The Khazarian theory also functions, in its underlying logic, as a specific and well-documented antisemitic substitution mechanism with a traceable modern genealogy. Arthur Koestler’s popular but historiographically unreliable book *The Thirteenth Tribe* (1976) is widely credited with reviving the “Khazar hypothesis of Ashkenazi ancestry” for a general audience. Despite Koestler’s own professed intent of undermining antisemitism by severing Ashkenazi identity from biblical Israel, the hypothesis was subsequently taken up by antisemitic and anti-Zionist writers and repurposed into the claim that contemporary Jewish identity is a fraudulent construction concealing a deeper, sinister allegiance, the specific pattern scholars term collective-blame or ‘fraudulent-identity’ substitution (Shnirelman, 2002). In its most recent iteration, circulating under the label “Khazarian Mafia,” the trope alleges a clandestine cabal of ‘fake’ Jews controlling global finance and politics, and has been documented spreading across fringe and mainstream platforms alike, including in relation to entirely unrelated events such as the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2022). This narrative structure is not new: it borrows from a long tradition of esoteric and extremist literature that positions Jewish people as the occult architects of global catastrophe, substituting theological fantasy for social analysis and recycling antisemitic tropes that have historically served as an ideological prelude to violence. This framing also performs a second, equally dangerous function: by attributing Epstein’s crimes to an ancient ethnic-religious conspiracy, it deflects scrutiny away from specific individuals and institutions whose documented relationships, decisions, or institutional roles warrant scrutiny. The antisemitic conspiracy frame therefore risks redirecting attention away from evidence-based questions of individual and institutional accountability.

Figure 2 lays out the chronology at issue: even granting every contested premise, the hypothesis still requires bridging roughly two millennia with no documented mechanism of transmission.

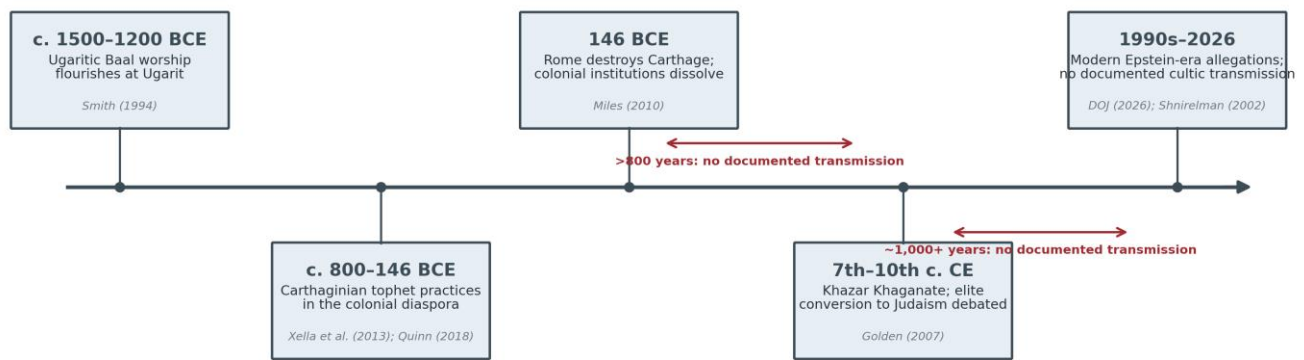


Figure 2. Chronological Discontinuity Underlying the Khazarian Hypothesis (Author-Generated). The diagram is a conceptual timeline, not a quantitative estimate; the highlighted intervals mark periods for which no documented transmission mechanism has been established.

5. Digital Amplification and Analytical Clarification

5.1. Algorithm and Myth: How Digital Ecosystems Manufacture Belief

Understanding why these narratives achieve the reach they do requires an analysis of the infrastructure through which contemporary belief is produced and distributed. The Epstein files, as a phenomenon, arrived at a moment of acute and legitimate public distrust. The release of records documenting Epstein's extensive associations with celebrated and powerful figures, alongside confirmed systematic abuse by Epstein and Maxwell, reinforced for many people a long-standing intuition that elite impunity could be structural and institutionally protected. That intuition is not irrational; it is, in significant measure, corroborated by the documented record. The 2007 non-prosecution agreement, the subsequently confirmed CVRA violation, and continued public interest in individuals named in Epstein's flight logs and contact books together indicate that institutional scrutiny of his network has been uneven and, in important respects, incomplete. This paper does not claim that any specific named individual beyond those already subject to legal findings, chiefly Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell, has been proven complicit in his crimes. The claim, more precisely, is that documented institutional failures are sufficient on their own to explain enduring public suspicion, without recourse to mythological explanation.

Algorithmic platforms interact with this justified suspicion in ways that current research suggests, though does not yet establish with platform-specific causal precision, may amplify emotionally intense but poorly verified content (Vaidhyanathan, 2018; Ribeiro et al., 2020). Engagement-optimised recommendation systems have been shown, in empirical audits of individual platforms such as YouTube, to be capable of surfacing progressively more extreme or sensational content in response

to user engagement signals (Ribeiro et al., 2020); the Baal narrative, with its evocative combination of infanticide, ancient evil, and secret global coordination, plausibly fits the profile of content such systems reward, though this paper does not claim to have measured that dynamic directly for the specific platforms and posts discussed here, and the claim should be read as a hypothesis consistent with the existing literature rather than as a demonstrated mechanism specific to this case.

A viral post from a celebrity with tens of millions of followers, a YouTube episode with a title explicitly connecting Epstein to ancient sacrifice, a podcast featuring an unverified claimant to familial connection: each of these is well suited to platform incentive structures that reward sustained engagement, even when evidential quality is uncertain.

The problem is not that the public suspects powerful people of extraordinary crimes; the Epstein case confirms that such suspicion is warranted. The problem is that mythological frameworks, by framing real crimes as supernatural, make accountability structurally more difficult to pursue.

The consequence is that mythological language becomes progressively detached from its scholarly context and repurposed as a political instrument. Baal ceases to be a figure of Near Eastern agricultural theology and becomes instead a symbol of hidden evil, one onto which contemporary fears about power, sexuality, and institutional betrayal are projected. The symbol gains its force precisely because it is ancient and obscure: its unfamiliarity to general audiences creates a sense of hidden knowledge recovered, of patterns discerned beneath the surface of official reality. That is the appeal of conspiracy as a mode of explanation: the feeling of seeing through appearances rather than into actual causes. When the actual causes, money, access, legal manipulation, institutional cowardice, are already visible in the documentary record, adopting mythological explanation does not sharpen the inquiry. It

replaces it. Islamic theological tradition offers a useful analytical vocabulary for this substitution: shirk, ordinarily rendered as the assignment of divine attributes to created things, is understood in the Qur'an to encompass not just literal idol-worship but the elevation of any partial, created object, including one's own desire (Qur'an 25:43), to the status of an ultimate explanatory principle. Read through that lens, the digital resurrection of Baal performs a similar displacement: a symbol given an explanatory power its referent cannot bear, installed precisely where disciplined causal reasoning is needed most.⁴

5.2. Three Layers of Analytical Clarity

A rigorous assessment of the Epstein-Baal claims requires separating three analytical layers that have become deeply entangled in public discourse. The first is evidential. The Epstein files reveal, with considerable clarity, patterns of abuse, networks of high-profile association, and troubling institutional failures that allowed exploitation to continue across decades. What they do not reveal, despite the enormous volume of documents released, is any verifiable documentation establishing a continuity between Epstein's activities and organised religious practices linked to ancient Near Eastern deities. The reference to "Baal" in the disputed field is, on the evidence set out above, best explained as a corrupted rendering of a routine financial-form field, not a chosen religious label; financial-document artefacts of this kind are ordinarily mundane. This explanation is far more parsimonious, in the investigative sense of preferring simpler explanations that require fewer unsupported assumptions, than the alternative. The inferential leap from a disputed field label to an ancient sacrificial cult demands a standard of proof that has not been remotely approached, while the evidence for a very earthly network of enablers, fixers, and institutional protectors continues to grow.

The second layer is historical. The invocation of Baal in contemporary conspiracy discourse reflects a recurring phenomenon in Western cultural history: the reinterpretation of ancient religions through the lens of modern moral anxieties. Scholarship on Canaanite traditions presents sophisticated, internally coherent theological systems rooted in agrarian cosmology and humanity's relationship to natural forces, not the simplified ritual of evil that viral narratives require. Historical discontinuity spanning millennia of religious transformation, empire formation, cultural rupture, and

demographic displacement leaves claims of institutional survival across three thousand years not just unproven but, absent substantial and currently nonexistent archaeological or textual evidence, historically implausible. This is a high evidentiary bar, and it has not been cleared.

The third layer is sociopolitical. The persistence of these allegations reveals more about the present than about the past. Conspiracy narratives emerge with particular force when institutional accountability appears incomplete, delayed, or structurally compromised. Epstein's connections to political figures, financiers, and global elites intensified the perception that justice operated unevenly, that certain people enjoyed a proximity to power that insulated them from the consequences ordinary citizens face (see Introduction and Documentary Trigger sections above). In such a context, myth becomes a way of converting systemic failure into intentional design, of turning moral outrage into cosmological struggle. The danger is not that people are angry; the anger is legitimate and, in many cases, politically productive. The danger is that the anger is redirected from the structural toward the supernatural, from the reformable toward the irredeemable, from the specifically accountable toward the mythologically inexhaustible.

5.3. Elite Deviance and Institutional Impunity

Whatever framework one applies, the factual foundation must be established first: what do we actually know? We know that Jeffrey Epstein abused dozens, credibly alleged to be more than a hundred, young women and girls over a period spanning at least two decades. We know that he did so across multiple jurisdictions and multiple properties, including a private island where the full scope of what occurred remains incompletely documented in the public record. We know that he maintained documented relationships with some of the most powerful individuals on earth. We know that in 2007 a federal prosecutor negotiated a non-prosecution agreement so favourable to Epstein that a federal district court later found it violated his victims' statutory rights, even though the Eleventh Circuit subsequently held, on procedural grounds, that those victims had no freestanding right of action to challenge it (*In re Wild*, 994 F.3d 1244 (11th Cir. 2021)). We know that he was arrested a second time in 2019 and died in a federal detention facility under circumstances that the New York City Chief Medical Examiner

⁴On shirk as the absolutizing of the partial or created, including desire, ideology, or symbol, rather than literal idolatry alone, see Rahman (1980) and Izutsu (1964).

attributed to suicide, a finding publicly disputed by forensic pathologist Michael Baden, retained by Epstein's brother, Mark Epstein, to observe the autopsy, who has argued that specific injuries were more consistent with homicidal strangulation than with suicidal hanging. That dispute remains unresolved in the public record. We know that his closest associate, Ghislaine Maxwell, was convicted of sex trafficking and is serving a twenty-year federal sentence (U.S. Department of Justice, Southern District of New York, 2021). Broader claims, that an undisclosed 'architecture of protection' remains fully intact, or that specific named individuals beyond Epstein and Maxwell bear proven criminal responsibility, exceed what the public record currently supports and are not asserted here. What the record does support is that significant questions about the scope of Epstein's network remain publicly unresolved.

Some public commentary has reached for the psychoanalytic concept of 'malignant narcissism' (Fromm, 1964; Kernberg, 1991) as an explanatory framework for Epstein's conduct. That concept, originally developed by Fromm and elaborated by Kernberg as a theoretical construct combining narcissistic and antisocial features with sadistic and paranoid traits, is not a diagnosis recognised in current editions of the major clinical diagnostic manuals, and no clinical assessment of Epstein exists in the public record on which such a diagnosis could responsibly be based. This paper accordingly does not diagnose Epstein, clinically or otherwise, and treats 'malignant narcissism' strictly as a historical psychoanalytic concept illustrating how the erosion of external accountability can, in principle, correspond to an erosion of internal moral restraint. It is not offered as an evidence-based account of Epstein's individual psychology. A methodologically stronger and more empirically tractable framework is available in the sociological literature on elite deviance: the study of how concentrations of wealth, status, and institutional access systematically insulate powerful actors from the ordinary consequences of wrongdoing (Simon, 2011). Read through that lens, Epstein's case exemplifies a recurring structural pattern of opportunity, insulation, and the mutual implication of collaborators, rather than a uniquely individual psychopathology, ancient or modern.

The available evidence does not establish that Epstein or his associates used Baal, or any other ancient deity, as part of a private symbolic vocabulary. If future documentary evidence were to demonstrate ritualised or occult imagery within Epstein's circle, that would constitute a distinct sociological question concerning symbolism, group identity, psychological control, or elite transgression. It would still fall far short of

demonstrating theological continuity with Bronze Age Canaan. The evidentiary question of whether ritualised symbolism was present in Epstein's environment must therefore remain separate from the historically much stronger claim that he belonged to a three-thousand-year-old sacrificial cult, for which no documented transmission mechanism has been established.

6. Conclusion: Myth as Misdirection

The investigation into the Baal cult allegations surrounding Jeffrey Epstein ultimately confronts a paradox that defines the contemporary information age: the coexistence of verified criminal reality and speculative explanatory mythology. Epstein's crimes were neither imaginary nor trivial. Judicial records, survivor testimonies, and multiple legal proceedings confirmed a system of exploitation sustained by extraordinary wealth, social access, and the failures of institutions that should have intervened years earlier. The magnitude of those failures created an interpretive vacuum, one increasingly occupied by narratives invoking ancient cults, hidden civilisations, and metaphysical conspiracies scaled to match the moral shock they sought to explain. That the vacuum exists at all is a structural indictment of every institution that chose complicity over accountability.

The investigative conclusion is not that public suspicion is irrational. It is that the suspicion is correct about its target and mistaken about its mechanism. The documentary record establishes repeated institutional failures and decisions that shielded Epstein from timely accountability. What the record, and what the available historical evidence, does not support, is a three-thousand-year sacrificial cult as the organising principle of that protection. The protection was organised by recognisable human motives: self-interest, mutual implication, the social glue of shared transgression, and the extraordinary leverage that extreme wealth confers over legal and regulatory systems.

Misattributing modern crimes to mythical continuity carries a serious cost, borne primarily by the survivors and by the public interest in genuine accountability. Every hour of public attention devoted to Baal worship is an hour not devoted to asking why specific prosecutors, financiers, and officials made the decisions they made. The task of honest investigation is therefore not only to uncover hidden truths but to resist explanations that substitute symbolic grandeur for analytical clarity, while sustaining, with equal rigour, the suspicion that the full truth has not yet been told. Understanding the specific vulnerabilities that enabled Epstein's crimes, naming the people who exploited them, and refusing to dissolve accountability into mythology remains the

essential obligation of investigation, of journalism, and of law.

The Baal cult allegations, examined with historical rigour and investigative discipline, illustrate a broader lesson about the relationship between societies and scandal. Confronted with injustice whose scale exceeds conventional understanding, communities seek explanations proportional to their moral shock. Ancient myths provide narrative magnitude equal to modern disbelief. The evidence, examined dispassionately, points toward a more unsettling and more actionable truth: the mechanisms enabling Epstein's crimes were not supernatural remnants of antiquity but recognisable features of

modern power: impunity, social insulation, institutional cowardice, and the systematic failure of the accountability structures designed to impose limits on those who operate at the apex of wealth and influence. Those mechanisms are institutional, evidentiary, and legally actionable rather than mythological.

The crimes were real. The impunity was real. The institutional failures were real. The survivors deserve a reckoning built on those realities, not on the borrowed imagery of Bronze Age deities repurposed for the digital age, and not on the comfortable fiction that the full story has already been told.

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Appendix A. Heuristic for Evaluating Viral Historical-Conspiracy Claims

The following is offered as an author-generated interpretive heuristic, not as an empirically validated instrument, and is intended to model the evidentiary discipline argued for throughout this paper.

1	When a claim relies on ancient terminology as “evidence,” verify the claim against primary historical or archaeological sources rather than against its rhetorical resonance.	2	When a claim attributes crimes or conduct to an entire racial, ethnic, or religious collective, treat that attribution itself as a signal warranting scrutiny for antisemitic or other collective-blame framing, rather than as an explanatory finding.
3	When a claim goes viral, ask what effects the narrative has and which forms of institutional accountability it tends to foreground or displace, rather than assuming a specific intentional beneficiary.	4	Distinguish consistently between documented institutional failure and speculative mythological explanation, even when both concern the same underlying events.