



CHICAGO JOURNALS

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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Apr., 1969), pp. 73-83

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

JOURNAL OF
Near Eastern Studies

APRIL 1969 • VOLUME 28 • NUMBER 2
EIGHTY-SIXTH YEAR

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK
OF GENESIS

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IN OUR generation, research in the Book of Genesis has progressed significantly because of the abundance of epigraphic documents and archeological evidence which have shed new light on many phenomena relating to cultural life in the Near East in general, and in Canaan particularly, during the second and early first millennia B.C. Numerous recent studies and commentaries have treated in detail the diverse problems pertaining to the literary sources of the book and their affinity to neighboring cultures—in language and literary form, in political, social, legal, and religious background, and with regard to Israelite origins. I make reference particularly to the most recent study of Genesis by Ephraim A. Speiser, which appeared only a few months before the passing of the esteemed scholar.¹

In contrast to most scholarly opinion, which continues to subscribe to the viewpoint of the Documentary Hypothesis, with its many ramifications, positing that the Book of Genesis was compiled from the sources J, E, and P by means of a complex process of editorial activity, various scholars have attempted to develop their own theories concerning the character, sources, and mode of composition of the Book of Genesis within the framework of the OT.² Thus, the late Umberto Cassuto saw in the Book of Genesis a single, unified composition from the outset, created according to a pre-determined plan, whose sources are various traditions, differing from one another in origin and character, which were culled and selected from the store of traditions that were extant in ancient Israel.³

Views are no less divided with respect to the early and late dating of various sources

¹ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, "The Anchor Bible" (New York, 1964).

² See O. Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*³ (1964), pp. 205 ff., where there is a detailed bibliography.

³ U. D. Cassuto, *From Adam till Noah* (1954); *From Noah till Abraham* (1949); *La Questione della*

Genesi (1934). About the viewpoint of the Scandinavian school, see: H. S. Nyberg, *Oral Tradition* (1954); and of the German School: M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuchs* (1948); G. von Rad, *Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels* (1957).

of Genesis, assessing the patriarchal accounts as an historic source, the degree of their reliability, and their importance for research in the emergence of the Israelite people.

Before dealing with principal problems having to do with the historical background of Genesis, let us discuss a few preliminary topics, without relation to the body of matter pertaining to its sources, or the hypotheses of the various scholars.

Genesis reveals itself to us as a monumental historiographic composition, the product of rich and variegated material collected, combined, arranged, and worked into one harmonious tract, with the purpose of portraying both the beginnings of mankind and the origins of Israel in the spirit of the monotheistic concept, and with a didactic aim. That pure religious notion, expressed in the belief in the one God of Israel, who is also the sole God ruling over the hidden recesses of creation, who had revealed Himself to the fathers of the nation by His various epithets, as well as by His explicit name, and had promised to their seed the whole land from the Euphrates to the River of Egypt—that notion corresponds precisely to the national and religious spirit which surged within the Israelite people during the period of the United Kingdom and the extension of its borders far beyond the limits of the Israelite settlement. It is within reason that Genesis was given its original written form during the time when the Davidic empire was being established, and that the additions and supplements of later authors were only intended to help bridge the time gap for contemporary readers, and had no decisive effect on its contents or its overall character.

This dating is indicated, in particular, by the poetic utterances inserted in the patriarchal accounts, including the blessing of Jacob, which stresses Judah's ascendancy over the other Israelite tribes, and the blessing of Isaac (as well as Noah's curse on Canaan) aimed to justify Israelite hegemony in Canaan and among nearby neighbors. Also attributable to this period is Genesis, chapter 14, in which a two-fold objective is prominent: (1) To substantiate the right of possession over the land on both sides of the Jordan, from El-paran, which apparently is none other than Elath, all the way to the region lying north of Damascus, on the basis of the father of the nation having acquired it by virtue of his victory over external enemies. (2) To mention Abraham's relationship to Melchizedek, king of Salem, and a priest of 'El-'Elyon, who had blessed the father of the nation and received from him "a tenth of everything." The words of the poet in Psalm 110 may well testify that with the conquest of Jerusalem by David that genealogical tradition which had linked the rulers of the city to Melchizedek—and with it the right of possession over the city—was transferred to the House of David. It is within reason that what is written in Genesis, chapter 14, is only a link in a chain of traditions then being forged in the new capital, including the traditions about Jerusalem as a site holy to 'El-'Elyon ("Jahweh the Most High, creator of heaven and earth" of Gen. 14:22); about the "binding of Isaac" at a mountain in the land of Moriah where Abraham built an altar, naming the place "the Lord appears" (Heb. *yera'eh*; Gen. 22:14); and about the building of an altar by David on the threshing floor of Aravnah, the Jebusite, at the very sanctified spot on Mt. Moriah "where He (the Lord) appeared to David" (Heb. *nir'ah*; II Chron. 3:1), and where Solomon erected the Temple.⁴ It is in place to mention the anachronisms in Genesis 14, such as Ashteroth-karnaim (Ashteroth in the region of

⁴ See Cassuto, *Eretz-Israel* 3 (1954), 15 ff.; B. Mazar in the anthology *Judah and Jerusalem* (1957), pp. 27 ff. (Hebrew).

Karnaim), and Hazezon-tamar (Hazezon in the region of Tamar), Dan, and "the valley of the king" (cf. II Sam. 18:18). And even the divine epithet "El-³Elyon, creator of heaven and earth" apparently cannot be dated much earlier than 1000 B.C.⁵

Moreover, the account in Gen. 14 fits in organically with the account of the sacrifice-covenant in Gen. 15, which reflects the political aspirations of David's and Solomon's time ("To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates"), and the promise of mastery over the Canaanite peoples, including the Kenites and the Kenizzites, who up to the time of David still comprised separate ethnic entities in Judah.

Another fact deserving of attention is that during the period of the United Kingdom the fixed, articulated, Phoenician-Hebrew alphabetical script became the accepted, widespread script in Palestine, and made possible the lively literary activity in the royal court and the priestly circles of Jerusalem. This creativity was manifested in various literary genres, in poetry and in prose, encompassing historiographic works, epic, religious and didactic poetry, and wisdom literature, which drew their inspiration both from Israelite traditions and from Mesopotamian, Canaanite-Phoenician, and Egyptian sources. It was not idly said of Solomon: "The wisdom of Solomon exceeded that of all of the peoples of the East, and all of the wisdom of Egypt," which means that wisdom literature, in different forms and of a different origin, was known in Israel and was particularly current in the royal court in Jerusalem.⁶ It is, then, in place to assume that at the time of the composition of Genesis, whose chief purpose was in the nature of: "Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth . . . which we have heard, and we know them; our ancestors have recounted them to us" (Ps. 78:1-2), the authors of Genesis had recourse not only to the national traditions then current but to various literary works, including Mesopotamian and Canaanite mythological and epic works. Some of these were imbedded in Genesis, especially in the primeval history, after having undergone thorough literary reformulation (though there are cases of different versions of the same story having been retained), in the spirit of Israelite monotheism, and in conformity to the historiographic conception which assigns great importance to genealogies in the history of mankind generally, and in Israelite history particularly.⁷

⁵ About ³El ⁴Elyōn, creator of heaven and earth, → F. M. Cross, *The Harvard Theological Review*, LX, 4 (1964), 241 ff. It is worth noting that outside of the biblical sources the appellation (³El) ⁴Elyōn is mentioned in the theogony of Sanchunyatōn and in the Sfire inscription (אל ועליו, A10) but is not at all known of in epigraphic sources from the second millennium B.C. Cf. R. Rendtorff, *Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, I (1967), 167 ff.

⁶ See A. Alt, *Kleine Schriften*, II (1953), 90 ff. With regard to the circulation of the Mesopotamian literary works it is worth mentioning that sections of the story of Gilgamesh in various versions from the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C. have been discovered in Megiddo and in Ugarit, and, in Hittite and Hurrian translations, also in Boğazköy.

⁷ Complex problems have recently arisen having to do with the first chapters of Genesis, among them the accounts of the Creation, the Garden of Eden, and the Tower of Babel, and the degree to which they were influenced, directly or indirectly, by the Meso-

potamian and Canaanite epics (cf. recently C. Westerman, *Genesis*, I, 1 [1966]); see also the detailed discussions in Speiser's exegesis of Genesis, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, W. G. Lambert's criticism of the views current among scholars ("A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," *JThS*, XVI, 2 [1965], 287 ff.). Speiser's opinion (*Orientalia* [1956], pp. 317 ff.) that the story of the Tower of Babel had its source in the Babylonian literary work, *Enūma eliš*, is quite instructive; but Lambert dates this literary work not before the eleventh century. It is conceivable that the Mesopotamian poems, in common with other mythological and epic works, came to Israel not only through the intermediation of the Canaanite culture, but indirectly as well, via travellers in caravans who traversed the trade routes—and that they are included in the general term "the wisdom of all the people of the east" (I Kings 4:30). With respect to the problem of genealogy, see W. Dufy, *The Tribal Historical Theory on the Origin of the Hebrew People* (1944), and J. Liver,

One may, apparently, also count among these the resemblances with ancient epics, such as the Nimrod account, incorporated into the Table of Nations. According to Speiser, this account is based on an epic of the exploits of Tukulti-Ninurta I, king of Assyria at the end of the thirteenth century B.C.⁸ In like fashion, the account of the expedition of Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and his allies, including Amraphel King of Shinar and Tidal King of Goiim, which apparently resembles a variety of ancient epics, is also incorporated into the account of Abraham's exploits in Genesis 14. Although it is not possible to prove the identification of Chedorlaomer with the Elamite king Kudur-Nahūndi I, as has been suggested by Albright, it is certainly worth mentioning that the exploits of this Elamite king had achieved notoriety and were related in later generations, as well.⁹ In any event, the practice of incorporating sections of epics or their semblance into historical accounts, and even into royal annals, was not unfamiliar to the ancients.¹⁰

The fundamental problem before us is whether it may be determined with any degree of certainty what were the delimitations in time of the way of life reflected in the series of patriarchal accounts, clarifying the historical context relevant to the political and ethnic picture which is portrayed in them. It seems to me that many contemporary scholars have gone too far in their recurring attempts to discover in the Akkadian sources, such as the Mari documents from the eighteenth century B.C., the Nuzi tablets from the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries, and even in the Egyptian sources from the Middle Kingdom, corroboration of the antiquity of the patriarchal accounts, or at least for the antiquity of the traditions imbedded in them, seeing in them monumental testimony to the existence of the "patriarchal period" as an actual, chronologically defined, historical era.¹¹ This is the case with the overall picture as reflected by the archeological digs and surveys at sites of the Middle Bronze period, and particularly Middle Bronze I in the Negev.¹² There is certainly room for thought and reconsideration of the conflicting views as to the dating of the "patriarchal period" to the first, second, and third quarters of the second millennium B.C.

Though it is undoubtedly true that the Israelites retained vague memories of the common origin and destiny of the tribes in the remote past, and traditions about the names and genealogies of their forefathers, of their origin in Mesopotamia and their

Encyclopaedia Biblica, Vol. III, s.v. 'yahas.' Concerning the exaggerated importance attributed to genealogy lists already at the time of the "Amoritic" kingdom of Babylonia (Hammurabi's dynasty), we can now learn a great deal from an extremely interesting document from the time of Ammišadūqa. See J. J. Finkelstein, *JCS* 20 [1966], 95 ff.

⁸ See Speiser, *Eretz-Israel*, 5 (1959), English section, pp. 32 ff.; on the exploits of Tukulti-Ninurta I, see also E. Weidner, *AfO*, 20 (1963), 113 ff.

⁹ See W. F. Albright, *BASOR*, 88 (1942), 33 ff.; 163 (1961), 53, n. 76.

¹⁰ See A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (1964), pp. 150 f., 362; and H. G. Güterbock, *JCS*, 18 (1964), 1 ff.

¹¹ The increasing number of epigraphic sources of the second millennium B.C. (particularly from Mari, Ugarit, Alalah, and Boğazköy) puts to a severe test the entire theoretical framework dealing with Hebrew origins and with the traditions contained in the book of Genesis and their evaluation as a historical source. At the same time the question arises all the more

sharply as to whether, or to what degree the parallelism in ancient social and legal forms, in customs and in motifs, can validly serve as a basis for establishing a chronology of the stories about the Patriarchs of the Hebrew nation, not to speak of the credibility of the events described therein. The various opinions, which are often contradictory to one another, and even undergo changes from time to time, have in recent years found expression in books on biblical history, entries in encyclopaedias, and numerous scholarly papers. See *inter alia* C. H. Gordon, *The World of the Old Testament*² (1960), pp. 113 ff.; *Biblical and Other Studies* (1963), pp. 3 ff.; W. F. Albright, *BASOR*, 163 (1961), 36 ff.; M. Noth, *Die Ursprünge des alten Israel im Lichte neuer Quellen* (1961); R. de Vaux, *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, ed. by J. Ph. Hyatt (1965); S. Yeivin, *RSO*, 38 (1963), 277 ff.

¹² See N. Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert* (1959), *passim*; Albright, *op. cit.*, and against their theory M. Kochavi's thesis, "The Settlement of the Negev in the Middle Bronze I Age," submitted to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on April 1967, pp. 232 ff.

connections with the "sons" of Nahor,¹³ of their migration to Canaan and of their descent to Egypt, a penetrating analysis of the accounts recorded in Genesis does not permit us to consider them as a faithful representation of the actual history of the Patriarchs and their exploits. Nor can we consider them to be ancient sources from which we may reconstruct, to any significant extent, the stages of the Israelite emergence against the background of general history, dwelling on the processes and developments relating to the lives of the Patriarchs over the generations, till the time of the formation of the "amphictyony" of the twelve tribes of Israel.

In my view, it is much more within reason that the way of life and the ethnic and socio-political picture reflected in the patriarchal accounts generally correspond to the end of the period of the Judges and the beginning of the monarchy. That is to say: the *Sitz im Leben* of these accounts, part of which are certainly based on folk-legends from the time of the Israelite occupation of Canaan, derives principally from a time that preceded by only a generation or two that very period during which the great historiographic work was given its original written form. This hypothesis is supported by certain data which can be interpreted only against the background of their historical period.

We must first give our attention to what are customarily termed "anachronisms," which run like a scarlet thread through the tableau of the patriarchal accounts, and which are also to be found in the first chapters of Genesis, such as the important role assigned to the Philistines and the Arameans, two nations which entered the arena of history in the twelfth century B.C.

Particularly instructive are the stories of the Patriarchs in the Negev, in Beersheba and in the region west of it, i.e. Gerar, which was an integral part of the Philistine country. In the ancient sources of Chronicles, Gerar, lying on the periphery of the area of settlement of Judah and its sub-groups, is described as a broad, open country, excelling in good pasture land, and containing relatively few permanent settlements and various semi-nomadic tribes (I Chron. 4:39 f.; II Chron. 14:13-14), while in Gen. 10:19 it is placed in the Western Negev, the southernmost region of the land of Canaan. The same is true of the accounts about Abraham and Isaac, who are pictured to us as "great men," living as semi-nomads in the region of Beersheba, and from there migrating, especially in times of drought, to Philistine Gerar. By virtue of their treaty with Abimelek, king of the Philistines, they would reside there under his protection, grazing their flocks and even engaging in seasonal agriculture (Gen. 26:12). At times disputes broke out between them and the Philistines over wells, and occasionally they moved southward with their flocks to the expanses of the Negev, reaching Kadesh-barnea and Beer-lahai-roi on the road to Shur. When there was a severe drought, they went down as far as the Nile Delta with Pharaoh's consent.¹⁴

The way of life and conditions of settlement reflected in these accounts do not differ from those existing in the days when David and his men resided in the Western Negev, in the territory of and under the protection of Achish, king of the Philistines, whose capital was Gat; and they correspond very well to all that the archeological surveys have

¹³ See B. Mazar, *Zion*, 11 (1946), 1 ff. (Hebrew).

¹⁴ From various sources relating to the Middle and Late Kingdoms, and particularly from the story in Papyrus Anastasi VI (R. A. Caminos, *Late Egyptian Miscellanies* [1954], pp. 293 ff.) about permission

being granted to nomads from Edom to enter the Delta region under similar circumstances (ca. 1200 B.C.), it may be assumed that this was a prevalent custom, not confined to any particular period or periods.

revealed concerning the unwallled settlements of the semi-nomads of the eleventh century in that region.¹⁵

One may find in the accounts about Abraham, Isaac, and Abimelek transparent allusions to the relations between the Judeans and their sub-groups in the Negev and the Philistine kingdom during the last quarter of the eleventh century. It is, therefore, not surprising that Achish is called by the name Abimelek in the title verse of Psalm 34: "To David, when he feigned madness before Abimelek, so that he drove him out, and he departed." There is no need to alter the text, or to assign to it a later date.

It is not by chance, therefore, that the author of the book of Samuel was careful to distinguish between the Kerethite Negev and the Negev of Judah and its sub-groups (I Sam. 30:14), which parallels the distinction in the same passage between the land of the Philistines and the land of Judah (*ibid.*, 30:16). This also explains the fact that the accounts in Genesis recognize a king of the Philistines, accompanied by his general, his "councillor" (Heb. *mere'ēhu*) and his slaves. What is here reflected is a monarchical regime, apparently established in Philistia at the time when the league of the five Philistine *Šeranīm* was cancelled, during the third quarter of the eleventh century. A corresponding system existed contemporaneously in the Israelite kingdom (cf. II Sam. 3:8).

As to the Arameans and the appellations of the Aramean countries—Aram-naharaim and Padan-aram—we have no convincing evidence for the appearance of the Arameans on the stage of history before the end of the twelfth century B.C. Tiglat-Pileser I was the first Assyrian king who fought against the Aḥlamē-Arameans, i.e. the nomadic Arameans in the broad area between the middle Euphrates and Mt. Sirion.¹⁶ In the course of the eleventh century they gained a foothold in the Euphrates crescent and in the adjoining areas in Mesopotamia. This background explains the description of the life of the semi-nomadic Arameans of Padan-aram, whose principal occupation was still pasture. So, too, we can well understand the fact that in the genealogical lists Aram appears as the younger branch in the "amphictyony" of the tribes of Nahor (Gen. 22:21), and that in the popular legend Laban the Aramean is accorded an honored position among the Arameans, whose central area of settlement was Haran in Aram-naharaim, spreading from there till eastern Transjordan.¹⁷

Here is reflected the historic course of events during the second half, and more particularly the end, of the eleventh century. On this background we can understand the account in Genesis in which the name Gilead is explained as being derived from the Hebrew *gal'ed*, "mound of witness" (in Aramaic *yegar šahadūthā*), and which describes the treaty enacted between Laban the Aramean and Jacob, the eponymus of the Israelite tribes, in Mizpah, in the region of Mt. Gilead, which treaty determined the

¹⁵ About the unwallled settlements in this region, see R. Gofna, *Yedioth*, 28 (1964), 236 ff. (Hebrew); *Atiqoth*, 3 (1966), 44 ff. On the basis of the pottery, they may be dated to the second half of the 11th century B.C. and the beginning of the 10th.

¹⁶ The various attempts to prove that the Arameans appeared earlier (see A. Dupont Sommer, *VTS*, I [1953], 40 ff.; M. F. Unger, *Israel and the Aramaeans of Damascus* [1957], p. 39; S. Moscati, *JSS*, IV, 303 ff.) have been fruitless, and no conclusive proof of this view has been found in the cuneiform sources; see also N. Schneider, *Biblica*, 30 (1949), 109 → J. C. S. Gibson, *JNES*, 20 (1961), 229 ff. This is also the case with everything that has to do with

the "proto-Aramean" language of the Western Semites in Mesopotamia (Noth, *ibid.*); see also D. O. Edzard, *ZA*, N. F., 22 (1964), 142 ff. To approximately this same period of time may be dated the initial appearances of the nomadic Chaldeans (Gen. 25:22; Job 1:17). This is the source of the combination Ur-of-the-Chaldees, which indicates that the Chaldeans resided in Ur. The land of the Chaldeans (*māt Kaldū*) at the southern end of Mesopotamia is known to us from the first half of the 9th century B.C. See, → H. W. F. Saggs, *Iraq*, 22 (1960), 200 ff.

¹⁷ S → B. Mazar, *Biblical Archaeologist*, XXV (1962), 98 ff.

territorial boundaries of the two nations (Gen. 31:45-54). What we have, in fact, is an enlightening portrayal of the relationship between Aram and Israel before the beginning of David's war against the kingdom of Aram-zobah and her allies in Transjordan.

Mentions of Moab and Ammon, the nations of the eastern border region, who are genealogically linked to Lot, are also fitted into the political and ethnic picture, as are the accounts and poems alluding to Edom's subservience to Israel in the days of David's reign. On this background are comprehensible also the lists of the kings of Edom "before a king ruled in Israel" (Gen. 36:31-39).

No less oriented to this period are the accounts about Ishmael, described as the father of a great nation, genealogically associated with Abraham and Hagar. The Ishmaelites are tribes of nomads, tent dwellers, camel riders, whose religious center was Beer-lahai-roi on the road to Shur, a site associated with the traditions about Isaac. Certainly we cannot assign to the appearance of the Ishmaelites on the border region of Palestine a date earlier than the eleventh century. In the course of their tremendous expansion, they dispossessed the Midianites, who had preceded them in the border regions and in the nearby desert areas, and absorbed them into their midst, which explains the relationship between the Midianites and the Ishmaelites in Genesis and the book of Judges.¹⁸ The merging of their tribes became a most important factor in the operation of the desert caravan trade: "And they dwelt from Havilah by-Shur, which is close to Egypt, all the way to Asshur. They made raids against all their kinsmen" (Gen. 25:18). This geographical definition reminds us, by the way, of the area within which the desert nomads operated in the days of Saul: "from Havilah by-Shur, which is close to Egypt" (I Sam. 15:7). There is certainly a connection between the description of Ishmael as "a wild colt of a man, his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him, and in the face of all of his kin he shall camp" (Gen. 16:12) and the tradition preserved in I Chronicles, chap. 5, concerning the tremendous pressure exerted by the Hagarites against the borders of the Israelite settlement in Transjordan during the reign of Saul, particularly as they are described as tent dwellers and camel, donkey, and sheep owners, the tribes of Jetur and Naphish (whose names also appear in the genealogy of Ishmael in Gen. 25:15) being ascribed to them. At the end of the eleventh century the Hagarites began to be pushed out of their positions by the Israelites on the one side and the Arameans on the other, and to become absorbed by associations of other tribes, who took over their position both in the border region of the country and in the desert areas which surround it from the east and the south.

The over-all ethnographic picture described above is, then, similar in many details to that which is presented in Psalm 83, one of the earliest psalms, which can be assigned to the end of the period of the Judges, in any event to a time prior to the westward expansion of the Arameans: "For they have taken counsel together, against you they form a pact, the tents of (Hebrew *ʾōholē*, but cf. the variant reading *ʾelōhē*, "the gods of," in the scroll from Masada) Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagarites, Gebal

¹⁸ See B. Mazar, *Eretz-Israel*, 3 (1954), 20; J. Liver, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, Vol. 3, s.v. 'Ishma'el.' It is worth stressing that, contrary to the stories about the Patriarchs, the imprint of desert life is manifest in the stories about Hagar and Ishmael. It is not without meaning that the Hagarites and the Ishmaelites are depicted as possessing camels, which

began to be used by nomads, it would seem, during the 12th and 11th centuries B.C. Concerning this problem, see W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (1942), pp. 96 ff.; R. Waltz, *ZDMG* (1951), pp. 28 ff.; (1954), pp. 45 ff. See, too, Albright, *Alt-Festschrift* (1953), pp. 1 ff., about Sheba, Dedan, and Havilah.

and Ammon, and Amalek, Philistia with the residents of Tyre; even Assyria is joined with them. They have become an arm of the Sons of Lot."¹⁹

The ethnographic situation in Canaan itself, as reflected in Genesis, can also be explained against the background of this same period. In the Table of Nations, which underwent a number of transformations in the course of the generations, Canaan appears as one of the "sons" of Ham, which is a general designation for the Egyptian empire and its spheres of influence; there is room for the view that the territorial and political scheme upon which the list of the sons of Ham is based is the product of a conception originating in the period of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties. In this list, Canaan is the eponym of the Phoenician city-states, of Hittite Hamath, which, according to archeological digs at the site, was founded in the twelfth century, and the ethnic elements which survived in Palestine until the period of the Israelite monarchy, while Sidon is considered "the first-born son" of Canaan by virtue of this city's pre-eminence in Phoenicia during the eleventh century. Even after Tyre rose to prominence, Southern Phoenicians were still called "Sidonians." On the other hand, the Philistines are classified within the territorial framework of Egypt (Gen. 10:14 should be read "and Caphtorim, whence came out the Philistines"), not only because of the settlements of the Sea Peoples (Caphtorim) in lower Egypt at the time of the Twentieth and Twenty-first Dynasties, but also because of the restoration of Pharaonic rule over the Philistine coast during the time of David, apparently during the reign of Pharaoh Siamon.²⁰

Particularly enlightening is the fact that in the Genesis accounts the ancestors of the Israelites are called Hebrews, especially when the author wishes to characterize their foreign identity in relation to peoples who are not related to them by common blood or origin. Thus, in Genesis 14, it is Abram the Hebrew (*ʿibri*) who dwells among the Amorites in Hebron, and thus, in the Joseph stories, Joseph is variously described by the Egyptians as "a Hebrew man," "a Hebrew youth," and "a Hebrew slave," and he testifies concerning himself that "I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews" (Gen. 11:15), i.e. the land of Israel. In like manner, the contrast between the Egyptians and Israelites is stressed by writing: "for Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews."

There have been various attempts, especially recently, to explain the meaning of the appellation "Hebrew" (in Hebrew: *ʿibri*) and its possible relation to the Ḫapiru of Akkadian sources and the ʿApiru of the Egyptian texts.²¹ From the standpoint of our subject, it should be stressed that the use of this appellation in Genesis, Exodus, and I Samuel is pronouncedly identical. Particularly worthy of attention are passages such as: "and be as Philistine men; lest you become servile to the Hebrews, just as they once served you," or "No skilled craftsman could be found in Israel, for the Philistines said: Lest the Hebrews fashion swords or javelins," and the words of the Philistine commanders concerning David and his band: "Who are these Hebrews?" And Achish replied to the Philistine commanders: "Is that not David, a royal officer of Saul, king of Israel?" In all of these passages, as in I Sam. 13:7 (and even in I Sam. 14:21) the reference can

¹⁹ See B. Mazar, *Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society*, 4 (1937), 47 ff., and S. Feigin, *Misitrê he'avar* (1943), pp. 31 ff. (Hebrew). At present I tend to date this psalm to the time of Samuel.

²⁰ → A. Malamat, *The Biblical Archaeologist*, XXI (1958), 99 f.; B. Mazar, *The Philistines and the Founding of the Kingdoms of Israel and Tyre* (1964), p. 11.

²¹ See especially J. Bottéro, *Le problème des Habiru* (1954); M. Greenberg, *The Hap/biru* (1955); J. Lewy, *HUCA*, 28 (1957), 1 ff.; W. F. Albright, *BASOR*, 163 (1961), 36 ff.; Gibson, *ibid.*, pp. 234 ff.; N. A. van Uchelen, *Abraham de Hebreëer* (Amsterdam, 1964).

only be to the Israelites and the minor nationalities associated with them. It is self-evident that the use of the ethnic appellation "Hebrew," especially when applied to the Israelites in their relations with foreign peoples such as the Egyptians, the Philistines, or the Canaanites, was accepted practice at the end of the period of the Judges and during the period of the monarchy, whereas its relation to the appellation Ḥapiru ('Apiru) of the external second-millennium sources, which refers to a social class, remains, for the time, unsolved. It is significant that Shem, the eponymous ancestor of the Israelites and the related ethnic groups (Gen. 9:26-27; cf. Speiser, *Genesis*, pp. 62 f.), appears in the Table of Nations as the ancestor of all the Hebrews (Gen. 10:21), and primarily of Abraham and his family (cf. 11:10-26).

I will confine myself to a few remarks on the migrations of the Patriarchs in the Land of Israel and their relationship to sacred sites. It appears reasonable to me that the Genesis accounts correspond, generally speaking, to the chronological context of the end of the period of the Judges and the beginning of the monarchy, when memories and echoes of events and exploits from the period of the settlement of the Israelite tribes in the land were still fresh, and when various traditions about their ancestors, their lives, and their ties with the sacred sites were still current. It should be noted that the majority of the sites mentioned as the places where the Patriarchs sojourned, or as stopping-off places in their migrations, are located within the area of the principal Israelite settlement, i.e. Judah, Mt. Ephraim, and Gilead. The vast majority of them are known as the locations of shrines and cultic celebrations during the period of the Judges and the beginning of the monarchy, and several of them as important centers of the Israelite tribes, as well.

Even the ever-recurring motif that the Patriarchs pitched their tents near sacred terebinths (Hebrew: *ʿelōnīm*) in proximity of cities, erecting altars and *mašsebōth*, and binding themselves by treaty and protective arrangements to the inhabitants of the cities, has its parallels in the period of the Judges. Thus, in the account of Heber the Kenite (one of the descendants of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses), who dwelled in Arad, he pitched his tents "all the way to Elon Bezaanaim" (Judg. 4:11), undoubtedly a sacred site in the area of Naphtali, entering into a protective treaty with the king of Hazor.²² In a number of accounts we discover transparent allusions to temples, as in the words Jacob uttered at Bethel: "and this stone that I have set up as a pillar shall be God's abode, and of all that you may grant to me, I will always set aside a tenth for you," certainly referring to the house of God in Bethel, known from the time of Samuel (1 Sam. 10:3) and from the accounts of the concubine in Gibeah (Judg. 20:18). The story of Jacob's "pilgrimage" to Bethel (Gen. 35, cf. 1 Sam. 10:3) also seems reasonable on the background of the end of the period of Judges and the beginning of the monarchy.²³ It is also instructive that the altar between Bethel and Ai is mentioned, since in the light of the excavations on the site of the Ai, present-day *et-Tell*, it becomes quite certain that an Israelite settlement existed there in the twelfth and eleventh centuries, at the very time that Bethel attained a high degree of growth, while the Ai of the Bronze Age was already laid waste in the third quarter of the third millennium B.C.²⁴

²² ↪ B. Mazar, *JNES*, XXIV (1965), 300 ff. Concerning shrines in general in Genesis, see R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (1961), pp. 289 ff.; I. Kaufman, *History of Israel's Faith*, II, 1 (1954), pp. 126 ff. (Hebrew); W. A. Irwin, *RB* (1965), pp. 161 ff.

²³ See A. Alt, *Kleine Schriften*, I (1953), 79 ff.

²⁴ Conclusions drawn from the excavations conducted at et-Tell in 1933-35 (J. Marquet-Krause, *Les fouilles de Ay [et-Tell]*) have in general been confirmed by the excavation season of 1964 (J. A. Callaway, *BASOR*, 178 [1965], 231 ff.).

As regards Hebron and her sacred sites—the terebinth of Mamre and the field of Machpelah before Mamre—one cannot escape the conclusion that there is a causal relation between the great importance which Genesis attaches to this locality and the rise of Hebron to the status of a royal city and cultic center at the beginning of David's reign. It was there that David was crowned king over all Israel "before the Lord," and there resided one of the most important priestly clans, that performed cultic service. It is not by chance that Hebron and Shechem are numbered among the "cities of asylum" and the "cities of the priests and the Levites" during the period of the United Kingdom.²⁵ Moreover, as in Hebron, the central city of Judah, so in Shechem, the center of Mt. Ephraim, various traditions and folk legends bound up with the historic past of these cities were woven together into epics about events in the days of the original settlement of the Israelite tribes and their sub-groups, and their relations with the autochthonous inhabitants, and about matters pertaining to the sacred sites and to the burial places therein, associated with imposing personalities of the remote past. It is not impossible that accounts such as that of Shechem, the son of Hamor, and Dinah, in Genesis 34 (cf. Gen. 48:22) are nothing but metaphors of the events described in the account about Abimelek in Judges 9 fitted in with one another: the abrogation of the treaty which existed between the Israelites and the rulers of Shechem, the annihilation of the clan of the Sons of Hamor, and the devastation of the foreign-populated city of Shechem.²⁶ It is certainly not a coincidence that it is precisely with respect to each of the three major centers, Hebron, Shechem and Jerusalem, that traditions were preserved concerning the permanent purchase of sites from their foreign owners, with payment in silver currency: the field of Machpelah and the burial cave in it, purchased by Abraham from his Hittite allies (Gen. 23); the section of the field in Shechem, where Jacob erected an altar and where Joseph's grave is located, purchased by Jacob from the Hivite Sons of Hamor (Gen. 33:19; Josh. 24:32); the threshing floor of Aravnah the Jebusite, purchased by David from the Jebusite ruler of Jerusalem (II Sam. 24:24).

With respect to the story of Joseph, without embarking on a clarification of the complex of problems involved, I will confine myself to asserting that there is no basis to the hypothesis current, according to which the account is based on an historic event during the Hyksos period, or at the time of Tell El-Amarna. The character of the account, its tendency (Joseph's pre-eminent position among his brothers, the transfer of the primogeniture from Menasseh to Ephraim, Machar being mentioned as Menasseh's son, the prominent role played by Judah, etc.) and the numerous "anachronisms" (the Egyptian names, the Ishmaelites, the land of the Hebrews, the land of Rameses) are such as to make us think that the traditions and motifs joined together in this single

²⁵ About the cities of the priests and the Levites, and their dating to the time of the United Kingdom, see W. F. Albright, *L. Ginzberg Jubilee Volume* (1949), pp. 49 ff.; B. Mazar, *VTs*, 7 (1960), 193 ff.; and about the cities of asylum: → M. Greenberg, *JBL*, 78 (1959), 125 ff.

²⁶ The prevalent view that the historic event reflected in the story of Genesis 34 took place during the Middle Bronze Age II has been set forth in G. E. Wright's *Shechem* (1965), which includes a detailed review of the excavations at Shechem; see also E. Nielsen, *Shechem, a Traditio-historical Examination*

(1955). It stands to reason, in my opinion, that the historic kernel was swallowed up by the popular tale, and was accompanied by folkloristic motifs after having been included in the Jacob-cycle of traditions. As regards the roles played by Simeon and Levi in this tale, its source is apparently a motif that was prevalent during the time of the United Kingdom, i.e. that Judah's ascent to grandeur and his position at the head of the tribes were the result of the sins committed by his three elder brothers (Gen. 49: 3 ff.).

tableau were interwoven and developed on Mt. Ephraim and were given their sophisticated novelistic literary form no earlier than the beginning of the Monarchy.²⁷

In conclusion, I will make the further observation that the incorporation of the account of Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38) into the series of narratives about the forefathers of the nation certainly has special significance. This chapter reflects not only a current tradition regarding the matter of the settlement of the tribe of Judah, its relations with the Canaanite population in the Shephelah, its branching out into clans, and their subsequent diffusion. It also serves as a kind of background account to the history of David's family and its genealogical relation to Perez, son of Judah (as in the book of Ruth). It is, then, joined with an entire complex of transparent allusions, in narrative and in poetry, about the origin and deeds of David, stressing the unique importance of the tribe of Judah, even with relation to the House of Joseph, to whom the deeply rooted Israelite historical traditions had assigned a position of centrality in the tribal organization.

This conception, fundamental to the book of Genesis, found an expression in the words of a later historiographer: "And the sons of Reuben, the first-born of Israel—although he was the first-born son, since he violated his father's bed, his right of primogeniture was transferred to the sons of (LXX: 'his son') Joseph, son of Israel; and he (Reuben) was not in the line of primogeniture. For Judah became the mighty one among his brothers and a prince over him, but the birthright belongs to Joseph" (I Chron. 5:1-2).

The author of Psalm 78 summarizes his survey of history by emphasizing, with painstaking care, the ascendancy of Judah over Joseph: "For the Lord despised the tent of Joseph, and preferred not the tribe of Ephraim. He chose rather the tribe of Judah, Mt. Zion which he loves . . . He has chosen David, his servant."²⁸

²⁷ On the Joseph stories, see J. M. A. Janssen, *Ex Oriente Lux*, 14 (1956), 63 ff.; J. Vergote, *Joseph en Egypte* (1959).

²⁸ It is also worth mentioning that similar problems have recently arisen in research concerning the Iliad and the Odyssey in everything that has to do with the historic background of these epics and the events depicted in them (particularly the Trojan War) in the light of archeological discoveries and critical

study of the sources and traditions imbedded in these literary works. See the detailed discussions in A. J. B. Wace-F. H. Stubbings, *A Companion to Homer* (1962); D. L. Page, *History and the Homeric Iliad* (1963); R. C. Jebb, *A Companion to Greek Studies* (1963), pp. 117 ff.; M. I. Finley *et alii*, "The Trojan War," *JHS*, 84 (1964); G. S. Kirk, "The Homeric Poems as History," *CAH*², Chap. xxxix (b) (1964); as well as R. de Vaux, *ibid.*, p. 29, n. 30.