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Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel

1

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Abraham

Thomas Römer

Introduction 1–2

Israel Finkelstein/Thomas Römer

Comments on the Historical Background of the Abraham Narrative. Between “Realia” and “Exegetica” 3–23

Jean Louis Ska

Abraham between History and Poetry 24–42

Matthias Köckert

Wie wurden Abraham- und Jakobüberlieferung zu einer „Vätergeschichte“ verbunden? 43–66

Irmtraud Fischer

Wenn „Völker“ geboren werden, entsteht kein Volk ohne Frauen. Eine gender-faire Reflexion der Sara-Figur im Kontext der Welt erzeugenden Erzählungen der Genesis 67–86

Mark G. Brett

The Priestly Dissemination of Abraham 87–107

New Projects

Jan Dušek, Mt. Gerizim Sanctuary, Its History and Enigma of Origin 111–133

New Findings

Dominique Charpin, The Assyriologist and the Computer: The “Archibab” Project 137–153



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Israel Finkelstein/Thomas Römer

Comments on the Historical Background of the Abraham Narrative

Between “Realia” and “Exegetica”

In this article we deploy biblical exegesis and insights from archaeology and extra-biblical historical sources in order to offer some preliminary observations on strands of “realia” in the Abraham narratives that could reveal their date and historical context. We first attempt to identify the early Abraham material and suggest that it represents traditions about the eponymous hero of the population of the southern highlands in the later phases of the Iron Age; these traditions could have been kept in the shrine of Mamre, which was possibly connected to the tomb of the hero. We then deal with the next phase in the development of the patriarchal story – the merging of the Abraham and the northern Jacob narratives. Finally, we describe those Abraham traditions that seem to date to exilic and post-exilic times and ask whether the Abraham material also contains a few insertions from the Hasmonean era.

Introduction

Since the traditional Documentary Hypothesis has collapsed, at least in European and to some extent also in Israeli scholarship, it is no longer possible to establish either the date or the origin of the pentateuchal traditions by attributing them to supposedly well-dated “documents.” Consequently, we cannot adhere anymore to the traditional historical-critical view about the formation of the Abraham texts,¹ which, according to the classical view, originated with the Yahwist under Solomon (von Rad and many others) or even before, at the very beginning of the Israelite monarchy in the famous *Grundschrift* of Noth.² The divine speech of Gen 12:1–4, in which

1 On the beginning of historical-critical research on the patriarchs in the 19th century, see the contribution of J. Louis Ska in this volume.

2 G. von Rad, “The Form Critical Problem of the Hexateuch,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (repr.; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd Ltd., 1984 [orig. 1965]), 1–78; M. Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (repr.; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981 [orig. 1972]).

YHWH grants Abraham a great name, promises to make him a blessing for all nations, and tells him of the gift of land reaching from the Nile to the Euphrates (Gen 15: 18), was understood as reflecting the geo-political situation of the Solomonic empire (see von Rad, Wolff³). Others used the location of the Abraham tradition around Hebron in order to date the oldest layers of the story to the time of David, because according to 2 Samuel 5, David was anointed as king at Hebron. The oldest Abraham narratives were then considered to constitute a legitimation for the Davidic monarchy.⁴ Yet these notions were based on circular arguments of dating texts according to information provided in the very same texts.⁵

It is of course even more anachronistic to continue the search for the “historical Abraham” (as did Albright, Westermann and many others) using legal texts from the second millennium – Nuzi and others – that allegedly parallel the customs of the patriarchs,⁶ thereby postulating a Patriarchal Age sometime in the second millennium B.C.E.⁷ This does not mean that one should deny the possibility that there was an historical individual named Abraham, whose tomb became a site of veneration. However, it is not possible to reconstruct anything else about this “historical Abraham;” indeed, in the texts, the oldest element associated with him may in fact be his grave and/or the cult site at Mamre (Gen 25:9). What we can and should do is look for indications that may help us to locate and date elements or layers of the complex Abraham narrative.

3 H. W. Wolff, “Das Kerygma des Jahwisten,” *EvTh* (1964): 73–98.

4 A. Lemaire, “Cycle primitif d’Abraham et contexte géographico-politique,” in *History and Traditions of Early Israel. Studies Presented to Eduard Nielsen* (ed. A. Lemaire and B. Otzen; VTS 50; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 62–75.

5 The idea that the description of the Promised Land in Gen 15:18 would reflect the boarders of the Davidic or Solomonic empire is typical for such a circular argument. The theory regarding such an empire is only based on (some, not even all) biblical texts. The description of a “homeland” reaching from the brook of Egypt to the Euphrates reflects the administrative realities of the Persian period (see also 2 Kgs 24:7). There are indeed some attempts to present Abraham as a new David, or with royal characteristics, but this happens in late postmonarchical texts in order to depict him as a substitute for the David dynasty. See for instance M. Köckert, *Vätergott und Väterverheißungen. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Albrecht Alt und seinen Erben* (FRLANT 142; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1988), 276–299; and T. Römer, “Abraham and the Law and the Prophets,” in *The Reception and Remembrance of Abraham* (ed. P. Carstens and N. Peter Lemche; Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and its Contexts 13; Piscataway: Gorgias, 2011), 103–118.

6 For a presentation and devastating critique of those approaches see J. Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

7 See the discussion and critique in I. Finkelstein and N. A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed. Archeology’s New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

There is of course little consensus in recent research on this question, and biblical scholars often build their theories on a relative chronology of different layers in the texts, which they date in comparison to other biblical traditions. For instance, Gen 12:1–4 was formerly viewed in the context of the Documentary Hypothesis as a key text for a tenth century Yahwist, but is now classified as a text from the Persian period because it takes up royal ideology (see Ps 72:8, 17) and transfers this ideology to Abraham. It also seems to presuppose dtr and priestly ideas and terminology.⁸ Indeed, in recent publications the entire Abraham story in Genesis 12–25 is supposed to date to exilic (Babylonian) times at the earliest.⁹

When arguing for a (late) date for the Abraham traditions, not much attention is paid to geographical situations and toponyms that appear in the stories and, accordingly, to the archaeology of these places. In other words, there is quite little interest in investigating the historical and archaeological realities that may lay behind the texts.

In the patriarchal stories in Genesis 12–36, the very existence of an early northern block (the Jacob Cycle), which depicts Iron Age realities (below), seems to negate the idea that the entire patriarchal tradition can be exilic or post-exilic.¹⁰ There is simply no post-Iron Age reality that can explain certain toponyms and geopolitical constellations in this material.¹¹ In the following discussion, we wish to deploy both biblical exegesis and insights from archaeology and extra-biblical historical sources in order to offer some preliminary observations on strands of “realia” in the Abraham narratives that could be important for revealing their date and historical context.

But before dealing with the Abraham narrative in this way, let us recall the major difference concerning the southern and northern traditions in

8 J. Louis Ska, “The Call of Abraham and Israel’s Birth-certificate (Gen 12:1–4a),” in *The Exegesis of the Pentateuch* (FAT 66; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 46–66.

9 For instance, this is the idea of A. de Pury, who argues that the Priestly layer of the Abraham story is the oldest, dating it to the beginning of the Persian period; all other non-P texts would have been inserted later; see A. de Pury, “Abraham: The Priestly Writer’s ‘Ecumenical’ Ancestor,” in *Rethinking the Foundations. Historiography in the Ancient World and in the Bible. Essays in Honour of John Van Seters* (ed. S. L. McKenzie and T. Römer; BZAW 294; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 163–181.

10 See recently P. Wajdenbaum, *Argonauts of the Desert: Structural Analysis of the Hebrew Bible* (Copenhagen International Seminar; Sheffield: Equinox, 2011), who claims that the whole Enneateuch takes up Hellenistic mythology, but does not offer close analysis of the Hebrew text.

11 One could of course argue that the Jacob traditions would reflect the claims of the Samaritans. In the 5th or 4th centuries, the emphasis on northern traditions in the Pentateuch certainly served to make the Torah “acceptable” for the northerners (see also the end of Deuteronomy). But in regard to the complexity of the material gathered in Genesis 25–37, it cannot be argued that this was the starting point for the edition of the Jacob traditions.

the Bible. There is no doubt that in many respects the biblical narratives reflect a southern perspective. This fact is of course discernible in the so-called Deuteronomistic History, where all northern kings are presented in a negative way, and in the book of Chronicles, where the Northern Kingdom is almost ignored altogether. The same applies to the arrangement of the book of Genesis: the patriarchal narrative opens with the southern Abraham who is made the grandfather of the northern Jacob; the later Joseph story emphasizes the role of Judah and downplays the importance of Reuben.¹² This southern reworking of major parts of the Hebrew Bible has influenced biblical scholarship, which has “inherited” the same southern perspective.

If “Judah” (through Abraham) is first in the patriarchal narratives as well as in traditional research, extra-biblical texts and archaeology demonstrate that, historically, Israel was the leading force among the Hebrew kingdoms. Israel was demographically and economically developed long before Judah. It had already been densely settled in the Iron I, when Judah was still relatively depleted demographically. Judah only developed in the end-phase of the late Iron IIA (late 9th century B.C.E.),¹³ and reached the peak of its prosperity only in the Iron IIB–C (late 8th century and 7th centuries B.C.E.).¹⁴ In short, Israel was the dominant power demographically, economically, militarily and geo-politically during most of the time when the two Hebrew kingdoms existed side by side.¹⁵

The Abraham and Jacob narratives “communicate” with each other, so that, in order to understand the Abraham traditions, we need to start with a few words on the early layer in the Jacob Cycle. We will not deal extensively with the problem of its adjunction to the Abraham Cycle (for competent treatment of this issue, see the article by M. Köckert in this volume).

12 J.-Daniel Macchi, *Israël et ses tribus selon Genèse 49* (OBO 171; Fribourg: Presses universitaires, 1999), 119–128.

13 I. Finkelstein, “The Rise of Jerusalem and Judah: The Missing Link,” *Levant* 33 (2001): 105–115; A. Fantalkin and I. Finkelstein, “The Sheshonq I Campaign and the 8th Century Earthquake: More on the Archaeology and History of the South in the Iron I–Iron IIA,” *TA* 33 (2006): 18–42; O. Sergi, “Judah’s Expansion in Historical Context,” *TA* 40 (2013): 226–246.

14 D. W. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991); I. Finkelstein, “The Settlement History of Jerusalem in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BCE,” *RB* 115 (2008): 499–515; I. Finkelstein and N. A. Silberman, “Temple and Dynasty: Hezekiah, the Remaking of Judah and the Rise of the Pan-Israelite Ideology,” *JSOT* 30 (2006): 259–285.

15 See for an overview I. Finkelstein, *Le Royaume biblique oublié* (Collection du Collège de France; Paris: Odile Jacob, 2013); for the English translation, see *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

The Jacob Cycle, the Oldest Ancestor Narrative in the Book of Genesis

If Hosea 12 dates from the 8th century,¹⁶ we have at that time already clear allusions to major episodes from the Jacob Cycle as we know it from the book of Genesis: birth and the struggle between the brothers (Gen 25:24–26), combat with God (El) or his angel¹⁷ (32:23–32), the encounter at Bethel (28:10–22*), Jacob's enrichment (30:25–42*), flight from Aram (31:1–22*), and servitude for a woman (27:15–30*). Interestingly, except for the allusion to his unnamed brother, all other elements mentioned in Hosea 12 are related to the Jacob-Laban narrative. This narrative in its pre-Priestly shape may well stem from the 8th century B.C.E.¹⁸ At that time Haran was the western capital of the Assyrian empire and the story of Jacob's sojourn there could be told in order to demonstrate to the audience how to deal cleverly with the Assyrians, who are depicted in fact as "Arameans." There is evidence for a symbiosis between Assyrians and Arameans and for the penetration of Arameans into Assyrian society at all levels. This is attested by the fact that Aramaic became an official and widely-used written language.¹⁹ Another, perhaps even better possibility, would be to consider the three references to Haran (Gen 27:43; 28:10; 29: 4) to be later insertions from the period of prosperity there in the 6th century. The original, Iron Age story would then deal with an Aram on the border of Israel. This theory may be strengthened by the observation that Hosea 12 mentions Aram but not Haran.

16 A. de Pury, "The Jacob Story and the Beginning of the Formation of the Pentateuch," in *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation* (ed. T. B. Dozeman and K. Schmid; SBL Symposium Series 34; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 51–72; E. Blum, "Hosea 12 und die Pentateuchüberlieferungen," in *Die Erzväter in der biblischen Tradition. Festschrift für Matthias Köckert* (ed. A. C. Hagedorn and H. Pfeiffer; BZAW 400; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 291–321. See, however, H. Pfeiffer, *Das Heiligtum von Bethel im Spiegel des Hoseabuches* (FRLANT 183; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); S. Rudnig-Zelt, *Hoseastudien. Redaktionskritische Untersuchungen zur Genese des Hoseabuches* (FRLANT 213; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006); and J. M. Bos, *Reconsidering the Date and Provenance of the Book of Hosea: The Case for Persian Period Yehud* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013). All of these scholars advocate a much later date. Here again the argumentation appears circular: since the pentateuchal texts are "late," allusions to them must also be late. But even if Hosea 12 is the result of late redactional interventions, they may still contain early materials.

17 Text-critical considerations suggest an original *el*.

18 E. A. Knauf, "Towards an Archaeology of the Hexateuch," in *Abschied vom Jahwisten. Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion* (ed. J. C. Gertz, K. Schmid and M. Witte; BZAW 315; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 275–294.

19 A. R. Millard, "Assyrians and Arameans," *Iraq* 45 (1983): 101–108.

Behind this 8th century Jacob-Laban narrative one can detect an older perhaps pre-monarchic tradition. It can easily be observed that the conclusion of a treaty between Jacob and Laban in Gen 31:45–54* implies that the border it establishes between them is located in the pasture areas to the northeast of the Israelite Gilead;²⁰ the “Land of Kedem” (people of the east) is to be found there. This shows that the origins of the Jacob traditions were in the Gilead. This location provides a sort of a *terminus ante quem*, because it hints to a period that precedes the expansion of Israel to the northern valleys and the Galilee – territories not mentioned in the Jacob Cycle that gradually constituted part of the Northern Kingdom starting in the late 10th century.²¹ This early Jacob tradition, in which Jacob was not yet the ancestor of “Israel,” could have originated in the Gilead and later, in the 8th century under Jeroboam II, could have been linked with Ephraim. In the time of Jeroboam II, the Jacob tradition could have been fostered as an all (to differ from local) North Israelite myth. Can the promotion of sanctuaries like Bethel and Penuel also be related to attempts by Jeroboam’s royal administration to legitimate these places through the figure of Jacob, who was identified as ancestor of Israel?

The question whether the Jacob-Esau narratives also belonged to the 8th century edition is difficult to answer. The first idea would be that a conflict with Edom fits better in a Judahite context, so that this part of the narrative reflects already the understanding of a “theological” Israel centered around Judah. However there may be an older relation between the North (Israel) and Edom as can be seen in the graffiti of Kuntillet Ajrud that mention both a YHWH from Samaria and a YHWH from Teman, the South, which includes Edom. This interesting question needs further investigation.²²

The first compilation of the early Jacob story was apparently undertaken in the first half of the 8th century, probably at Bethel. This story came to Judah after 722 B.C.E. and was taken up by the redactors of the Abraham tradition, who combined the Abraham (and Isaac) narratives with the epic of the Northern ancestor.

20 O. Eissfeldt, “Das Alte Testament im Licht der safatenischen Inschriften,” *ZDMG* 104 (1954): 88–118. On the Israelite territory in the Gilead, including the location of Mizpah, see I. Finkelstein, I. Koch and O. Lipschits, “The Biblical Gilead: Observations on Identifications, Geographic Divisions and Territorial History,” *UF* 43 (2012): 131–159.

21 I. Finkelstein, “Stages in the Territorial Expansion of the Northern Kingdom,” *VT* 61 (2011): 227–242.

22 We will come back to this question in another article.

The Early Southern Abraham Block

As we have already mentioned, the settlement system in the South intensified starting in the late Iron IIA (probably in its later phase, in the second half of the 9th century) and reached a peak in the Iron IIB (8th century).²³ Similar to the case of Bethel in the Ephraimite hill country and Penuel in the Gilead, it is a reasonable assumption that this population too had at least one central shrine and eponym ancestor stories. If the Jacob traditions come from a relatively early time in the Iron Age and were written down in the early 8th century, it is difficult to imagine that there were no competing southern traditions for several centuries thereafter while the two Hebrew kingdoms lived side by side, and after the fall of Israel. In other words, it is unthinkable that the south – with intensive population starting in the Iron IIB – did not develop one or more traditions about eponym ancestors. There is also historical logic to imagine the merging of the Jacob and Abraham stories after 720 B.C.E. but before 586 B.C.E. – possibly in line with a “pan-Israelite” ideology that may have started at the time of Josiah.

It is also quite logical to assume that the original tradition regarding Abraham²⁴ comes from a cult place at the holy Oak of Mamre (the MT in Gen 13:18; 14:13; 18:1 uses the plural in order to play down the cultic aspect of the holy tree; LXX keeps the singular and reflects the original wording). The original Mamre could have been a shrine connected to a sacred tree and/or a grove near Hebron – in the heartland of the Judean hill country. Its exact location is impossible to verify.²⁵ And it is quite plausible that there was a burial tradition of Abraham in the area of Hebron already in monarchic times, especially if one considers that the “place of memory” of an ancestor is in many cases a shrine related to his grave. The identification with Machpelah *asher al penei Mamre*²⁶ (Gen 23:17, 19; 25:9, 49:30; 50:13) is a late Priestly invention and occurs only in Priestly or even post-Priestly texts from the Persian period. The origin of this concept may be found in the geopolitical situation of the Persian period: the original cult-place (and possibly

²³ See n. 13 above.

²⁴ For the sake of convenience, we always speak of “Abraham.” The biblical story presents the ancestor as “Abram” (which is a common Semitic name), who according to the Priestly texts in Genesis 17 changes his name to “Abraham” – a theological construction of the Priestly writer. The change of the ancestor’s name can be connected to the royal image of Abraham in Genesis 17 (a king often has two names) or to a wish to parallel the Judahite ancestor with the Jacob story, which also describes a change of name.

²⁵ Interestingly Absalom, according to 2 Sam 15:7, visits a shrine in Hebron. Is this the same shrine related to the figure of Abraham?

²⁶ Perhaps to be translated “Machpelah overlooking Mamre.”

sacred tomb) did not belong to the province of Yehud (though it was very close), so a Machpelah “overlooking Mamre” tradition developed in Priestly circles. For P there would be a Mamre somewhere at Hebron and a grave at Machpelah a bit to its north. Perhaps P wanted to “replace” the shrine with a grave and “desacralize” the Mamre tradition, as suggested by Van Seters.²⁷ Later, Herod constructed two monuments – one for the tomb and one for the shrine, the latter probably for the non-Jewish (Idumean) population. The original location of Mamre could have been forgotten,²⁸ so that its identification with the site at Ramet el-Ḥalil is late and did not occur probably much earlier than under Herod the Great.²⁹ Summing up, there was an old Judahite tradition relating Abraham to a sanctuary and his grave, but this tradition was drastically transformed already in the Persian period.

In order to collect criteria for the dating of the Abraham narratives it is useful to analyze the texts that refer to the patriarch outside the Pentateuch.³⁰ Abraham is mentioned in Ezek 33:23–29 which contains a *disputatio* against the remainees (in Jerusalem?) who were not in exile and who claimed possession of the land. It begins by quoting a claim of the population: “The word of YHWH came to me: ‘Son of man, the inhabitants of these ruins (שְׁבִי הַחֲרוּבוֹת) in the land of Israel are saying, ‘Abraham was only one (אֶחָד), yet he possessed the land (וַיִּירֶשׁ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ), but we are many; to us the land has been given (לָנוּ נִתְּנָה) for a possession (לְמִוְרָשָׁה)’ (v. 23–24).” These verses raise three points. First, this reference to Abraham shows that he was a known figure and this very fact, in turn, clearly indicates that the oldest Abraham traditions are not an invention from the Babylonian period; rather, they must go back to the Iron Age. Second, Abraham is presented as אֶחָד, as “one.” This adverb creates an opposition with the רַבִּים. It is noteworthy that the link with Jacob, who is mentioned in Ezek 37:25 and 28:25 in relation with the gift of the land,³¹ is apparently unimportant or even unknown.³² Third, the text

27 Above, n. 6, 293–295

28 It has often been noticed that Josephus seems to be somewhat confused. In *Antiquities* I, 186 he explains that Abraham resided near Hebron, by an oak called ogyges. In *Wars* IV, 533 he speaks of a terebinth that is 6 stadia away from Hebron. It seems that in *Antiquities* he follows the biblical story, while in *Wars* he refers to the holy place in his own time.

29 B. J. Diebner, “Schaut Abraham an, euren Vater” – Spekulationen über die ‘Haftpunkte’ der Abraham-Tradition ‘Mamre’ und ‘Machpela,” *DBAT* 8 (1975): 18–35.

30 For more details see T. Römer, “Abraham Traditions in the Hebrew Bible Outside the Book of Genesis,” in: *The Book of Genesis. Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (ed. C. A. Evans, J. N. Lohr and D. L. Petersen; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 159–180.

31 T. Römer, *Israels Väter. Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im Deuteronomium und in der deuteronomistischen Tradition* (OBO 99; Freiburg (CH): Universitätsverlag, 1990), 506–513.

32 Ezek 33:28 mentions the “mountains of Israel,” but here Israel means, like in v. 24 “Judah.”

says that Abraham possessed or took possession of the land, which indicates that the saying of the remainees is based upon an Abraham tradition – one that told how the patriarch came to possess the land. Interestingly, there is no allusion to a divine gift or to the promise of the land. Furthermore there is no indication of a Mesopotamian origin of the patriarch. Abraham appears as an autochthonous figure.

The saying about Abraham and his possession of the land quoted in Ezek 33:24 seems presupposed by the author of Isaiah 51:1–3: “Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek YHWH. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the cavity, the cistern³³ from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was one (אהר) when I called him (קראתי), I blessed him (ואברכהו)³⁴ and made him many (וארבהו). For YHWH will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her ruins (כל הרבתייה), and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of YHWH” The exact date of Isa 51:1–3 is difficult to determine. What is clear, however, is that the evocation of Sarah and Abraham seems to presuppose and “correct” the passage of Ezek 33:23–29. Isaiah 51: 2 attests that the theme of offspring was an important part of the Abraham tradition, probably from the beginning. Therefore, the best solution is to consider Isa 51:2 as an allusion to this motif, which does not necessarily depend on a written text from the Genesis story, as argued by Köckert.³⁵ This solution is also supported by the somewhat strange verse of Isa 51:1, which has no parallel in Genesis: “Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the cavity, the cistern from which you were dug.” It is often argued that this metaphor applies to Abraham (and Sarah), reflecting the archaic conception of people born out of earth or out of stones.³⁶ This explanation supports the

33 בור (lacking in Syr.) may be a gloss to explain the hapax מקבה, which sounds a bit like “Machpela.”

34 For the vocalization of the MT and its rendering as a past tense in the versions, see J. Goldingay and D. F. Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55. Volume II* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 224. 1QIsa reads “I made/make him fruitful” ופרהו which fits very well the context. The couple פרה and רבה appears especially in Priestly or later texts of Genesis and Exod 1:7; Lev 26:9 (in Hiph’il only Gen 17:20; 28:3; 48:4; Lev 26:9). It is difficult to decide whether this was the original text. One could argue that MT altered the text in order to make it fit with Gen 12:2. On the other hand, the Qumran reading may also be understood as an attempt to parallel the text with a standard expression of Genesis (see E. Y. Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll* [Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 6; Leiden: Brill, 1974], 275–276). פרה, Hiph’il is used in relation to Abraham (and Ismael) in the P text Gen 17:6 and 20.

35 M. Köckert, “Die Geschichte der Abrahamüberlieferung.” in *Congress Volume Leiden 2004* (ed. A. Lemaire; VTS 109; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 103–128, 110.

36 Fohrer, *Jesaja* 40–66, 143.

notion that Abraham was originally an autochthonous figure. The rock metaphor, however, is often applied to יהוה (see especially Deut 32:18), who could therefore also be identified with the rock of Isa 51:1.

Both texts – Ezekiel 33 and Isaiah 51 – present the two main themes of the Abraham narrative in Genesis: land and offspring. Probably neither depends on specific texts of Genesis 12–26. As such, they are the oldest mentions of Abraham outside the book of Genesis. They lend support to the notion that the oldest Abraham traditions originated in the Iron Age and that they contained an autochthonous hero story.

These observations indicate that the oldest Abraham narratives originated in the monarchic period. This date can be strengthened through several geographical and historical *realia* in the Abraham narratives.

a) *The relation with Lot and his offspring.* Lot and his daughters represent the Moabites and the Ammonites. The mocking account about the birth of Ammon and Moab in Gen 19:30–37*, as well as the recognition that they are related to Abraham (Lot is either the nephew or the brother of Abraham), make good sense in the Iron Age. What would be the point for these etiological narratives in post-Iron Age times, when Moab and Ammon were no more? Related to the figure of Lot is the etiological story of the cities of the plain. In the late Iron Age, Judah was significantly populated on the western shore of the Dead Sea, the Judean Desert,³⁷ the eastern Arad Valley and south of the Dead Sea (for the latter, e.g., at the fort of En Hazeva, see below); in the Persian period the only Judean settlement close to this area was En Gedi.

b) *The mention of Gerar* in two versions of the wife of the ancestor story in Genesis 20 (v.1–2) and 26 (vv. 1, 6, 17, 20, 26). In both narratives, Abraham and Isaac sojourn in the territory of Abimelech, a positively depicted Philistine king. In Genesis 26, Isaac settles down in this place before moving back to Beersheba. In recent research both stories are considered to be late compositions. According to Blum and others, Genesis 20 reflects signs of post-biblical Hebrew and may accordingly be seen as a “Diaspora novella” from the late Persian period;³⁸ it is likewise possible that Genesis 26 depends on Genesis 20 and is therefore even later.³⁹ Yet historically, the mention of Gerar

37 For instance, P. Bar-Adon, *Excavations in the Judean Desert* (Atiqot 9; Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 1989 [Hebrew]); L. E. Stager, *Ancient Agriculture in the Judaean Desert, A Case Study of the Beqecah Valley* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1975).

38 Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 405–410; J. Wöhrle, “Abraham und das Leben im Ausland. Zur Intention der Ahnfrau-Erzählung in Gen 12,10–20 und ihrer frühen inner- und außerbiblischen Rezeption,” *BiNo* 151 (2011): 23–46.

39 Van Seters, *Abraham*, 166–183.

fits better in an earlier period,⁴⁰ since both stories seem to deal with the issue of the western border of Judah. The story in Genesis 26 – recounting a dispute over land and wells near Gerar, not far from Ziklag, which “belonged to the kings of Judah to this day” (1 Sam 27:6) – may have been related to a clash over the southwestern border of Judah in late-monarchic times. Both the Ziklag and Gerar stories seem to aim at justifying and legitimizing the claim of Judah over these territories. Therefore they might contain a 7th century B.C.E. kernel or memory, which was later reworked. The question of the possession of the western Shephelah became a pressing issue after 701 B.C.E., when Sennacherib transferred Judahite territories to the Philistine cities. It is plausible that, under Manasseh, who was a compliant vassal of Assyria, Judah got back parts of the Shephelah.⁴¹ Does the original story behind Genesis 20 and 26 reflect the situation of that time? A 7th century B.C.E. context is also plausible in view of the possible relation between Abimelech king of Gerar in Genesis (otherwise unknown) and Ahimilki king of Ashdod, who paid tribute to Assyria in the days of both Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. Finally, the results of excavations at Tel Haror, which is most probably the location of biblical Gerar, indicate the special importance of the site as a fortified Assyrian administration center in the later part of the Iron Age.⁴²

c) *The Ishmael-Hagar story in Genesis 16.*⁴³ E. A. Knauf, who followed earlier observations, has convincingly demonstrated that Ishmael in Genesis 16 should be viewed in relation to the tribal confederation Shumu’il – men-

⁴⁰ Gerar is however also mentioned in 2 Chr 14:13–14 (in the description of the reign of Asa, without parallels in the books of Kings). The author of Chronicles may have taken the name from the book of Genesis with which he was familiar.

⁴¹ I. Finkelstein, “The Archaeology of the Days of Manasseh,” in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King* (ed. M. D. Coogan, J. C. Exum, and L. E. Stager; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 169–187; I. Finkelstein and N. Na’aman, “The Shephelah of Judah in the Late 8th and Early 7th Century BCE: An Alternative View,” *Tel Aviv* 31 (2004): 60–79; contra O. Lipschits, O. Sergi and I. Koch, “Judahite Stamped and Incised Jar Handles: A Tool for Studying the History of Late Monarchic Judah,” *Tel Aviv* 38 (2011): 5–41.

⁴² E. D. Oren, “Haror, Tel,” *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 2:583–584. The site was also inhabited in the Persian period.

⁴³ Gen 20:8–21, a text that in the context of the Documentary Hypothesis had often been considered to be the “E” parallel to the “J” account of Genesis 16, is in fact a late *midrash* of Genesis 16 that aims at preparing the narrative of Abraham’s testing in Genesis 22. See among others, E. A. Knauf, *Ismael. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Palästinas und Nordarabiens im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (2nd ed.; ADPV; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1989), 16–25 and 140.

tioned in Assyrian sources enumerating “kings of Shumu’il”⁴⁴ – that existed perhaps in the 8th century but certainly in the 7th century only to dissolve in the 6th century B.C.E.⁴⁵ The original story telling how this Ishmael/Shumu’il became Abraham’s son in Gen 16:1–2*, 4–8, 11–13 (14?), would therefore fit in a 7th century B.C.E. context. The attempt to make Ishmael the son of Abraham would reflect the southern expansion of Judah under Assyrian hegemony. Note for instance the involvement of Judah and Judahites at Kadesh-barnea starting in the late 8th century and peaking in the 7th century B.C.E.⁴⁶

d) This brings us to *the question of the relation between the traditions of Abraham and his second son, Isaac*. If one takes a look outside the Pentateuch, Isaac is mentioned independent of the patriarchal triad (YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob/Israel” etc.⁴⁷) only in Amos 7:9,16, and in the late genealogical records in 1 Chr 1:28, 34. In Amos 7, *Yiṣḥaq* seems to represent the South in opposition or parallel to the North. If one or both passages (v. 9 is part of the visions, v. 16 part of the Amaziah-episode) stem from a pre-exilic revision of Amos,⁴⁸ then they would attest to the existence of a southern ancestor named Isaac (see also the mention of Beersheba in Amos 5:5 and 8:14), who was sufficiently important in order to represent the South. If the Isaac tradition indeed comes from the Beersheba Valley,⁴⁹

44 For a convenient presentation of these texts, see J. Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (London: Routledge, 2003), 165–168.

45 Knauf, *Ismael*, 1–16 and 25–55.

46 For the site, see R. Cohen and H. Bernick-Greenberg, *Excavations at Kadesh Barnea (Tell el-Qudeirat) 1976–1982* (ed. R. Cohen and H. Bernick-Greenberg; IAA Reports 34; Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2007); for the Hebrew inscriptions, see A. Lemaire and P. Vernus, “Les ostraca paléo-hébreux de Qadesh-Barnéa,” *Orientalia* 49 (1980): 341–345; idem, “Lostraca paléo-hébreux No. 6 de Tell Qudeirat (Qadesh-Barnéa),” in *Fontes atque pontes. Fine Festgabe für Hellmut Brunner* (ed. M. Görg; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), 302–326; R. Cohen, “Inscriptions,” in *Excavations at Kadesh Barnea (Tell el-Qudeirat) 1976–1982* (ed. R. Cohen and H. Bernick-Greenberg; IAA Reports 34; Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2007), 245–254.

47 Exod 2:24; 3:6, 15, 16; 4:5; 6:3, 8; 32:13*; 33:1; Lev 26:42; Num 32:11; Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 29:12; 30:20; 34:4; Josh 24:2–5; 1 Kgs 18:36*; 2 Kgs 13:23; Jer 33:26 (TM); 1 Chr 1:27–34*; 1 Chr 29:18*; 2 Chr 30:6*; Ps 105:9–10 (=1 Chr 16:16–17).

48 This is the opinion of J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel. With a reprint of the article Israel from the “Encyclopaedia Britannica”* (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1885); see also the reprint of this title under New York: Meridian 1957, 319–320; H. W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 301–302. Recent publications often advocate a late date – see for instance S. Petry, *Die Entgrenzung JHWHs: Monolatrie, Bilderverbot und Monotheismus im Deuteronomium, in Deuteronomium und im Ezechielbuch* (FAT II/27; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 134 – an option that nonetheless fails to offer a more adequate explanation of this singular use of Isaac.

49 M. Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (Englewood Cliffs: 1972); and reprinted under Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981, 103–107.

it must have originated still in the Iron Age, because after 586 B.C.E. the area was sparsely inhabited and far from Yehud. It is therefore quite plausible that there was a second ancestor figure in the South, venerated in a sanctuary in Beersheba.

Isaac must have become Abraham's son quite early. The author of the story of the divine visitors in Gen 18:1–15, in which Abraham's hospitality is rewarded with the gift of a son, makes already a pun on the name of Isaac by introducing the theme of Sarah's laughter (18:12–15, see also 21:6). Genesis 18* does not presuppose that Abraham already has a son; on the contrary, the whole plot, like in the Greek and Roman (and other) parallels,⁵⁰ necessitates a childless man or couple. This means that Genesis 16* and 18* constituted either two different traditions about a son of Abraham, or that one of these traditions was older (maybe Genesis 18?), while the other son was added later.

In the book of Genesis the traditions about Isaac are very sparse and limited to Genesis 26 (in all other chapters he functions only as son or father). The traditions in Genesis 26 all have parallels in the Abraham narratives (Gen 26:1–11//Gen 12:10–20; Gen 20:1–18; Gen 26:12–33//Gen 20:22–34), so that either they were borrowed from Abraham, or, what is more plausible, that Abraham vampirized (at least partially) Isaac, since the location in Beersheba in Genesis 21 indicates an original Isaac tradition.⁵¹

In the 7th century, then, Abraham probably had two “sons,” Isaac in the Beersheba Valley and Ishmael in the areas further to the south. This may depict realities of the time: Judahite settlement in the Beersheba Valley peaked in the late 8th century B.C.E. and later; activity further south also characterizes the “Assyrian Century,” when Judahites served in Kadesh-barnea and probably also in the Assyrian forts along the Arabian trade routes.⁵² Judahite presence in the southern desert continued in the decades following the withdrawal of Assyria.⁵³

50 See for these T. Römer, “Quand les dieux rendent visite aux hommes (Gn 18–19). Abraham, Lot et la mythologie grecque et proche-orientale,” in *Dans le laboratoire de l'historien des religions. Mélanges offerts à Philippe Borgeaud* (ed. F. Prescendi and Y. Volokhine; Religions en perspectives 24; Genève: Labor et Fides, 2011), 615–626.

51 Wellhausen thought that, contrary to Isaac, Abraham was “a free creation of unconscious art. He is probably the youngest figure in the company” (*Prolegomena*, 320). For more details on Isaac see H. Schmid, *Die Gestalt des Isaak: ihr Verhältnis zur Abraham- und Jakobtradition*. (EdF 274; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991).

52 N. Na'aman, “An Assyrian Residence at Ramat Rahel?,” *Tel Aviv* 28 (2001): 267–270.

53 Demonstrated by the Hebrew ostraca found at Kadesh-barnea, which best-fit a date ca. 600 B.C.E., and by several contemporary Arad ostraca, which seem to refer to Judahite military units that moved in the desert. For the former, see summary in R. Cohen, “Inscriptions,” in *Excavations at Kadesh Barnea (Tell el-Qudeirat) 1976–1982* (R. Cohen and H. Bernick-

It could also seem logical to add to the early Abraham materials the list in Gen 14:1–11, which in some regards would fit well into 8th or 7th century B.C.E. realities. But this list, imitating Neo-Assyrian war accounts and annals,⁵⁴ was unrelated to the Abraham narrative when first written down,⁵⁵ its connection with Abraham being made at a very late stage.⁵⁶

Summing up the discussion thus far, the earliest Abraham traditions that we can recover behind the stories in the book of Genesis are in Genesis 13*, which is linked to Genesis 19*. Genesis 19* is introduced by 18:1–15*, a story preparing the birth of Isaac in Genesis 21*. Genesis 16* reflects what is perhaps an independent tradition about another son of Abraham that was later combined with the Abraham-Isaac cycle. There was certainly also an independent Isaac tradition, which can hardly be reconstructed. The stories around Gerar and Beersheba (Genesis 20* and 26*) were probably originally attached to this tradition.

The early Abraham material represents traditions of the population of the southern highlands in the later phases of the Iron Age regarding their eponymous hero. These traditions could have been kept in the shrine of Mamre, possibly connected to the tomb of the hero. They must have originated from a period earlier than the “stitching together” of the Jacob and Abraham tra-

Greenberg; IAA Reports 34; Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2007), 245–254; for the latter, see Y. Aharoni, *Arad Inscriptions* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 15, 145.

54 Van Seters, *Abraham*, 299–300.

55 The list opens with the description of a World War of sorts. The names in vv. 5–7 could be explained in the context of the reality of the “Assyrian Century.” The southern places – El-Paran = Elath, Enmishpat = Kadesh-barnea, and Hazazon-Tamar = En Hazeva – are the three Assyrian strongholds/ command spots along the strategic Arabian trade routes, where Judahite soldiers and administrators may have served. Karnaim was an important spot as a provincial Assyrian capital. The idea of an invasion from the north also comes from the Assyrian and Babylonian periods. These verses have parallels in Deut 2:9–12 and may have been taken over from there. Be that how it may, Gen 14:1–11* reflects a sort of a scribal training from the 7th century, which was reused when Genesis 14 was composed (in the Persian period, at the earliest).

56 W. Schatz, *Genèse 14: une recherche* (EHS XXIII/2; Bern: P. Lang, 1972), gives an overview about the history of research; B. Ziemer, *Abram – Abraham. Kompositionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Genesis 14, 15 und 17* (BZAW 350; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), demonstrates once again the late composition of Genesis 14, but his argument that this chapter is later than Genesis 15 is unconvincing, since this chapter clearly presupposes Genesis 14. For this reason J. Ch. Gertz, who also wants to date Genesis 15 before Genesis 14, must postulate, without a diachronic argument, that all links in Genesis 15 to Genesis 14 were added later – again a case of circular reasoning; see J. Ch. Gertz, “Abraham, Mose und der Exodus. Beobachtungen zur Redaktionsgeschichte von Genesis 15,” in *Abschied vom Jahwisten. Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion* (ed. J. Ch. Gertz, K. Schmid and M. Witte; BZAW 315; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 63–81.

ditions; the *terminus a quo* for this merging of traditions can confidently be placed in the late Iron II, after 720 B.C.E.⁵⁷ The origins of the early Abraham stories probably cover a long period, starting with the demographic expansion in the southern highlands in the second half of the 9th century and continuing until the 7th century B.C.E. In this case too, the earliest traditions were not yet written down; it is more reasonable to imagine the first written texts in the (late?) seventh century B.C.E., when literacy in Judah expanded.

The Merging of the Northern and Southern Traditions

It is quite clear that after 720 B.C.E. the kingdom of Judah became more populated, with an important Israelite component. In just a few decades the population of Judah at least doubled, and Jerusalem grew from a town of less than 10 hectares to a metropolis which covered 60 hectares.⁵⁸ Most scholars also agree that it was after 720 that northern traditions made their way to the South. The new demographic situation made it necessary to strengthen the coherence of this “united” nation by creating one story that combined southern and the northern traditions. The earliest context for this attempt would be the reign of Josiah and its pan-Israelite ideology regarding territory and people. The merging of the traditions was done from the beginning in written form, since it was a deliberate attempt to impose a new “official,” overarching Patriarchal History, and as oral traditions are normally not “invented.” Also, the post-720 B.C.E. years in Judah – and especially the late 7th and early 6th centuries – are already characterized by widespread use of writing as a medium of administration and communication.⁵⁹

In this unified history, the reality on the ground was reversed; Judah (Abraham and Isaac) was put in the lead of the unified patriarchal tradition, and Jacob was placed last. The goal was to subordinate the Jacob stories to the Abraham ones, in essence, to subordinate Israel (which was no more) to Judah. This merging of the traditions was not done in one step; it was rather

57 For more details see the contribution of M. Köckert in this volume.

58 M. Broshi, “The Expansion of Jerusalem in the Reigns of Hezekiah and Manasseh,” *IEJ* 24 (1974): 21–26; R. Reich and E. Shukron, “The Urban Development of Jerusalem in the Late Eight Century B. C. E.,” in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period* (ed. A. G. Vaughn and A. E. Killebrew; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 209–218; H. Geva, “Western Jerusalem at the End of the First Temple Period in Light of the Excavations in the Jewish Quarter,” in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period* (ed. A. G. Vaughn and A. E. Killebrew; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 183–208; Finkelstein and Silberman, see n. 14 above.

59 Jamieson-Drake, see n. 14 above.

a long process that had probably started in the 7th century and continued until the Persian period. On the literary level, this unification was effected by different redactors with different strategies: one for instance was the repetition of divine promises of the land and offspring to the three ancestors.⁶⁰

It has often been observed that, in the unified narrative, the southern traditions “react” to the northern ones. In Gen 12:5–9, Abraham too goes to Bethel and Shechem. He “gets out” of Judah to master the entire hill country and to claim it for the Judahite monarchy or the Judahites.⁶¹ The question is in which situation the emphasis on Bethel in Gen 12:8 fits. The passage is nowadays often considered to be “exilic” or later,⁶² but at that time the site was either unoccupied or very sparsely inhabited.⁶³ Interestingly, Abraham is not “connected” to Penuel (unlike Bethel) because the merging of the stories takes place when Penuel is no longer an issue; the Gilead was lost with the offensive of Rezin of Damascus in the second half of the 8th century⁶⁴ and did not become an issue again until Hasmonean times.

In Genesis 12, the places of worship of Abraham are “near” – that is, near Bethel and near Shechem. This positioning could be a strategy to show that even before centralization of the cult in the Jerusalem temple, the venerated patriarch did not worship in “illegitimate” places, especially not in Bethel, which deuteronomistic ideology despised. And interestingly, in these places, Abraham “invokes the name of YHWH,” but does not offer sacrifices. The only place where he offers an animal sacrifice is in Genesis 22, where Moriah is an allusion to Zion or Jerusalem. These texts clearly presuppose the deuteronomistic idea of cult centralization and therefore stem, at the earliest, from exilic or post-exilic times.

60 R. Kessler, *Die Querverweise im Pentateuch. Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen der expliziten Querverbindungen innerhalb des vorpriesterlichen Pentateuchs* (Ph.D. diss., Universität Heidelberg, 1972); R. Rendtorff, *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* (BZAW 147; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1976); for the English translation, see *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch* (JSOTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); Köckert, *Vätergott und Väterverheißungen*.

61 The visit of Jacob in Mamre (Gen 35:27) probably belongs to the same strategy – to strengthen the parallels between the two ancestors and the superiority of Judah over Israel.

62 For instance Blum, *Vätergeschichte*, 462.

63 I. Finkelstein and L. Singer-Avitz, “Reevaluating Bethel,” *ZDPV* 125 (2009): 33–48. The fact that in Gen 12:8 Abraham does not go directly to Bethel, but stays “next” to it, contrary to Jacob, may be explained on the background of the dtr ideology of centralization of cult and the “sin” of Bethel, in view of the (dtr) redactions of the book of Hosea. J. Blenkinsopp, “Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (ed. O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 93–107, has argued that the sanctuary of Bethel played a major role during the Babylonian period. In regards to archaeological evidence, this claim becomes somewhat problematic.

64 N. Na’aman, “Rezin of Damascus and the Land of Gilead,” *ZDPV* 111 (1995): 105–117.

Finally, all the texts that mention the three patriarchs together outside the book of Genesis⁶⁵ are late theological summaries from the Babylonian and Persian Periods.⁶⁶ This is not surprising, since during this era (and even the Hellenistic period), editions of the patriarchal narrative flourished.

Abraham in the Exilic and Post-Exilic Periods

The contours of the oldest literary Abraham tradition remain difficult to reconstruct. The oldest story was probably associated with issues related to the land (and neighbors) and the birth of one or two sons (Genesis 13*; 16*; 18–19*; 21:1–4*).⁶⁷

On firmer ground stands the reconstruction of the editing of and additions to the Abraham narrative in the Babylonian and Persian periods:

a) Gen 12:10–20 reflects perhaps the context of the exilic period. According to this narrative, Abraham descends to Egypt and must learn that it is not a place to stay. This may expose a discussion during the Babylonian period about the opportunity of an “Egyptian exile.” Interestingly, the same issue appears in Jeremiah 42–44 (see especially 43:2) as well as in Jeremiah 32* (the description of the purchase of a field in Anathoth) – both of which promote the necessity to remain in the land, as does Gen 12:10–20. Since the latter has many parallels to Genesis 16*, it was probably added to the Abraham story and composed as a sort of prologue to Genesis 16⁶⁸ in order to teach the addressees to remain in the land.

b) Apparently at the beginning of the Persian period, the Priestly writer offered a new version of the Abraham and Jacob traditions. Giving importance to Haran in the opening genealogy probably fits the prosperity and importance of this place in the 6th century. The fact that Abraham’s family comes from Babylonia and then stays for a while at Haran may reflect an invitation for those born in “exile” to return to the land. P is the first to invent

⁶⁵ See above, n. 47.

⁶⁶ See already R.J. Tournay, “Genèse de la triade ‘Abraham-Isaac-Jacob,’” *RB* 103 (1996): 321–336.

⁶⁷ Interestingly this reconstruction reaches similar results as several literary studies of the Abraham cycle: I. Fischer, *Die Erzeltern Israels. Feministisch-theologische Studien zu Genesis 12–36* (BZAW 222; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994); B. Gosse, *Structuration des grands ensembles bibliques et intertextualité à l’époque perse* (BZAW 246; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 93. Different approaches leading to similar conclusions make a strong point for the validity of the hypothesis.

⁶⁸ The parallels between Gen 12:10–20 and Genesis 16 have often been observed. See, e.g., T. Römer, “The Exodus in the Book of Genesis,” *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 75 (2010): 1–20.

a Mesopotamian origin for Abraham in order to make it possible for the Golah easily to identify itself with this ancestor. There is quite a consensus about the scope of the P-text in Genesis 12–26,⁶⁹ which for Abraham consists mainly of Genesis 17 and 25, where he is constructed as an “ecumenical ancestor.”⁷⁰ In Genesis 17 Abraham receives the practice of circumcision as a sign of the covenant with יהוה, which makes sense in the context of a Diaspora situation and not in pre-exilic times, when, except for the Philistines, all people practiced circumcision.

P shows interest in the integration of Ishmael into the covenant and in his good relation with Isaac (even if they are separated, they gather in order to bury their father). For P, “Ishmaelites” were in contact with the Judahites; therefore, the priestly authors wished to underline the integration of Idumea and the South (territorially or theologically) into the offspring of Abraham.

As we have already mentioned, P shows an interest in the place of Machpelah (or even “invents” it), where according to him all patriarchs are buried. The story about the purchase of Machpelah in Genesis 23 and the burial notices for the patriarchs is meant to strengthen the connection with Hebron, which was now outside of Yehud (the southern border of the province was at Beth-zur).⁷¹ By citing the burial of the patriarchs, the Priestly (or post-Priestly) author of Genesis 23⁷² probably appeals to the knowledge of his time regarding the past. It is also quite plausible that in order to unify the patriarchal family Jacob’s burial place was “moved” from Shechem to Hebron. Interestingly, in the New Testament, the book of Acts seems still to presuppose a link with Shechem, since the burial place of Abraham is said to have been purchased there (Acts 7:16).

c) The story of the sacrifice in Genesis 22 with its prologue in 21:9–21, which explains why Abraham at the beginning of Genesis 22 has only

69 See for instance the listing in P. P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness. A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (JSOTSup 106; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 220–221, who gives a synopsis of the attributions of Holzinger, Noth, Elliger, Lohfink and Weimar, which shows an important agreement on the Abraham material.

70 A. de Pury, “Abraham: The Priestly Writer’s ‘Ecumenical’ Ancestor,” in *Rethinking the Foundations. Historiography in the Ancient World and in the Bible. Essays in Honour of John Van Seters* (BZAW 294; ed. S. L. McKenzie and T. Römer. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 163–181.

71 A. de Pury, “Le tombeau des Abrahamides d’Hébron et sa fonction au début de l’époque perse,” *Transeuphratène* 30 (2005): 183–184.

72 Traditionally Genesis 23 was considered to be part of P, though recently some publications consider it as post-P. See J. Blenkinsopp, “Abraham as Paradigm in the Priestly History in Genesis,” *JBL* 128 (2009): 225–241, with good arguments for an attribution of Genesis 23 to P.

one son, was probably written down in the Persian period.⁷³ Without the Davidides, Abraham becomes a royal figure (likewise in Gen 12:1–4a, which displays many linguistic and thematic parallels to Genesis 22, as is often observed) and is connected to Jerusalem and its temple.⁷⁴ The other link between Abraham and Jerusalem appears in Genesis 14, where he pays the dime to the priestly king of “Shalem,” but the encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek is probably an insertion. In its original form, the story emphasized Abraham’s royal status and Genesis 14 (without the Melchizedek episode) is presupposed by Genesis 15.⁷⁵

d) The story of Abraham’s sending his servant to find a wife for Isaac in Aram-Naharaim, a late expression for Mesopotamia,⁷⁶ displays a style very different from the other Abraham narratives as well as vocabulary that fits in the Persian⁷⁷ period at the earliest or, perhaps better, in the Hellenistic period. This story is not put in an aggressive mood like the texts in Deuteronomy or Ezra-Nehemiah. It is not so much concerned with “foreign wives” as with the idea of members of the Babylonian Golah to marry only inside of wealthy families from this community.

e) Finally, Genesis 15 can quite easily be considered as one of the latest texts in the Abraham narrative.⁷⁸ It provides a kind of summary and pre-

73 T. Veijola, “Das Opfer des Abraham – Paradigma des Glaubens aus dem nachexilischen Zeitalter,” *ZThK* 85 (1988): 129–164; K. Schmid, “Die Rückgabe der Verheißungsgabe. Der ‚heilsgeschichtliche‘ Sinn von Gen 22 im Horizont innerbiblischer Exegese,” in *Gott und Mensch im Dialog. Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag* (ed. M. Witte; BZAW 345; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 271–300; T. Römer, “Abraham’s Righteousness and Sacrifice: How to Understand (and Translate) Genesis 15 and 22,” *Communio Viatorum* LIV (2012): 3–15.

74 The identification of Moria and the Temple Mount is made in 2 Chr 3:1, but Genesis 22 probably already presupposes this identification by using the term *maqôm*, which in light of Deuteronomy 12 is easily understood as referring to the Jerusalemite temple.

75 See already Gen 15:1 – יהוה’s promise of a booty clearly takes up his military victory in Genesis 14. The name “Damascus” appears in the patriarchal story only in Gen 14:15 and 15:2. The name of Abraham’s servant Eliezer corresponds according to the gematria to the number 318, which is the number of Abraham’s servants in Genesis 14.

76 The expression appears in the Hebrew Bible only in Gen 24:10; Deut 23:4; Judg 3:8; Ps 60:2; 1 Chr 19:6.

77 A. Rofé, “An Inquiry into the Betrothal of Rebeka,” in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte. FS R. Rendtorff* (ed. E. Blum et al., Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 27–39.

78 This view is widely accepted by recent European scholarship; for further details, see T. Römer, “Abraham and the ‘Law and the Prophets,’” in *The Reception and Remembrance of Abraham* (Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and its Contexts 13; ed. P. Carstens and N. P. Lemche; Piscataway: Gorgias, 2011), 103–118. The late date of Genesis 15 is also accepted by L. Schmidt, who defends the traditional Documentary Hypothesis; see L. Schmidt, “Genesis xv,” *VT* 56 (2006): 251–267.

sents Abraham not only as the first patriarch, but also as the first king, the first prophet, and even a Proto-Moses, since he receives in this chapter the revelation of the divine name.

Hellenistic Additions and Revisions?

When was the pentateuchal narrative of Abraham closed? Or to phrase the question differently, is it possible to imagine that the last reworking of the Abraham story took place in the Hasmonean period? It has often been noticed that the Melchizedek episode can be understood on the background of the Hasmonean period. Melchizedek appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible only in Psalm 110, which is often related to the Hasmoneans. And his description as the “priest of El Elyon” in Genesis 14 has the best parallel in the Maccabean period, when the Hasmoneans took for themselves the title of “high priests of the God Most High” (Jos. *Ant.* XIV, 163). Does this mean that “the Melchizedek legend was much in vogue about the time of the Hasmoneans”⁷⁹ or that it arose at that time? The latter is indeed a reasonable option.⁸⁰ Genesis 14 may in its present form stem from the Hellenistic period⁸¹ and would then perfectly serve Hasmonean needs.

This brings us to the difficult question of the translation of the Torah into Greek, which is commonly supposed to have taken place during the 3rd century B.C.E.⁸² This date is probably correct, since the earliest material attestations of Greek texts from the Pentateuch come from the 2nd century B.C.E. It may therefore be difficult to imagine that the first Greek translation was based on a Hebrew text, to which whole later chapters were added. On the other hand, it is also obvious that the translated Hebrew text was not yet considered as a “fixed” and “stable” one as well as that the Greek Torah text is the result of revisions that certainly continued during the Hasmonean period.⁸³ So it is quite possible that, even after a first translation into Greek,

⁷⁹ J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; Edinburgh: 1910), 271.

⁸⁰ Similar to the figure of Nehemiah in 2 Maccabees? See Abraham in 1 Macc 2:52 versus Gen 15:6; of course, the former may have been taken from the latter.

⁸¹ J. A. Soggin, “Abraham and the Eastern Kings: On Genesis 14,” in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots. Biblical Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield* (ed. Z. Zevit, S. Gitin, and M. Sokoloff; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 283–291.

⁸² M. Tilly, *Einführung in die Septuaginta* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 26–36; A. A. Fischer, *Der Text des Alten Testaments. Neubearbeitung der Einführung in die Biblia Hebraica von Ernst Würthwein* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2009), 118–128.

⁸³ Tilly, *Einführung*, 57–58, 81–87.

shorter passages were added or revised. A fitting candidate for such insertions and revisions is the Melchizedek episode in Genesis 14, which could have been added in connection with the production of new copies of the Genesis scroll.⁸⁴ Other revisions could be the insertion of Moriah in Genesis 22 and perhaps also a reworking of Genesis 15. In order to clarify these issues, a thoroughgoing analysis of these chapters (for which this article can afford no space) would be necessary.

Summary

The aim of this presentation was not to provide a complete theory about the formation of the Abraham narrative. In the context of the sometimes chaotic situation of pentateuchal research, we simply wanted to show the importance of some “realia” – geographical and archeological alike – which, combined with exegetical analysis, support the idea that the Abraham traditions originated in the Iron Age; that the 7th century was an important moment for their textualization; and that the conjoining of the Abraham (and Isaac) tradition with the northern Jacob tradition is a product of the period that followed the fall of Israel.

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84 G. Granerød, *Abraham and Melchizedek. Scribal Activity of Second Temple Times in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110* (BZAW 406; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 252. Granerød, who offers a detailed and interesting analysis of Genesis 14, thinks that the first version of the chapter (without Melchizedek) was triggered by the *Leerstelle* after Gen 13:17 (see p. 93–98) during the late Persian or Early Hellenistic period.

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