



The Pre-Priestly Abraham Narratives from Monarchic to Persian Times

Oded Lipschits, Thomas Römer, Hervé Gonzalez

► To cite this version:

Oded Lipschits, Thomas Römer, Hervé Gonzalez. The Pre-Priestly Abraham Narratives from Monarchic to Persian Times. *Semitica*, 2017, 59, pp.261-296. hal-03825678

HAL Id: hal-03825678

<https://hal.science/hal-03825678>

Submitted on 24 Oct 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

The Pre-Priestly Abraham Narratives from Monarchic to Persian Times

Oded Lipschits, Thomas Römer & Hervé Gonzalez

Tel Aviv University — Collège de France and University of Lausanne*

Résumé. La recherche récente sur le Pentateuque souligne que l'essentiel de l'histoire d'Abraham en Gn 12-25 est d'origine soit sacerdotale, soit post-sacerdotale. Néanmoins, quelques traditions pré-sacerdotales peuvent être identifiées, notamment en Gn 12,10-20 ; 13* ; 16* ; 18-19*, des passages qui peuvent difficilement être lus comme formant une narration unifiée. Sur la base d'observations littéraires et historiques, l'article défend la thèse selon laquelle Abraham était à l'origine une figure du Sud judéen qui appartenait à divers groupes ethniques. Les traditions les plus anciennes qui nous soient parvenues, en particulier le récit d'Abraham et Lot, qui est associé à la promesse d'un fils et à sa naissance, étaient probablement transmises dans le sanctuaire de Mamré durant la période monarchique tardive. Plus tard, à l'époque exilique, où les sanctuaires judéens hors de Jérusalem reprennent de l'importance, les anciens récits d'Abraham ont été complétés par la tradition de la matriarche en danger en Gn 12,10-20 et celle de la naissance d'Ismaël en Gn 16*. Ces deux passages, qui témoignent de liens importants, accentuent la dimension pluriethnique de la figure d'Abraham. Ce n'est qu'à la période perse que les récits pré-sacerdotaux sur Abraham ont été utilisés par les élites de Jérusalem en vue de justifier leurs prétentions culturelles et politiques sur la région du Sud.

* This article is based on two papers presented by Oded Lipschits and Thomas Römer at a symposium on *The Politics of the Ancestors* (held January 15th to 17th 2016 at the University of Oldenburg, Germany). The papers will be published in the proceedings of the symposium. Observations at the symposium were that Lipschits's historical-archaeological approach and Römer's exegetical investigation resulted in similar conclusions about the origins of the Abraham tradition. These observations triggered the idea of merging the two texts into a combined piece. This was accomplished with the assistance of Hervé Gonzalez, who added further ideas and comments of his own.

Introduction

The origins of the Abraham traditions have been much debated in biblical research. Since the classical Documentary Hypothesis has been called into question, new models have been proposed, which considerably limit the extent of pre-priestly Abraham traditions and narratives. The first part of this article proposes a brief presentation of recent scholarly discussion, pointing out that pre-priestly traditions can only be identified in Genesis 12:10–20; 13*; 16*; 18–19*. These passages, however, can hardly be read as a cohesive narrative. The second part argues, based on literary and historical observations, that Abraham was originally a multi-ethnic figure from the South, whose early traditions were probably transmitted at the cult site of Mamre. The third part supports the view that the Abraham-Lot narrative, which is connected to the promise to Abraham of a son and to Isaac's birth, represents the earliest Abraham traditions, which were developed in the South during the late monarchic period. The fourth part of the article deals with the exilic period, when the local sanctuaries outside Jerusalem gained importance, and the early Abraham narratives were expanded with the tradition of the “endangered ancestress” in Genesis 12:10–20, as well as the birth of Ishmael in Genesis 16*; these two passages, which display important connections, further emphasize the inclusive character of the figure of Abraham. At the end of the article, we argue that the pre-priestly narratives were eventually used by the Jerusalem elites during the Persian period to justify their religious and political claims over the South, which was cut off from Judah and became what is known from the Early Hellenistic documentation as the province of Idumea.

I. Pre-priestly traditions in the Abraham narrative

Some scholars still continue to explain the formation of the Abraham narrative within the paradigm of the Documentary or New Documentary Hypothesis, like, e.g., Joel Baden, who assumes

that the J, E and P sources are consistent throughout the Patriarchal Narratives, as in the entire Pentateuch. In this view, there is no difference in the formation of all the narrative traditions of the Pentateuch.¹ But if we take into account new approaches of the Abraham narrative, we must disregard an a priori division of the text into three layers or sources (of which two would be “pre-priestly”). After all, at a relatively early stage of biblical criticism, many of the Abraham-cycle texts were considered problematic in terms of their assignment to J or E: Genesis 14, 15 and 24 were denied attribution to the Pentateuchal sources because of their style, content and references to younger texts.²

It is unnecessary to review this debate in detail. As for the priestly texts of the Abraham narrative, there is general agreement that P can be found in the following passages: Genesis 11:27–28a, 29–32; 12:4b.5; 13:6, 11*, 12b; 16:3, 15–16; 17*; 19:29; 21:1b–5*; 23*; 25:7–10.³ We will not engage here in a discussion of whether some of the above P texts may be multilayered, such as Genesis 17, or whether some of them, like Genesis 23, perhaps do not belong to the so-called *Grundschrift*. It is possible to read the P passages as a complete and coherent Abraham-and-Sarah-narrative, in which, contrary to the Jacob-narrative, only few gaps in the text need to be filled. This means that, in Genesis 12–25*, we can indeed reconstruct an independent P narrative. How-

¹ Joel S. Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs* (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

² For Genesis 14, see: John A. Emerton, “Some Problems in Genesis XIV,” in *Studies in the Pentateuch* (VTS 41; Leiden: Brill, 1990), 73–102; Jan Alberto 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. Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin and Michael Sokoloff; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 283–291. For Gen 15, see: Otto Kaiser, “Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung von Gen 15,” *ZAW* 70 (1958): 107–125; André Caquot, “L’alliance avec Abram (Genèse 15),” *Semitica* 12 (1962): 51–66; for Genesis 24, see: Bernd Jørg Diebner and Hermann Schult, “Alter und geschichtlicher Hintergrund von Genesis 24,” *DBAT* 10 (1975): 10–17; Alexander Rofé, “La composizione de Gen. 24,” *BeO* 129 (1981): 161–165.

³ See for instance Albert de Pury, “Genèse 12–36,” in *Introduction à l’Ancien Testament* (ed. Thomas Römer, Jean-Daniel Macchi and Christophe Nihan; Le Monde de la Bible 49; Genève: Labor et Fides, 2009, 2nd ed.), 217–238, 224–225.

ever, this P narrative seems to imply older, written or oral narratives of Abraham and Sarah. This is suggested especially because of the shortness of most of the episodes. A verse such as 19:29 (“And when God destroyed the cities of the plain, God remembered Abraham, and guided Lot out of the midst of the destruction, when he destroyed the cities in which Lot dwelt”) certainly does presuppose of its addressees knowledge of the narrative of Sodom’s destruction. The same probably holds true for the priestly account of the separation between Lot and Abraham as well as for the priestly birth narrative of Ishmael.

More complicated than the identification of the priestly texts is the decision about the date of the non-priestly texts in Genesis 12–25. Are they pre- or post-priestly? At least in European scholarship the issue of Genesis 14 and 15 might be relatively undisputed. The narrative of Abraham’s military campaign should be understood as a post-priestly text that wants to place Abraham in the context of world history. The text—which in some way breathes the spirit of the times of the Maccabees, but can hardly be dated so late—,⁴ incorporates the encounter with the priest-king of Shalem, a Judean addition that wishes to place a reference to Jerusalem within the Patriarchal tradition and probably also to legitimize a theocratic ideal.⁵ Genesis 15, in its present form, presupposes Genesis 14: this already becomes clear in the speech about the “booty” in 15:1, whereas the lexeme נָפֶל acquires the form נָפְלָה of Gen 14:20. But even scholars who reconstruct an earlier version in Genesis 15 that did not presuppose Genesis 14⁶ agree

⁴ For such a dating, see Soggin, *art. cit.* For a date in the Persian period: Volker Glissmann, “Genesis 14: A Diaspora Novella?,” *JSOT* 34 (2009): 34–45; Alon Wagner, *Genesis 14: Its Literary Growth, its Messages, and their Historical Contexts* (MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, 2014).

⁵ Gard Granerød, *Abraham and Melchizedek. Scribal Activity of Second Temple Times in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110* (BZAW 406; Berlin – New York: de Gruyter, 2010).

⁶ Jan Christian 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. Jan Christian Gertz, Konrad Schmid and Markus Witte; BZAW 315; Berlin – New York: de Gruyter, 2002), 63–81; Christoph Levin, “Jahwe und Abraham im Dialog: Genesis 15,” in *Gott und Mensch im Dialog. Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag* (ed. Markus Witte; BZAW 345; Berlin – New York: de Gruyter, 2004), 237–257.

that this *Urtext* should be later than P. It is one objective of Genesis 15, among others, to incorporate the Exodus tradition into the Abraham narrative.⁷ By the self-introduction of Yhwh in Genesis 15:7 as “I am Yhwh who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it,” the editor of this text transfers to Abraham Yhwh’s self-presentation as the god who leads out of Egypt in the Decalogue (Exod 20:2; Deut 5:6), and also turns him into an “exodic” figure. Simultaneously, it seems that Genesis 15:7 also seeks to correct the priestly Abraham version, because after the priestly genealogy in 11:31–32 Terah moves out of Ur of the Chaldeans whereas Abraham leaves not from Ur but from Harran, where his father had settled.

The post-priestly provenance of Genesis 24 should also be considered as proven, following Alexander Rofé’s investigations.⁸ This chapter calls to mind the Book of Tobit, with its baroque style and the idea of guardian angels, and also shows linguistic and contextual indications for locating the narrative in the (probably late) Persian period.

Chapters 20–22* should also be understood as post-priestly.⁹ In the framework of the Documentary Hypothesis, these chapters were often assigned to the Elohist. A moment of truth in this attribution was the observation that they are closely interrelated

⁷ Thomas Römer, “Abraham and the ‘Law and the Prophets,’” in *The Reception and Remembrance of Abraham* (ed. Pernille Carstens and Niels Peter Lemche; Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and its Contexts 13; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2011), 103–118; see already *idem.*, “Gen 15 und Gen 17. Beobachtungen und Anfragen zu einem Dogma der ‘neueren’ und ‘neuesten’ Pentateuchkritik,” *DBAT* 26 (1990): 232–247.

⁸ Rofé, *art. cit.*, and Alexander Rofé, “An Enquiry to the Betrothal of Rebekah,” in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte. FS R. Rendtorff* (ed. Erhard Blum; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 27–39; see also Alexander Rofé, “Promise and Covenant: The Promise to the Patriarchs in Late Biblical Literature,” in *Divine Promises to the Fathers in the Three Monotheistic Religions. Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Jerusalem March 24–25th, 1993* (ed. Alviero Niccacci; ASBF 40; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1995), 52–59.

⁹ As demonstrated especially by Matthias Köckert, “Gen 20–22 als nachpriesterliche Erweiterung der Vätergeschichte,” in *The Post-Priestly Pentateuch. New Perspectives on its Redactional Development and Theological Profiles* (ed. Federico Giuntoli and Konrad Schmid; FAT 101; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 157–176.

and that Genesis 21–22 displays several parallels to the Isaac tradition. The “endangered ancestress” version in Genesis 20 is later than Genesis 12:10–20 and corrects the latter in the form of a midrash.¹⁰ Genesis 20 also shows linguistic characteristics that are close to post-biblical Hebrew (like *מָה רָאִיתָ* in 20:10); also the often emended verse 20:4, in which Abimelech designates himself as a righteous “goy,” presupposes the meaning “pagan, gentile.”¹¹

Following the priestly birth account of Isaac in 21:1–7, which probably integrates elements of an earlier narrative, the story about the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael in 21:9–21 belongs to a post-priestly layer. E. A. Knauf has pointed out¹² that the story was written to smoothen the discrepancy between the non-priestly text 16:12, according to which Ishmael lives in the desert, and 16:15 (P), in which Ishmael is in the house of Abraham.¹³ Furthermore, there are a number of parallels between this story and Genesis 22 that are better explained if both texts are assigned to the same author, or if Genesis 21:9–21 was composed later than Genesis 22. In any case, 21:9–21 also explains why Abraham has only one son in chapter 22.

The dispute between Abraham’s shepherds and the servants of Abimelech in 21:22–34, which has a parallel in Genesis 26:14b–33,

¹⁰ See already John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1975), 167 and 183. There is an ongoing discussion whether Genesis 12:1–10 or 26:1–11* are the oldest of the three variants. Many scholars argue that 26:1–11 represents the oldest narrative because of its “profane” character; see, e.g., Ludwig Schmidt, “Die Darstellung Isaaks in Genesis 26,1–33 und ihr Verhältnis zu den Parallelen in den Abrahamerzählungen,” in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Pentateuch* (BZAW 263; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 167–223, 180–183. But 26:1–11* has no plot at all and can be labeled as a “constructed narrative”; and 26:1 clearly presupposes the narrative in 12:10–20. See Irmtraud Fischer, *Die Erzeltern Israels. Feministisch-theologische Studien zu Genesis 12–36* (BZAW 222; Berlin – New York: de Gruyter, 1994), 176.

¹¹ Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 408–409, with notes 13 and 14.

¹² Ernst Axel Knauf, *Ishmael. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Palästinas und Nordarabiens im 1. Jahrtausend v.Chr.* (ADPV; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1989, 2nd ed.), 18–25.

¹³ For further arguments see Köckert, *art. cit.*, 166–173; Nadav Na’aman, “The Pre-Priestly Abraham Story as a Unified Exilic Work,” *SJOT* 29 (2015): 157–181, 163.

is hard to classify. The story was probably transferred from chapter 26 to chapter 21¹⁴ in order to assign the few Isaac traditions to Abraham. The relationship of Genesis 20–22 to the Isaac texts in Genesis 26 needs a thorough examination that cannot be conducted within the framework of this article.

The Genesis 22 narrative about the disrupted sacrifice of Isaac and his replacement by a ram should also be understood as post-priestly.¹⁵ This is primarily supported by the location of the sacrifice on “one of the mountains in the land of Moriah”—provided that this place name refers to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem as in 2 Chronicles 3:1.¹⁶ Furthermore, the question of the promise of a son, the emphasis on Isaac as the representative of the “Israel line” and the narrative’s abolition of human sacrifice all fit into Genesis 22’s Persian period setting.¹⁷ A late date is further supported by the angel that operates from heaven, as in Genesis 21 but in contrast to Genesis 16.

Summing up, chapters 20–25 should be classified as priestly and post-priestly, aside from the probably earlier elements in the narrative of Isaac’s birth in 21:1–7*. The question of the beginning of the pre-priestly Abraham narrative is also complicated. Abraham’s itinerary in 12:6–9 is, according to most scholars, an inverted mirror adaptation of Jacob’s travels, and therefore a Judean reworking of the Israelite Jacob tradition. The mention of Shechem in 12:6–7 can be explained as an allusion to Genesis 33:18–

¹⁴ Schmidt, *art. cit.*, 221–223.

¹⁵ See also Köckert *art. cit.*, 173–176. See already Timo Veijola, “Das Opfer des Abraham—Paradigma des Glaubens aus dem nachexilischen Zeitalter,” *ZThK* 85 (1988): 129–164 and Konrad 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. Markus Witte; Berlin – New York: de Gruyter, 2004), 271–300.

¹⁶ This is the *opinion communis*. In a forthcoming article, Christophe Nihan argues that the author of Genesis 22 chooses the mountain in “the land of Moriah” in order to allude to the Oak of Moreh, the site near Shechem (Gen 12:6). The term was coined to be understood by the Samaritans as a reference to Mount Garizim. 2 Chr 3:1 would then be a later Judean interpretation.

¹⁷ Whether Genesis 22 is related to child sacrifice is debated. See Thomas Römer, “Le sacrifice humain en Juda et Israël au premier millénaire avant notre ère,” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 1 (1999): 16–26.

20, but it also functions as an anticipatory reference to the end of the Hexateuch in Joshua 24, since Joshua's final speech also takes place in Shechem. According to Genesis 12:8, Abraham does not move directly to Bethel, but camps between Bethel and Ai. Either Bethel was not a functional sanctuary at the time of the composition of the text, or the author of the text considered this sanctuary illegitimate, and therefore pointed, by mentioning the ruins of Ai, to its anticipated, or already transpired, destruction. The itinerary in 12:6–9 probably presupposes the divine speech in 12:1–4a, which, according to Jean-Louis Ska, interrupts the priestly composition 11:27–32; 12:4–5, and is therefore a post-priestly insert using both priestly and Deuteronomistic terminology.¹⁸ If Genesis 22 is considered post-priestly, the same should be suggested for Genesis 12,1–4a, because these verses are constructed as a parallel and preparation to Genesis 22.¹⁹ The fact that Genesis 12:1–3 is quite late is also acknowledged by Köckert, who qualifies this passage as a “text that came into being probably close to the time of P.”²⁰

Therefore, only Genesis 12:10–20; 13*; 16*; 18–19* (excluding the discussion on Yhwh's righteousness in Genesis 18:18–19, 22–23*), and maybe a short note on Isaac's birth in Genesis 21:1–7*, qualify as pre-priestly texts.²¹ These texts do not allow for the reconstruction of a continuous Abraham-and-Sarah narrative, which led de Pury to suggest that the “Abraham narrative has its

¹⁸ Jean-Louis Ska, “The Call of Abraham and Israel's Birth-certificate (Gen 12:1–4a),” in Jean-Louis Ska, *The Exegesis of the Pentateuch* (FAT 66; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 46–66.

¹⁹ This view, however, has been criticized by M. Köckert with the argument that the focus of Genesis 12:1–3 is limited to the sole book of Genesis. See Matthias Köckert, “Wie wurden Abraham- und Jakobüberlieferung zu einer ‘Vätergeschichte’ verbunden?,” *HeBAI* 3.1 (2014), 43–66, 63. Köckert refers to Konrad Schmid, *Erzväter und Exodus. Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments* (WMANT 81; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 105. But does every post-priestly insertion necessarily refer to a Pentateuchal large context? One should further note that the “great nation” (גוי גדול) in 12:2 appears again in Deuteronomy 26:5.

²⁰ Köckert, *art. cit.* (2015), 173.

²¹ For a similar reconstruction, see also the history of research presented in Na'aman, *art. cit.*, 157–161.

starting point on a literary level, probably in the priestly version.”²²

It is barely possible to read the above-suggested pre-priestly Abraham story as a cohesive narrative. The authors of the account of the promise of a son in Genesis 18 and his birth in 21:1–7* do not seem to have knowledge of the existence of Ishmael. It is therefore possible to distinguish between two different parts in the pre-priestly Abraham tradition: the Abraham-Lot narrative, which is associated to the promise of a son for Abraham and to Isaac’s birth,²³ and the traditions of the “endangered ancestress” in Genesis 12:10–20 as well as of the birth of Ishmael in Genesis 16*—two traditions that are closely connected as we will argue below.

The date of these traditions is debated, but most of the scholars mentioned above assume that this early stratum of the Abraham narrative developed in the pre-exilic period.²⁴ Some of them,

²² De Pury, *art. cit.*, 214. Römer had followed a suggestion made by Irmtraud Fischer, which is to locate the beginning of the original Abraham tradition in 12:10–20. See: Thomas Römer, “Recherches actuelles sur le cycle d’Abraham,” in *Studies in the Book of Genesis. Literature, Redaction and History* (ed. André Wénin; BETL 155; Leuven: University Press – Peeters, 2001), 179–211, 193; Fischer, *op. cit.*, 339. This hypothesis was rightly criticized by Matthias Köckert, “Die Geschichte der Abrahamüberlieferung,” in *Congress Volume Leiden 2004* (ed. André Lemaire; VTSup 109; Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2006), 103–128, 212, footnote 58. It should probably be assumed, then, that the original opening of the Abraham-narrative was later replaced by Genesis 12:1–9 (see also Blum, *op. cit.*, 285–286); but for this, however, there are no literary indications.

²³ This confirms an assumption of earlier research; see especially Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901), 159f, who, however, wanted to add 12:1–9 as an introduction. See further Blum, *op. cit.*, 282–289.

²⁴ According to Blum (*op. cit.*, 273–289; 461–462 and also: Erhard Blum, “Abraham I. Altes Testament,” *RGG*⁴ 1 [1998]: cols 70–74, 71–72), Genesis 13, which describes the strife between the shepherds of Abraham and Lot, is an exposition of the episodes in chapters 18–19. The themes in this early story are the birth of the promised heir and the genesis of the peoples of Israel, Ammon, and Moab. In his early work (*op. cit.* [1984], 273–297), Blum called the early Abraham and Jacob stories “*Vätergeschichte 1*” and dated it to the preexilic period. But his later work he gave up on this stage and dated the composition of the pre-priestly patriarchal story to the exilic period (*art. cit.* [1998], 71–73; cf. also Rainer Albertz, *Israel in the Exile. The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*

like Fischer, even assumed that these stories developed before the fall of the Northern Kingdom.²⁵ Other scholars did not commit to a particular date and accepted the option of a pre-exilic as well as an exilic date.²⁶ In the following, we will argue that, during the ex-

[Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003], 255-256). Reinhard Kratz observed that “the Yahwistic primeval history and the patriarchal history can be read as the foundational legend of the states of Israel and Judah in a non-state garb and as legitimation for the worship of the national God YHWH.” Nevertheless, he suggested that the cycle was composed between the years 720 and 586 BCE, “in which there was no kingdom, but one people Israel alongside and in the kingdom of Judah” (Reinhard G. Kratz, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* [London – New York: T&T Clark – Continuum, 2005], 273 and 265). For a similar interpretation of the story-cycle see Köckert, *art. cit.* (2014), 64–65. According to Thomas Römer, “Abraham Traditions in the Hebrew Bible outside the Book of Genesis,” in *The Book of Genesis. Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr and David L. Petersen; Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2012), 159–180, 161–173, 178–179, Ezek 33:24 and Isa 51:1–3, which refer to Abraham as ancestor, indicate a pre-exilic date of the early stratum of the Abraham tradition. Like Blum, Matthias Köckert (*art. cit.* [2006], 120–121; [2014], 69–70) dated the earliest stratum, which included the Abraham-Lot narratives (Gen 13*, 18–19 and 21,1a.2*.7), to the pre-exilic period. To this story, he suggested to add chapter 16, which was also written in the pre-exilic period, but the date of its integration into the early story-cycle is uncertain. In his earlier publication, Köckert (*art. cit.* [2006], 122–123) dated the combination of the Abraham and Jacob stories to the exilic period. In his recent work, however (Köckert, *art. cit.* [2014], 48–66), he suggested that the combination of the two cycles was made during the pre-exilic period. Na’aman dates all the patriarchal stories to the 6th century BCE, claiming that “the author deliberately planted the patriarchs in Hebron and Beer-sheba, cities located in the midst of areas that the Edomites took possession of after the downfall of Judah. Just as he emphasized that the lost territories of the former Kingdoms of Israel and Judah are the inheritance of Israel, so did the seat of the patriarchs in the lost south Judahite regions make it clear that these districts are the possession of the patriarchs’ descendants for all generations to come.” (*art. cit.*, 172).

²⁵ Irmtraud Fischer (*op. cit.*, 339) dated the early stratum of the Abraham narratives to the period before the downfall of the Northern Kingdom, and suggested that it developed in the southern regions of the land. These stories were combined with the story cycle of Jacob by the addition of the Isaac story already in the pre-exilic period. Hence, the combined story of the three patriarchs and matriarchs was already written in the late monarchic period.

²⁶ David M. Carr speaks of a “proto-Genesis,” and dates this work to “sometime in the pre-exilic or (more likely) early exilic periods” (David M. Carr,

ilic period, Genesis 12:10–20 and the birth of Ishmael in Genesis 16* were added to preexisting Abraham traditions of the Iron Age that are attested in Genesis 13* and 18–19*.

II. Abraham in the pre-priestly traditions: a multi-ethnic figure from the South

1. The figure of Abraham in biblical traditions

An autochthonous figure

The pre-priestly Abraham is not an emigrant. Only P (or to be precise the post-priestly text Genesis 15) turns the family of Abraham into emigrants migrating from Ur in the land of the Chaldeans to Canaan.²⁷ The link between Abraham and Mesopotamia can be explained by the intent to enable Abraham to emanate from a famous Mesopotamian city, while turning him into a role model for the Babylonian Golah. In the canonical shape of the Patriarchal narratives, Abraham crosses the entire “fertile crescent,” from Ur to Egypt. As he does so, before entering the land, he passes through regions in which Judean and Israelite diasporas were previously located; after his arrival in Canaan he goes down to Egypt which, in the Persian period, was also a home for Judean and Israelite diasporas. As such, he turns into an “ecumenical” figure²⁸ with whom all descendants of the former Judah and Israel could identify.

Reading the Fractures of Genesis [Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1996], 227 and 236).

²⁷ According to P, Abraham’s father leaves Ur, so that Abraham, according to Genesis 12:1–3, leaves from Harran. The author of Genesis 15 apparently wanted to correct this idea.

²⁸ For this expression, see Albert 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. Steven L McKenzie and Thomas Römer; BZAW 294; Berlin – New York: de Gruyter, 2000), 163–181.

The pre-priestly Abraham, however, was probably an autochthonous figure, with roots in southern Palestine. This seems indicated in Ezekiel 33:23–24, where the autochthonous population's reference is criticized from a Golah perspective:

Then the word of the Lord came unto me: Son of man, the inhabitants of these ruins (יֹשְׁבֵי הַחֲרוּבוֹת הָאֵלֶּה) of the land of Israel say: Abraham was one (אֶחָד), and he owned the land (וַיִּירֶשׁ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ). But we are many; the land is given (נִתְּנָה) us as possession (לְמוֹרָשָׁה).

Such a saying, put in the mouth of a population that remained in the land, shows that Abraham served as a role model for this group. This was probably for the most part a rural, multi-ethnic population and not the exiled elite of Jerusalem. This quote, which should probably be dated to the first half of the 6th century BCE, shows that Abraham must have been an older figure, because it is implied that the addressees know him. The close relationship between the “one” Abraham and the land is not justified here by a promise of land, but by Abraham’s “possession.” The root *y-r-š* is rarely found in the Abraham narrative (Genesis 15; 22:17; 24:60; with the meaning “to inherit” in Genesis 15:3–4 and 21:10), and probably originates from Ezekiel 33:24. It is also interesting that, in this exilic text, Abraham is not associated to Jacob, though the latter also appears in Ezekiel 37:25 and 28:25 in relation to the land.

The somehow younger oracle in Isaiah 51:1–3 adopts a positive attitude towards the “population of the ruins”:

Look at the rock (צוּר) from which you are carved, and at the cave, the cistern (מִקְבֵּת בּוֹר) from which you are dug. Look at Abraham, your father, and Sarah, who gave birth to you. He was one (אֶחָד) when I called him (קָרָאתִיו), and I blessed him (וַאֲבָרַכְהוּ)²⁹ and I made him many (וַאֲרַבְהוּ). Yhwh soothes Zion, he soothes all of her ruins

²⁹ For the vocalization of the MT and the rendering in the versions, see John Goldingay and David F. Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55. Volume II* (ICC; London – New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 224. 1QIsa^a has “I make (made) him fertile,” which also makes sense.

(כְּלִי-חַרְבָּתִיהָ), he turns her desert into Eden, and her steppe into the garden of Yhwh.

This text refers to Ezekiel 33:24 and corrects it with regards to the “ruins.” Contrary to Ezekiel, however, Isaiah 51:1–3 does not deal with the land but with Abraham’s offspring. This explains why Sarah is mentioned here.³⁰ We cannot say whether it already implies a written (priestly) version of the Abraham story.³¹ The root *q-r-ʿ* does not appear in the context of Abraham’s call in Genesis 12. In Genesis 13:10, there is a parallel to the expression “garden of Yhwh,” but there it designates the land that Lot chose (the region of Sodom and Gomorra).

If the “rock” in Isaiah 51:3 refers to Abraham, the oracle may also contain a reference to the autochthonous character of the couple Abraham and Sarah. This would reflect a mythological concept according to which “autochthonous humans are born out of rock, and brought out from the rock or the cave.”³² But it is also possible that the rock or the cave is Abraham’s tomb at Mamre/Hebron.³³

The pre-priestly Abraham served during the Babylonian period as a figure of legitimation of a rural and un-deported population. The traditions linked to him revolve around land property

³⁰ This is the only mention of Sarah in the Hebrew Bible outside the Book of Genesis.

³¹ As argued by Köckert, *art. cit.* (2006), 206.

³² Paul Volz, *Jesaja. II* (Kommentar zum Alten Testament IX; Leipzig: A. Deichert’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1932), 111; further bibliography for this opinion in 110, footnote 1.

³³ So de Pury, *art. cit.* (2009), 233. See already Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (HKAT III/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902, 2nd ed.), 344–345. Another possibility is to correlate the rock with Zion, see Odil Hannes Steck, “Zions Tröstung. Beobachtungen und Fragen zu Jesaja 51,1–11,” in *Die hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte. Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Erhard Blum, Christian Macholz and Ekkehard W. Stegemann; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 257–276, reprinted in Odil Hannes Steck, *Gottesknecht und Zion. Gesammelte Aufsätze zu Deuterjesaja* (FAT 4; Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), 84–85. The mention of Abraham and Sarah makes this solution less probable.

and offspring.³⁴ Both are important themes in the ancient Near East as well as in Greece, and both appear in the pre-priestly Abraham narratives. Before returning to this subject, let us take a brief look at Abraham and Jacob's different political functions. It is remarkable that Abraham appears in the so-called Deuteronomistic History³⁵ and in the Book of Jeremiah only in late insertions.³⁶ This already provides an indication that the Jerusalemite elite did not need these stories for their reconstruction of Israel's and Judah's history.

A non-national, inclusive and multi-ethnic figure of the South

Genesis 32:23–32 tells how Jacob receives his new name, “Israel.” This legend is used to turn the patriarch into a “national” patriarch, an ancestor of the Kingdom of Israel. This probably happened during the reign of Jeroboam II, if Hosea 12 is read as a critical statement against the officialization of the Jacob tradition.³⁷

³⁴ See Bernard Gosse, *Structuration des grands ensembles bibliques et intertextualité à l'époque perse* (BZAW 246; Berlin – New York: de Gruyter, 1997, 92–94, and Israel Finkelstein and Thomas Römer, “Comments on the Historical Background of the Abraham Narrative. Between ‘Realia’ and ‘Exegetica’,” *HeBAI* 3/1 (2014): 3–23, 19.

³⁵ The few mentions of the Patriarchs in Joshua, Samuel and Kings are post-dtr inserts, see Thomas Römer, *Israels Väter. Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im Deuteronomium und in der deuteronomistischen Tradition* (OBO 99; Freiburg (CH) – Göttingen: Universitätsverlag – Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), *passim*.

³⁶ The only appearance of Abraham in the MT of Jeremiah (33:26) is probably part of a late addition (vv. 14–26 are lacking in LXX); see for instance Johan Lust, “The Diverse Forms of Jeremiah and History Writing with Jer 33 as a Test Case,” *JNSL* 20/1 (1994): 31–48.

³⁷ For the critical assessment of the Jacob tradition in Hosea 12 and its dating to the 8th century BCE, see Albert de Pury, “Hosea 12 und die Auseinandersetzung um die Identität Israels und seines Gottes,” in *Ein Gott allein? JHWH-Verehrung und biblischer Monotheismus im Kontext der israelitischen und altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte* (ed. Walter Dietrich and Martin Klopfenstein; OBO 139; Freiburg (CH) – Göttingen: Universitätsverlag – Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 413–439.

Abraham, on the other hand, was never an “official” patriarch of the Kingdom of Judah. He is not the ancestor of the different tribes or clans that form Judah. P reports in Genesis 17, however, a name change for him and Sarah, probably inspired by Genesis 32. But Abraham’s new name is by no means related to a national function. The change from Abram to Abraham is explained theologically with the statement that the patriarch will become the father of many peoples. Abraham is not thereby exactly turned into a Judean ancestor. The pre-priestly texts already indicate that his two sons do not belong to the same ethnic group. Thus, Abraham was a reference person for certain Judean but also non-Judean, “Arab” groups, which had been in contact with each other in the Negev, southern Hebron Hills and the southern Shephelah. As de Pury underlines, Hebron appears in the David narrative “as the assembly point for all groups (...), the ones living in the Negev, in the mounds of the lowlands as well as in the highlands, if not even for the far neighbors in Transjordan, Arabia and Sinai.”³⁸ Consequently, Abraham was a figure who was remembered in the south of Judah, but not as the patriarch of the kingdom of Judah.

Though, in some prophetic texts, Jacob and Abraham do appear together (Isa 29:22; 41:8; 63:16 [Israel]; Mi 7:20; cf. Ps 105:6) and probably symbolize the north (Israel) and the south (Judah), such a use of Abraham is an exception and a later development. The original political function of the figure of Abraham, as it was shared by various groups in the south, thus differs distinctly from that of Jacob.

2. The background of the pre-priestly Abraham traditions from the perspective of the historical *longue durée*

This picture of Abraham as an autochthonous figure, important for southern tribes, is consistent with a *longue durée* perspective on the geopolitical history of the region.

³⁸ De Pury, *art. cit.* (2009), 233.

By the second millennium BCE there were two main geopolitical centers in the hill country—the kingdom of Shechem and the kingdom of Jerusalem. The historical and archaeological data clearly show that the kingdom of Shechem was the larger and more populated one, with areas better ruled over from the agricultural perspective, and closer to the rich valleys and the important cities and roads that existed during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. It controlled the Northern hill country, reached as far north as the Jezreel Valley, as far east as the Gilead and as far to the southwest as Gezer. These are precisely the historical borders of the Kingdom of Israel prior to its expansion during the days of the Omrides. The first millennium BCE Kingdom of Israel is the direct consequence and continuation of the Labaya kingdom of Shechem of the Late Bronze Age.³⁹

The Kingdom of Jerusalem was much smaller and less active, and the main debate between scholars concerns the territory ruled by this hilly fortress during the second millennium BCE. Naʾaman,⁴⁰ following Alt,⁴¹ reconstructed a very small city-state that ruled solely over its immediate territory.⁴² It seems quite

³⁹ Israel Finkelstein, “The Last Labayu: King Saul and the Expansion of the First North Israelite Territorial Entity,” in *Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context: A Tribute to Nadav Naʾaman* (ed. Yaira Amit, Ehud Ben Zvi, Israel Finkelstein and Oded Lipschits; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 171–177.

⁴⁰ Nadav Naʾaman, “Canaanite Jerusalem and Its Central Hill Country Neighbours in the Second Millennium B.C.E.,” *UF* 24 (1992): 275–291; *idem*, “The Contribution of the Amarna Letters to the Debate on Jerusalem’s Political Position in the Tenth Century B.C.E.,” *BASOR* 304 (1996), 17–27; *idem*, “Jerusalem in the Amarna Period,” in *Jérusalem Antique et Médiévale: Mélanges en l’honneur d’Ernest-Marie Laperrousaz* (eds. Caroline Arnould-Béhar and André Lemaire, Paris, 2011), 31–48.

⁴¹ Albrecht Alt, “Die Landnahme der Israeliten in Palästina (1925),” in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel I* (München: Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1953), 89–125, 107–108.

⁴² Zechariah Kallai and Haim Tadmor, “Bit-Ninurta = Beth-Horon — On the History of the Kingdom of Jerusalem in the Amarna Period (Hebrew),” *Erls* 9 (1969): 138–147, followed by Israel Finkelstein, claimed that Jerusalem ruled over all the southern hill country, as far as the Beersheba–Arad Valleys, including the Hebron hills. See: Israel Finkelstein, “The Sociopolitical Organization of the Central Hill Country in the Second Millennium BCE,” in: *Biblical Archaeology Today, 1990 — Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Biblical Archaeology*,

clear that the traditional borders of the kingdom of Jerusalem were small and never included the southern Judean Hills, i.e. the area of Hebron, which was the heart of the local tribe or clans of Judah according to the biblical descriptions. At least during the Late Bronze Age, Jerusalem was an isolated fort that controlled a sparsely populated area, with a probably very small number of 'Apiru groups and semi-nomadic clans roaming its territory to the south and west of it.⁴³

In the Middle Bronze Age, Hebron was the main urban center in the southern Hill country. Tell er-Rumeideh (the location of ancient Hebron) was well fortified, with a strong wall that surrounded an area of about 24–30 dunams.⁴⁴ A cuneiform text discovered at the site⁴⁵ was dated to the 17th century BCE.⁴⁶ The frequent mention of the word “king” in this inscription indicates that the tablet originally belonged to the local king’s archive; sheep are mentioned and they—partly or entirely—served for sacrifice, indicating that a cult place existed either in the city or nearby.⁴⁷ During the 17th–16th centuries BCE, Hebron was the political and military center of the southern hill country while Jerusalem was the center of the central hill region. It was destroyed in an unknown period and was probably abandoned during the Late Bronze Age. During the same period when Hebron existed as the

Supplement (eds. A. Biran and J. Naveh, Jerusalem, 1993), 110–131; “The Territorio-Political System of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age,” *UF* 28 (1996): 221–255, 228–229, 234–235 and 255. Their reconstruction, however, does not account well for the main archeological and epigraphic data from the Southern region (see below).

⁴³ Na’aman, *art. cit.* (1992), 280–288.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey R. Chadwick, *The Archaeology of Biblical Hebron in the Bronze and Iron Ages: An Examination of the Discoveries of the American Expedition of Hebron* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, 1992), 56–76, 131–133; Avi Ofer, “‘All the Hill Country of Judah’: from a Settlement Fringe to a Prosperous Monarchy,” in *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel* (ed. Israel Finkelstein; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 95–96, 100, 110; Na’aman, *art. cit.* (1992), 280–288.

⁴⁵ Avi Ofer, “Excavations at Biblical Hebron (Hebrew),” *Qadmoniot* 87–88 (1989): 88–93, 91–93.

⁴⁶ Moshe Anbar and Nadav Na’aman, “An Account Tablet of Sheep from Ancient Hebron,” *Tel Aviv* (1986–1987): 3–12.

⁴⁷ Na’aman, *art. cit.* (1992).

main urban center of the south, Beth-Zur existed to its north, also fortified with a strong wall, surrounding an area of about 8–15 dunams. Beth-Zur was destroyed at the end of the Middle Bronze Age and was also deserted during the Late Bronze Age.

During the Late Bronze Age, the main urban center of the south was Khirbet Rabûd—biblical Debir.⁴⁸ The ca. 50 dunam site was well fortified by a strong wall. Four Late Bronze Age strata were unearthed at this site during archaeological excavations.

The archaeological surveys conducted in the Judean hills indicate that, during the Late Bronze II, the area between Jerusalem and Khirbet Rabûd (about 40 km) was uninhabited. The two mountain-located and fortified towns were territorially disconnected.

The location of Debir in the southern Judean hill country in the Late Bronze II is similar to that of Hebron in the Middle Bronze II: a major city within a partly or entirely non-sedentary area. Just as Hebron was an independent city-state in the Middle Bronze II, so was Debir in the Late Bronze II. All written and archaeological data indicate that the independent city-state of Debir dominated the southern hills of Judah in the Late Bronze II. Just like Hebron, Debir was a fortified stronghold in the middle of an unpopulated and unsettled area.⁴⁹ This situation also corresponds to local Judahite traditions according to which the clan that settled in the Hebron area was Caleb's (cf. Num 13–14 and Josh 14), while another clan—Othniel's—settled in and around Debir (Josh 15:15–17).

⁴⁸ For the excavations of Khirbet Rabûd, see Mosheh Kochavi, "Khirbet Rabûd = Debir", *Tel Aviv* 1 (1974): 2–33; A. Ofer, *art. cit.*, 96, 110.

⁴⁹ The territories of the kingdoms of Middle Bronze II Hebron and Late Bronze II Debir must have encompassed the Beer-sheba–Arad Valleys. The sites of Tel Masos and Tel Malhata in the south and Beth-Zur in the north were secondary towns within the Middle Bronze II kingdom of Hebron. The territory of Debir, on the other hand, was almost entirely uninhabited. Its economy was based on agriculture and animal husbandry and it kept close relations with the pastoral groups located in its highland and Negebite territories. Its close neighbors were the city-states of Jerusalem in the north and Lachish in the west. Whether there were other small city-states on its western border remains unknown.

In biblical traditions of Israel's early history and during the early Iron Age, Jerusalem (Jebus) is consistently disconnected from the hill country of Judah. It should be remembered that, according to the biblical record, the family of David lived inside the territory of the kingdom of Jerusalem, in close proximity to the city itself—far from the tribal territory of Judah in the Hebron Hills.⁵⁰

However, from the stories on his early career, it seems that David understood that the clans of Judah could give him the support he needed against Saul and the elite of the kingdom of Jerusalem. He continued to send them gifts and assist them (1 Sam 30:26, etc.). The support of the elders of Judah led them to ask David to become their leader prior to the conquest of Jerusalem and the establishment of the Davidic kingdom. In this case, the stories of David as the leader of an 'Apiru group who became the leader of a tribal territory is similar to that of Jephtah in the Book of Judges (Judg 11).

According to the biblical tradition, the territory of Saul had been in the Benjaminite region and probably included Jerusalem. Following his death, the areas of the "Kingdom of Jerusalem" and that of Hebron/Debir were united under the leadership of David, whose center was in Hebron. In the narrative of David's rise, Jerusalem is presented as a town with a foreign population—the Jebusites—, just as the western area of Benjamin was portrayed as Hivite foreign territory (Josh 9).

This short overview shows that the biblical traditions of the early history of Israel consistently separated Jerusalem from the southern hill country of Judah.⁵¹ The integration of the Southern territory into the kingdom of Jerusalem, the establishment of the territorial kingdom of Judah, and the later integration of the lowland into that kingdom—all during the second half of the 9th century BCE—was one of the most important achievements of the

⁵⁰ Recently, Hermann Michael Niemann ("Juda und Jerusalem. Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Stamm und Stadt und zur Rolle Jerusalems in Juda," *UF* 47 [2016]: 147–190) has argued that there never was a "historical tribe of Judah," but different clans living in Judahite territory. The tribe of Judah was invented in the 8th or 7th century BCE in order to legitimize the Davidic dynasty.

⁵¹ See also Niemann, *art. cit.*, 175–176.

Davidic kings; geographically, this was *not* natural to this region. Attention must be paid to the fact that this unification of the two territories is described in the Books of Samuel as a conquest of Jerusalem by the tribal leader of Judah from his center in Hebron, and this conquest was only part of David's long struggle against the leading families of the Benjaminite region.

From the very moment of the creation of the kingdom of Judah, and until the Babylonian exile, the city of Jerusalem was the center of a kingdom that encompassed an extensive territory, vastly larger than the Judean hills. Yet, in the kingdom's administrative framework, Jerusalem was the center of a small district (described as סביב/סביבות ירושלים) whereas the hill country of Judah was a large, separate district (called ההר).⁵²

This unification of the two regions was a one-time occurrence; it had never transpired before, and it terminated with the end of the Davidic dynasty and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The geopolitical outcome of this destruction was the renewed separation of the two regions. The province of Yehud included precisely the territory of the former Middle and Late Bronze Ages kingdom of Jerusalem, while the traditional area of the tribe of Judah was cut off from Jerusalem and very soon became part of the province of Idumaea. The Northern border of Idumea was south of Beth-Zur, and the Beer-sheba–Arad Valley and the southern Shephelah were included in this territory. This border system survived throughout the Persian and early Hellenistic periods. Even the Hasmonean and Roman conquests did not change the place of this area within the overall administrative division of the hill country and the Shephelah. In the time of John Hyrcanus (134–105 BCE), Idumea was conquered by the kings of Jerusalem, converted by force and annexed as a separate administrative district to the Hasmonean kingdom. This administrative division remained in power until the destruction of the Second Temple. Later on, the administrative detachment of Jerusalem

⁵² Nadav Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah," *Tel Aviv* 18 (1991): 3–71, 13–16.

and the area of Hebron remained intact until the early Ottoman period.⁵³

Therefore, an examination of the *longue durée* geopolitical situation in the hill country indicates that for more than a thousand years—from the destruction of the First Temple until the end of the Byzantine period—, in various historical situations and under different political powers, Jerusalem and the southern Judean hill country were part of different—at first political and later administrative—entities.

German scholarship postulated the existence of a “Greater Judah” in the pre-monarchic period. According to Alt, Noth, Zobel and others, a confederation of six small clans existed in the pre-monarchy period: Judah, Simeon, the Calebites, the Kenazites, the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites.⁵⁴ Other scholars, such as Mowinckel⁵⁵ and de Vaux,⁵⁶ claimed that the tribe of Judah did not exist before the time of David and that the unification of the clans in the Hebron hills happened only under David’s leadership in Hebron. Archaeology can contribute to this debate, since it is now clear that the Judean hill country was sparsely populated in the Late Bronze Age and the Iron I. In light of this data, it is reasonable to assume that the crystallization of a territorial-tribal entity with the name “Judah” around Hebron only followed the rise of a

⁵³ Na’aman, *art. cit.* (1992), 282–283.

⁵⁴ Albrecht Alt, *The God of the Fathers* (Essays on Old Testament History and Religion; Oxford: 1966), 53–54; Martin Noth, *Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels* (BWANT IV/1; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930), 107–108; Hans-Jürgen Zobel, “Beiträge zur Geschichte Groß-Judas in früh- und vordavidischer Zeit,” in *Congress Volume Edinburgh 1974* (VT.S 28; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 253–277.

⁵⁵ Sigmund Mowinckel, “‘Rahelstämme’ und ‘Leastämme’,” in *Von Ugarit nach Qumran. Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen und altorientalischen Forschung*, Otto Eissfeldt zum 1. September 1957 (ed. Johannes Hempel and Leonard Lost; BZAW 77; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1958), 129–150, 137–138.

⁵⁶ Roland de Vaux, *Histoire ancienne d’Israël. Des origines à l’installation en Canaan* (Études bibliques; Paris: Gabalda, 1971), 509–510. See also Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: A Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (BZAW 142; Berlin – New York: de Gruyter, 1977), 65–66.

strong leader in Hebron, and that a figure like David might have played a major role in this process.⁵⁷

This *longue durée* geopolitical picture seems to confirm the hypothesis that the Abraham traditions grew inside the Southern territory of Judah, around the site of Hebron. In addition, 2 Samuel 5:3 seems to refer to a cult place in Hebron, and the same cultic place appears in the excuse of Absalom when he planned to revolt against his father David (2 Sam 15:7). The Abraham traditions in Genesis mention more specifically the cult place of Mamre in Hebron.⁵⁸ This cult place might be identified as one of the places where these traditions were transmitted and developed.

The original location of Mamre remains obscure. According to Genesis 13:18, Mamre is located in or near Hebron and could therefore have been a sanctuary that was connected to the city. Its identification with *Ḥaram Ramet el-Khalil*, located about 3 km north of Hebron, probably goes back to the time of King Herod, when an impressive cultic site was built there.⁵⁹ This building must have preserved a cultic tradition whose sources go back in

⁵⁷ See, however, the skeptical remarks by Niemann, *art. cit.*, who thinks that the biblical texts do not reflect a historical reality, but should be taken as an ideological reconstruction.

⁵⁸ Mamre is not mentioned outside of Genesis (13:18; 18:1; then 23:17, 19; 25:9; 49:30 and 50:13 as well as in personal names in Genesis 14:13, 21). This observation led Roland de Vaux to conclude that this sanctuary was considered as unorthodox by later editors. See Roland de Vaux, "Mambré," *Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément V* (1957): 753–758.

⁵⁹ The history of the site at *Ḥaram Ramet el-Khalil* in its pre-Roman phases is not clear. For a summary of the archaeological picture, and for the results of the excavations that were conducted in this place in 1984–1986, see Yitzhak Magen, "Elonei Mamre—Herodian Cultic Site [Hebrew]," *Qadmoniot* 24 (93–94) (1991), 46–55; *idem*, "Mamre. A Cultic Site from the Reign of Herod," in *One Land—Many Cultures. Archaeological Studies in Honor of Stanislo Loffreda OFM* (ed. G.C. Bottini, L. Di Segni and D. Chrupcala; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2003), 245–257. For the Mader 1926–1928 excavations see: Andreas Evaristus Mader, *Altchristliche Basiliken und Lokalt raditionen in Südjüdäa: archäologische und topographische Untersuchungen* (Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums VIII/5–6; Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1918); *idem*, *Mambre: die Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen im heiligen Bezirk Râmet el-Ḥalîl in Südpalästina: 1926–1928* (Freiburg im Breisgau: E. Wewel, 1957). See also Wolfgang Zwickel, "Das Heiligtum von Mamre," *BN* 101 (2000): 27–28.

time and were probably linked from an unknown period to the Abraham stories. The option that, in the Roman period, the origin of these traditions moved to the site of *Ḥaram Ramet el-Khalil* from the nearby site of *Khirbet Nimra*, as suggested by Detlef Jericke,⁶⁰ is relevant, especially in light of the similarity of the names Mamre and Nimra. It is difficult, however, to accept archaeological arguments for dating the story of Abraham at Mamre to the Persian period, as suggested by Jericke, especially since the large administrative structure that was excavated at *Khirbet Nimra* and dated to the Persian period was not a cultic place.⁶¹ This structure probably has no connection to the Abraham traditions, and its date to the 6th–4th centuries BCE should not be used to claim that the Mamre-Abraham tradition belongs to the Persian period.⁶² The biblical text mentions a sacred grove of oaks, where an open space altar was erected. Archaeology is very limited in detecting open space cult sites, and even if structures were built around it, one cannot base the date of biblical traditions on such limited and often occasional finds. Since the date of the administrative structure in *Khirbet Nimra* has nothing to do with the date of the Abraham traditions, textual analysis—as complicated and uncertain as it is—should be the basis for the discussion.

Let us now try to locate more precisely the earliest Abraham traditions against this socio-historical and archeological background.

⁶⁰ Detlef Jericke, *Abraham in Mamre. Historische und exegetische Studien zur Region von Hebron und zu Genesis 11,27–19,38* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 17; Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2003), 35–52, 234–235, 301.

⁶¹ Hanany Himzi and Zion Shabtai, “A Public Building from the Persian Period at Jabel Nimra (Hebrew),” in *Judea and Samaria Research Studies. Proceedings of the 3rd Annual Meeting* (ed. Z.H. Ehrlich and Y. Eshel; Kedumim-Ariel: The Research Institute of Judea and Samaria, 1993), 65–86.

⁶² Pace Jericke, *op. cit.*, 234–235, 301. See also Na’aman, *art. cit.* (2015), 175.

III. The early Abraham narrative at the cult site of Mamre during the late monarchic period

1. Abraham and Lot (Gen 13*; 18–19*)

The origin of the transmission history of the Abraham-Lot narrative resides in the tradition of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorra, which is referenced in several biblical texts that do not mention the figure of Lot.⁶³ The original tradition was about the destruction of mythical cities by the Dead Sea in primeval times. This tradition was then developed narratively and the figure of Lot was integrated.

The origins of the figure of Lot are obscure, as is the etymological meaning of his name.⁶⁴ We must assume that, for the audience of the Abraham-Lot tradition, Lot was known as the patriarch of the Moabites and Ammonites, with whom the tradents of this tradition felt connected. In the stories of Genesis 13 and 18–19, one may detect a certain sense of sympathy for Lot, which is however also ensconced in a tinge of irony and superiority.

The Abraham-Lot tradition draws parallels between the two men with regards to land, hospitality and offspring.

*The land conflict and its solution in Genesis 13**

The content of the original narrative of Genesis 13, which roughly encompasses verses 2, 5, 7–11a*, 12b–13 (14a.17) 18a,⁶⁵ is a territorial conflict solved peacefully thanks to Abraham's generous offer.

⁶³ Deut 29:22; 32:32; Isa 1:9f.; 3:9; 13:19; Jer 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Ezek 16:44–48, Am 4:11; Zeph 2:9.

⁶⁴ The root means something like “disguise.” There may be a relation to the name Lotan, which appears in Genesis 26 and 1 Chronicles 1:38–39, as an offspring of Esau.

⁶⁵ Vv. 6, 11b and 12a are traditionally assigned to P (pace Blum, *op. cit.* [1984], 285). Vv. 1, 3–4, 7b, 14–17, 18b seem to belong to the same level as 12:1–9. See also (with somewhat different results) Theodor Seidl, “Conflict and Conflict Reso-

In contrast to the conflict between Jacob and Laban, in which Jacob tries to flee and which is only reconciled with a pact, Abraham takes on a more generous role with his “brother” Lot.⁶⁶ He allows Lot to choose his territory, and the latter chooses the Jordan Valley. The description of this valley as the “garden of Yhwh” shows the tradent’s etiological interest: the explanation of the strange and eerie terrain around the Dead Sea. The idea of the narrative is that this area was very fertile and attractive before its destruction.

With his integration into this region, the nomad Lot (see v. 5: sheep, goats and tents) is transformed into a city dweller (12b: “Lot settled in the cities of the valley and moved with his tent until Sodom”); and exactly this change will become disastrous for him. Abraham, on the other hand, settles at the holy tree (here the singular of the LXX seems preferable) in Mamre, where the story of Genesis 18 takes place (v. 1).

Genesis 13 apparently pleads for a peaceful relationship between the groups presented by Abraham, which were connected to Hebron, the “center” of the southern Palestine hill country,⁶⁷ and the Moabites and Ammonites, represented by Lot. This position contradicts discourses in the so-called Deuteronomistic History, in several prophetic texts (Isa 15–16; 25:10; Jer 48; Am 2:10–11, etc.) as well as in some Psalms (Psa 83:6–9), which depict an aggressive attitude towards the Moabites and the Ammonites.⁶⁸

lution: Inner Controversies and Tensions as Places of Israel’s Self-Conception in the Patriarchal Traditions of Genesis,” *OTE* 26 (2013): 840–863, 842–843.

⁶⁶ According to P, Lot is the nephew of Abraham. In the older tradition he was perhaps Abraham’s brother, but it is also possible that the word is used rhetorically in 13:8.

⁶⁷ De Pury, *art. cit.* (2009), 232.

⁶⁸ For references regarding a military conflict between Ammon and Judah, see Ulrich Hübner, *Die Ammoniter: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte, Kultur und Religion eines transjordanischen Volkes im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr* (ADPV 16; Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1992), 285f. For Moab see Stefan Timm, *Moab zwischen den Mächten: Studien zu historischen Denkmälern und Texten* (ÄAT 17; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1989), 171–180; Oded Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem* (Winona-Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 140–146; Erasmus Gass, *Die Moabiter, Geschichte und Kultur eines ostjordanischen Volkes im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr* (ADPV 38; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 138–210.

In contrast to these texts, and especially contrary to Deuteronomy 23:4 (“No Ammonite or Moabite is allowed in the assembly of Yhwh, never is one of their offspring allowed in the assembly of Yhwh, even not in the tenth generation”), a nonviolent vision towards Moab and Ammon appears in Deuteronomy 2:

v. 9: There Yhwh spoke to me: Do not attack the Moabites and do not get yourself into a war with them! I will not give you anything of this land as property; because I gave Ar⁶⁹ to the sons of Lot as property.

v. 19: You will come close to the Ammonites; do not attack them, and do not get yourself into a war with them! I will not give you anything of the land of the Ammonites as property, because I gave it to the sons of Lot as property.

These texts, which belong to a post-dtr edition of the Book of Deuteronomy,⁷⁰ depend on Genesis 13 (and 19:30ff) and understand the Moabite and Ammonite territories as a gift by Yhwh to these peoples, displaying a universalistic tendency that does not yet exist in Genesis 13*.

It is difficult to detect the exact historical and political context of Genesis 13*. According to Na’aman, Genesis 13 already implies an “overall-Israelite” understanding of Abraham, because Ammon and Moab had been neighbors of Israel at the time of the monarchy.⁷¹ Jericke argues that Ammon and Moab were neighbors of Judah only after the conquest of Judah by the Babylonians.⁷² Therefore, 586 BCE should be the *terminus post quem* for the dating of Genesis 13* and 18–19*. The question is, however, whether such a story could emerge only in “post-exilic” times, when the political entity of Ammon and Moab fell apart.⁷³ If Abraham was not an “official” patriarch of the kingdom of Judah, but rather the ances-

⁶⁹ For Ar and the different identifications, see Jeremy Smoak, “Ar,” *EBR* 2 (2009): cols 573–574.

⁷⁰ Eckart Otto, *Deuteronomium 1–11* (HThK.AT Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 2012), 427–431.

⁷¹ Na’aman, *art. cit.* (2015), 161–162.

⁷² Jericke, *op. cit.*, 232.

⁷³ Gass, *op. cit.*, 211–212, points rightly to the meager body of source material.

tor of a rural group in the Hebron area, an Iron Age origin of this tradition is very plausible, since this tradition is concerned with the relationship of the Hebronite groups to the eastern-Jordanian (as well as the Negebite) population. The area was well populated in the late Iron Age, to the west and to the south of the Dead Sea,⁷⁴ and the population south of Moab had increased as well.⁷⁵ Genesis 13* thus definitely makes sense in the 8th or 7th century BCE. Theoretically, it is possible that this tradition reflects a “rural” resistance against a Jerusalemite expansion under Josiah.

“Tent” against “house,” “land” against “city”: the hospitality of Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18 and 19

Abraham’s hospitality in Genesis 18 parallels Lot’s behavior in Genesis 19.⁷⁶ The parallels with Abraham indicate that Lot is depicted here in a positive light. The main difference is that Genesis 19 has, contrary to Genesis 18, an urban context. Contrary to Abraham, who dwells in a tent, Lot lives in the city gate. Further, it stands out that Lot makes a *מִשְׁתֶּה* (a banquet) for his guests, a term that implies the consumption of alcoholic beverages (see e.g. 1 Sam 25:36 or Isa 5:12). The negative view about the “great city” appears in the description of the evil behavior of the residents of Sodom.

Some scholars assumed that the report about the destruction of Sodom should be understood as a symbolic narrative that hints at the destruction of Jerusalem.⁷⁷ Such an allegorical understanding would have been possible after 586 BCE, but could hardly be the original intention of the story. The original narrative understood Sodom to be a symbol for a despicable urban culture, but also had, as already mentioned, an etiological interest in explaining the strange landscape surrounding the Dead Sea.

⁷⁴ Lipschits, *op. cit.*, 224–237.

⁷⁵ Gass, *op. cit.*, 304, points out that after the heyday in the 7th century BCE there is a decline in settlement in the 6th century BCE.

⁷⁶ See also Van Seters, *op. cit.*, 215f.

⁷⁷ Jericke, *op. cit.*, 303f. Na’aman, *art. cit.* (2015), 167f, is more careful.

Abraham's three visitors

Nadav Na'aman, taking up observations by Esther J. Hamori,⁷⁸ understands Genesis 18:1–15 as a parallel to 32:23–33, so that both texts could have been written by the same (exilic) author.⁷⁹ Indeed, Genesis 18 and 32 display several parallels (a “direct theophany,” with Yhwh appearing in human form), but there are also many differences in style and intention. Hence, Genesis 18 is concerned with the promise of a son and a divine triad, which has no equivalent in Genesis 32, the latter focusing on the change of Jacob's name to Israel.

The switch from singular to plural in Genesis 18:1–15 was often explained by the distinction of two layers. John Van Seters assumes an original history of the promise of a son in which only one divine figure (Yhwh) appeared (1a; 10–15), and which was later complemented by verses 1b–9*, which mention three divine visitors.⁸⁰ However, the reason for the promise of the son, which is given in return for Abraham's hospitality, would then be lost. The tension between “one” and “three” may be explained by the use of a mythological motive very common in the Greek-Roman world. Three deities, who travel incognito, are hosted by an old man or couple, and they return the favor with promising or giving an offspring.⁸¹

But perhaps there is a more specific reason for the appearance of three visitors and their identification with Yhwh. In some biblical texts, Hebron—also named Kiriath-Arba (“the City of the Four”)—is connected to the number “three”: Numbers 13:22, Joshua 15:13 and Judges 1:10 mention three men from Hebron⁸²: Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai. The names of these mythological inhabitants of Hebron, who are designated as descendants of

⁷⁸ Esther J. Hamori, ‘When Gods Were Men’: *The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature* (BZAW 384; Berlin – New York: W. de Gruyter, 2008), 5–25, 65–68, 96–101.

⁷⁹ Na'aman, *art. cit.* (2015), 165–166.

⁸⁰ Van Seters, *op. cit.*, 210–211.

⁸¹ See Thomas Römer, “The Hebrew Bible and Greek Philosophy and Mythology — Some Case Studies,” *Semitica* 57 (2015): 185–203.

⁸² Genesis 14:13–14 mentions three allies of Abraham in Hebron.

Anak, are still unexplained.⁸³ Since the Anakites are described elsewhere as the mythical ancestors of the area around Hebron (Num 13–14), they may be deified ancestors whom the author of Genesis 18:1–25 wanted to identify with Yhwh in order to make them compatible with the Abraham tradition.

The descendant of Abraham and the descendants of Lot

Genesis 18:1–15 ends with the promise of a son, who must be Isaac. This is more than evident in the allusions to his name through Sarah's laughter. Because the motive of the return of the divine visitor in v. 10 and v. 14 is not resumed, it can be considered that the story originally ended with God's return and Isaac's birth, and that this ending was later replaced by the P narrative in 21:1–7*. Leftovers of the original story can perhaps be detected in 21:1–7, especially in v. 2 and v. 7.⁸⁴ Because the promised son can only be Isaac, it appears that the connection between Abraham and Isaac is probably older than the connection between Abraham and Jacob. Furthermore, the narrative of Genesis 18:1–15 does not seem to know of the existence of Ishmael. Therefore, Ishmael's birth story in Genesis 16 developed either later or in a different context.

Contrary to Abraham, the narrative of the birth of Lot's sons, which explains how he came to be the patriarch of the Moabites and Ammonites, is told in a burlesque manner. After the destruction of Sodom and the transformation of his wife into a pillar of salt, his two daughters get Lot drunk⁸⁵ and have sex with him. Lot's offspring is therefore the result of incestuous relations with his daughters. Precisely those daughters, whom Lot had wanted to hand over to the inhabitants of Sodom as sexual objects to protect his guests, take in 19:30–38 the initiative over their father in

⁸³ Horst Seebass, *Genesis II. Vätergeschichte I (11,27–22,24)* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997), 108, like others, supposes a Hurrian influence.

⁸⁴ Köckert, *art. cit.* (2006), 121.

⁸⁵ This is maybe an ironical adaption of Lot's "drinking banquet," which he offers to his guests.

order to provide him and themselves an offspring.⁸⁶ For the modern reader, the behavior of Lot and his daughters seems scandalous. It is often claimed that the author of Genesis 19:30–38 presents the origin of the Ammonites and the Moabites in a negative light. It should be kept in mind, however, that for an Iron Age audience the situation was much more complex. Genesis 19 deals with the preservation of two essential societal pillars: the practice of hospitality and the absolute necessity to bring offspring into the world. For Lot, his obligation of hospitality is more important than protecting the virginity of his daughters,⁸⁷ and his daughters value the necessity of descendants more than the incest taboo. Another possibility for the origin of the story in Genesis 19:30–38 may have been an interest for an etymological explanation for Moab and Ammon, names that can be explained in wordplays like “of the father” (Moab) and “son of my relative” (Ammon). Though Genesis 19 deals with a balance of taboo and transgression, it cannot be ruled out that the story about the behavior of Lot and his daughters also contains elements of irony and even mockery about the origins of the neighbors to the east.

2. Historical conclusions

Summing up, the oldest version of the Abraham-Lot narrative in Genesis 13* and 18–19*, which can be reconstructed on a literary level, reflects the late monarchic period. Abraham does not appear here as the patriarch of the Kingdom of Judah, but as an autochthon reference figure of several tribes and groups that settle in the area of Hebron. There is a peaceful attitude towards the neighbors to the east, since Abraham acts benevolently towards Lot, accepting his territorial choices. Abraham was already connected to Isaac at that stage. The story about the visit of the three mysterious men, who are identified with Yhwh, may be under-

⁸⁶ See e.g. Thomas M. Bolin, “The Role of Exchange in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and Its Implication for Reading Genesis 18–19,” *JSOT* 29 (2004): 37–56, 49.

⁸⁷ See also Thomas Desmond Alexander, “Lot’s Hospitality: A Clue to His Righteousness,” *JBL* 104 (1985): 289–291.

stood as an integration of non-Yahwistic traditions that were transmitted in Hebron. The narrative about the destruction of Sodom and the birth of Moab and Ammon shows the importance of hospitality and offspring. Furthermore, the dangers of urban life are pointed out, which shows the rural origins of the Abraham traditions.

We agree with Konrad Schmid's conclusion, which posits that the story in Genesis 18 was derived from the *hieros logos* of the holy oak in Mamre, and that this cult place was the *Haftpunkt* of the pre-exilic original traditions regarding Abraham.⁸⁸ There was probably a burial tradition of Abraham in the Hebron area, perhaps near the cult place of Mamre,⁸⁹ especially if one considers that an ancestor is in many cases remembered by a shrine connected to his grave.⁹⁰ The shrine was also related to fertility (see similarly Shiloh in 1 Sam 1–2) as the place where divine promises and the gift of a son to the ancestor were remembered.⁹¹ Such stories about the founder of the place could serve as a proof for the actual presence of the deity in this place. They may well have been preserved and transmitted at the shrine of Mamre during the monarchic period. Far from the eyes and the heart of the Jerusalem elite, this location also helps us understand why Abraham is never mentioned in the early Deuteronomistic (Jerusalemite) texts.

⁸⁸ Konrad Schmid, "Genesis and Exodus as Two Formerly Independent Traditions of Origins of Ancient Israel," *Bib.* 93 (2012): 187–208.

⁸⁹ Finkelstein and Römer, *art. cit.*, 9.

⁹⁰ The identification of the cult and the burial place in Genesis 23:17, 19; 25:9, 49:30; 50:13 is a late priestly invention and occurs only in priestly or even post-priestly texts, probably as part of the debate on the ownership over the land. See Van Seters, *op. cit.*, 293–295; Finkelstein and Römer, *art. cit.*, 9–10.

⁹¹ Na'aman, *art. cit.* (2015), objected to this interpretation: according to the biblical tradition (Josh 14:6–14; 15:13–14; Judg 1:20), Caleb and not Abraham was the eponymous ancestor of Hebron. There are indeed two competing traditions about Hebron: Abraham is totally ignored in the Deuteronomistic literature and Caleb is not mentioned in the patriarchal cycle.

IV. Pre-priestly additions in the neo-babylonian period: Abraham's move to Egypt and the birth of Ishmael

As indicated previously, Genesis 12:10–20 and 16* belong together, and probably have a pre-priestly origin. Indeed, Genesis 17* (P) presupposes the knowledge of Genesis 16 and 18:1–15, and purports to answer the question of how to distinguish between the two sons of Abraham.

Van Seters⁹² pointed in particular to the close stylistic and literary connection between Genesis 12:10–20 and 16:1–2, 4–8, 10–13.⁹³ Both narratives are constructed in two scenes that are distinguished from each other through a change in location (Gen 12:10–13: moving to Egypt; 12:14–20: in Egypt; 16:1–6: in the house of Abraham; 16:7–13: in the desert). In the beginning, both narratives have a slightly unorthodox suggestion which is introduced each time (12:11; 16:2) by הִנֵּה-נִא (‘‘Behold now’’). In Genesis 12 Abraham talks, Sarah remains silent and obeys. In Genesis 16, Sarah talks and Abraham follows his wife’s proposal. In both narratives, the original proposal provokes complications, which in both cases are defused by an unexpected action of Yhwh or his messenger. Genesis 12:10–20 and 16* are further connected because Hagar is designated as an Egyptian servant in Genesis 16. This suggests that she belongs to the slaves that were given as a bride price to Abraham by the Pharaoh.

Furthermore, both narratives adapt the Exodus tradition in a ‘‘counter history.’’ In Genesis 12:17 Yhwh strikes (וַיַּכֶּה, cf. Exod 11:1) the Egyptian king as in the plague narrative in the Book of Exodus. But, in Genesis 12, the Pharaoh understands Yhwh’s intervention and sends Abraham (וַיִּשְׁלַח אֹתוֹ, cf. Exod 5:1f; 7:2, 14–16, 26f, etc.) back to Canaan. This story polemicalizes discreetly but understandably against the official ‘‘Deuteronomistic’’ Exodus theology. There is a similar theme in the story of Ishmael’s birth

⁹² Van Seters, *op. cit.*, 168–170; 192–194.

⁹³ For this reconstruction of the original story see Knauf, *op. cit.*, 25–35; Thomas Römer, ‘‘Isaac et Ismaël, concurrents ou cohéritiers de la promesse ? Une lecture de Genèse 16,’’ *ETR* 74 (1999): 161–172.

in Genesis 16^{*94}: Hagar, the Egyptian, is here oppressed by her Hebrew mistress (וַתַּעֲבֹדָהּ, cf. Exod 1:11–12; Deut 26:6 and Gen 15:13). And, in the same way as the children of Israel escape (בָּרַח, Exod 14:5) from Egypt, Hagar flees (וַתִּבְרַח) from her oppressor (Gen 16:6).

These similarities between Genesis 12:10–20 and 16 suggest that both texts were written by the same author, who perhaps wrote them as an addition to the Lot-Abraham tradition. Both stories have a rather “liberal spirit” and seem to criticize the Jerusalemite Exodus theology.

Dating the two texts is difficult. Regarding the ancestress narrative in 12:10–20, Levin recently qualified this text as very late, arguing that Genesis 26:1–11^{*} contains the oldest version of the “endangered ancestress” narrative.⁹⁵ However, Levin does not discuss the relationship between 12:10–20 and 16^{*}, and does not provide a clear socio-historical context for the narrative.⁹⁶

The fact that Genesis 12:10–20 was put before Genesis 13 may be understood as a message that Abraham should not live in Egypt but in the land that Yhwh did promise to him.⁹⁷ The narrative may then be understood as a polemic against the Egyptian diaspora which, according to Jeremiah 41–42, was founded by self-initiative (see also Abraham’s self-initiative in Gen 12:10). Consequently, Genesis 12:10–20 should be dated to the Babylonian period at the earliest.

This earliest dating might fit Genesis 16^{*}. The best explanation for the name “Ishmael” is still, despite some objections,⁹⁸ the

⁹⁴ Thomas B. Dozeman, “The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story,” *JBL* 117 (1998): 23–43.

⁹⁵ Christoph Levin, “Abraham in Ägypten (Gen 12,10–20),” in „Vom Leben umfassen“. Ägypten, das Alte Testament und das Gespräch der Religionen. Gedenkschrift Manfred Görg (ed. Stefan Wimmer and Georg Gafus; ÄAT 80; Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2014), 109–121. For the relation between Genesis 12:1–10, Gen 20 and 26:1–11 see our discussion above.

⁹⁶ See p. 119, where Levin speaks of an “Abraham-Midrash.”

⁹⁷ Blum, *op. cit.* (1984), 311; Jakob Wöhrle, “Abraham und das Leben im Ausland. Zur Intention der Ahnfrau-Erzählung in Genesis 12,10–20 und ihrer frühen inner- und außerbiblischen Rezeption,” *BN* 151 (2011): 23–46.

⁹⁸ Like Na’aman, *art. cit.* (2015), 162–163, who refers to Ran Zadok, “On Early Arabians in the Fertile Crescent,” *Tel Aviv* 17 (1990): 223–231, 223–224. His argu-

term Shumu'il, which designates a group of Arab tribes and appears in Neo-Assyrian texts.⁹⁹ This would provide a *terminus a quo* in the Neo-Assyrian period. But if Genesis 12:10–20 and 16* come from the same hand, then both texts should be dated to the Babylonian period. Genesis 16 seems to connect Arab tribes (“Ishmaelites”) with the Judean groups of Hebron by transforming their patriarch into a son of Abraham as well. Abraham was perhaps reclaimed by Arab (and Edomite) groups in Hebron, in which case the author of Genesis 16 wanted to take account of this fact. In any case, he promotes an inclusive theology, as can be seen in the explanation of the name “Ishmael”: “You will name his name Ishmael (יִשְׁמָעֵאל), because Yhwh has listened (שָׁמַע) to your misery” (16:11). The equation יִשְׁמָעֵאל = יְהוָה שָׁמַע יְהוָה shows that the narrator wanted to identify El with Yhwh: Yhwh is not only the god of Abraham and Isaac but also the god of Hagar and Ishmael, even though Arab tribes call their gods differently. The author wanted to legitimize the coexistence of Judean groups and nomadic groups in Hebron, and perhaps even the mutual use of the sanctuary at Mamre.

As such, it appears that the Abraham traditions from the monarchic period were used by the people who remained in the land in their claim for ownership over the land and property, as against the Jerusalem elite who were deported to Babylon (cf. Ezek 33:23–24). The destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Davidic house and of the Jerusalem elite broke Jerusalem’s monopoly over the cult and the national historiography, and opened the way for the renaissance and development of local cult places (Mizpah, Bethel, Gibeon and Hebron), local traditions and local heroes. During this period, the Abraham traditions were also told and transmitted outside of Hebron and became known in

ments were refuted by Ernst Axel Knauf, “Ishmael (Son of Abraham and Hagar). I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament,” *EBR* 13 (2016): cols 352–355.

⁹⁹ Knauf, *op. cit.*, 1–10. Today he would not call these tribes a confederation (see *art. cit.* [2016], cols 354–355). The picture of a large-scale Arabian confederacy, as drawn by Knauf in his book on Ishmael, might be expanded by the biblical writer in order to describe all the West-Semitic tribal groups who wandered all over the North Arabian desert regions, as Na’aman, *art. cit.* (2015), 163, claimed.

what was left of the Kingdom of Judah, among the people who remained in the land.

V. Conclusion: the pre-priestly Abraham narratives from monarchic to Persian times

In the pre-priestly Abraham tradition, two stages of formation can be distinguished: Genesis 13*; 18–19* and 12:10–20; 16*. The Abraham-Lot tradition, of which the first literary form should be dated to the 7th century BCE, deals with the relationship between Judean groups, which consider Abraham as their patriarch, and their neighbors on the other side of the Dead Sea. With regards to the land, a peaceful cohabitation is propagated, and a close relationship between the groups that are represented by Abraham and those whose ancestor is Lot is claimed. Abraham is not an official patriarch of Jerusalem or the kingdom of Judah; he is a “rural” ancestor, who resides in Mamre.

The “liberal” and anti-dtr perspective of this pre-priestly Abraham tradition matches the later texts 12:10–20 and 16, added during the exilic period. Ishmael, who represents West-Semitic tribal groups around Hebron that also wandered all over the North Arabian Desert regions,¹⁰⁰ is integrated into the family of Abraham. Abraham’s peaceful attitude and his genealogical relations to Moab, Ammon and the “Ishmaelites” give him an “ecumenical” character, which is later taken up in the priestly texts that develop this idea in their own way.

The combination of the Abraham and Jacob stories does not appear to have occurred before the early Persian period. This link was made by priestly elites at the sanctuaries of Jerusalem and Mount Garizim that collaborated in writing a narrative on the origins of a great Israel, uniting the North and South.¹⁰¹ One can only hypothesize that families from Hebron brought the Abraham

¹⁰⁰ Nadav Na’aman, “The Boundaries of the Promised Land in the Patriarchal Narratives,” *BN 170* (2016): 3–12, 6.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Römer, “Cult Centralization and the Publication of the Torah Between Jerusalem and Samaria,” *forthcoming*.

stories to Jerusalem when they left the South under the pressure of semi-nomadic tribes, with the South then becoming part of Idumea. The Abraham narratives were used as the southern answer to the Jacob-Israel cycle. At the same time, however, this new inclusive account of the origins of Israel was also a subtle means for the priestly elites in Jerusalem and Mount Garizim to control and limit the cult sites in the land. It is indeed remarkable that, although several cultic places—such as Mamre or Bethel—are referred to in the patriarchal narrative, once Yhwh has revealed his name and has freed Israel from Egypt, the cult is depicted as centralized and codified for all Israel, even if the central cult place is not identified.¹⁰² For these priestly elites, the integration of southern Abraham narratives in their history of the origins of Israel was also part of a strategy to gain religious control and eventually cultic hegemony over the Yahwistic cults in the southern region. This was important not only because of the presence of Judeans who remained in the province of Idumea, but also *vis à vis* other competing Yahwistic cults that could have gained importance in the South during the exilic period.

In the context of the Enneateuch, the priestly account of Israel's origins became an introduction to a larger national history of Israel with a clear pro-Judean orientation. As such, it could support the claim for the centrality of the Jerusalemite cult. This claim was made by the returning Jerusalemite elite and their descendants as part of the creation of the new post-Davidic history of Israel. With the establishment of the province of Idumaea, the figure of Abraham was used as “proof” of Judean ownership over the South. The Abraham narratives corresponded well to the new geopolitical situation but, at that time, Abraham's status had already turned to that of patriarch of “all Israel,” far from his original position as founder and ancestor of the cultic place of Mamre.

¹⁰² The Pentateuch never states explicitly the identity of the exclusive place where Yhwh should be worshipped, allowing different understandings of “cult centralization.” See Christophe Nihan, “The Torah between Samaria and Judah: Shechem and Gerizim in Deuteronomy and Joshua,” in *The Pentateuch as Torah. New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance* (ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 187–223.