Ancient Israel's
HISTORY

An Introduction to Issues and Sources

EDITED BY

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Preface

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The impetus for this work came through the Institute for Biblical Research (IBR). Professor Lee Martin McDonald was president of IBR at the time and suggested that volumes focusing on each Testament be produced. One of us (Richard Hess) served on the board as editor of the *BBR* and volunteered to proceed with the project. We planned the work in collaboration with Jim Kinney of Baker Academic, to whom we express our appreciation for his help on a number of issues.

Our objective in this volume is to provide a current state of research on issues relative to the history of ancient Israel. Consequently, we chose separate individuals to write the chapters, with each contributor chosen because of demonstrated expertise on the subject matter of that chapter. They represent a variety of backgrounds. The contributors would not all necessarily agree on a number of topics regarding the history of Israel, a fact that we believe strengthens the volume. We allowed our contributors to express their own points of view on controverted issues, while insisting that all points of view be represented fairly. The contributors have written chapters that we believe are within the spirit of the IBR, and each has produced an outstanding contribution.

The volume's structure reflects our methodological commitments. First, we chose to assume neither a negative stance toward the biblical literature nor a naive fideism on difficult issues. Second, we designed chapters that move chronologically through the periods of Israel's history with a focus on the primary sources and the major scholarly issues regarding the interpretation

of history in the period under consideration. While this book is intended as
an introductory volume, the research represented here also provides new in-
sights and reconstructions for further study of the subject. We hope that this
work will be of benefit to students and researchers alike, as all of us strive to
understand more about this fascinating and important subject.

Abbreviations

General

//	parallel text(s)	idem	by the same author(s)
AD	*anno Domini* (in the year of our Lord)	IA1	Iron Age I (1200–1000 BCE)
		IA2	Iron Age II (1000–586 BCE)
Akk.	Akkadian	i.e.	*id est*, that is
art.	article	LBA	Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550–1200 BCE)
BC	before Christ		
BCE	before the Common Era	lit.	literal, literally
ca.	circa	LXX	Septuagint (Greek version of the Jewish Scriptures)
CE	Common Era		
cf.	compare	masc.	masculine
chap(s).	chapter(s)	MBA	Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2100–1550 BCE)
col(s).	columns		
Dyn.	Dynasty, Dynasties	no(s).	number(s)
ed.	edition, edited by, editor	pl.	plural
e.g.	for example	repr.	reprint
esp.	especially	rev.	revised
ET	English translation	sg.	singular
et al.	and others/another	s.v.	under the word
etc.	and the rest	trans.	translated by, translation, translator
fem.	feminine		
fig(s).	figure(s)	v.l.	*varia lectio*, variant reading
Heb.	Hebrew	v(v).	verse(s)
ibid.	in the same source		

Modern Versions

ESV	English Standard Version		*according to the Traditional Hebrew Text*
NJPS	*Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation*		
		NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis	Song	Song of Songs
Exod.	Exodus	Isa.	Isaiah
Lev.	Leviticus	Jer.	Jeremiah
Num.	Numbers	Lam.	Lamentations
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Ezek.	Ezekiel
Josh.	Joshua	Dan.	Daniel
Judg.	Judges	Hosea	Hosea
Ruth	Ruth	Joel	Joel
1–2 Sam.	1–2 Samuel	Amos	Amos
1–2 Kings	1–2 Kings	Obad.	Obadiah
1–2 Chron.	1–2 Chronicles	Jon.	Jonah
Ezra	Ezra	Mic.	Micah
Neh.	Nehemiah	Nah.	Nahum
Esther	Esther	Hab.	Habakkuk
Job	Job	Zeph.	Zephaniah
Ps./Pss.	Psalm/Psalms	Hag.	Haggai
Prov.	Proverbs	Zech.	Zechariah
Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Mal.	Malachi

New Testament

Matt.	Matthew	1–2 Thess.	1–2 Thessalonians
Mark	Mark	1–2 Tim.	1–2 Timothy
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philem.	Philemon
Acts	Acts	Heb.	Hebrews
Rom.	Romans	James	James
1–2 Cor.	1–2 Corinthians	1–2 Pet.	1–2 Peter
Gal.	Galatians	1–3 John	1–3 John
Eph.	Ephesians	Jude	Jude
Phil.	Philippians	Rev.	Revelation
Col.	Colossians		

Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

1 En.	*1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)*	1–2 Macc.	1–2 Maccabees
1 Esd.	*1 Esdras*	Sir.	Sirach
Let. Arist.	*Letter of Aristeas*	*T. Iss.*	*Testament of Issachar*

Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Texts

CD-A	Damascus Document[a]
CD-B	Damascus Document[b]
1QpHab	1QPesher to Habakkuk
1QS	1QRule of the Community
4Q169 (4QpNah)	4QNahum Pesher
4Q171 (4QpPs[a])	4QPsalms Pesher[a]

4Q175 (4QTest)   4QTestimonia
4Q379 (4QapocrJoshua^b)   4QApocryphon of Joshua^b
4Q394 (4QMMT^a)   4QHalakhic Letter^a
4Q396 (4QMMT^c)   4QHalakhic Letter^c

Philo

Good Person	*That Every Good Person Is Free (Quod omnis probus liber sit)*	*Hypoth.*	*Hypothetica (Hypothetica)*

Josephus

Ag. Ap.	*Against Apion*	*J.W.*	*Jewish War*
Ant.	*Jewish Antiquities*		

Mishnah, Talmud, and Related Literature

b.	Babylonian Talmud	*Sanh.*	*Sanhedrin*
m.	Mishnah	*Ṭahŏr.*	*Ṭahorot*
y.	Jerusalem Talmud	*Yad.*	*Yadayim*
		Yebam.	*Yebamot*
Šabb.	*Šabbat*	*Yoma*	*Yoma (= Kippurim)*

Greek and Latin Works

Appian

Hist. rom.	*Historia romana (Roman History)*		

Diodorus Siculus

Bib. hist.	*Bibliotheca historica (Library of History)*

Herodotus

Hist.	*Historiae (Histories)*

Livy

Hist.	*Ab urbe condita libri (History of Rome)*

Pliny the Elder

Nat.	*Naturalis historia*

Polybius

Hist.	*Historiae (Histories)*

Tacitus

Hist.	*Historiae (Histories)*

Secondary Sources

AAA	Approaches to Anthropological Archaeology	*ABD*	*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research	*ABR*	*Australian Biblical Review*
ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament	ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AAWG	Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen	*ACF*	*Annuaire du Collège de France*
AB	Anchor Bible	*AcSum*	*Acta sumerologica*

ADAJ	*Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*		ATDan	Acta theologica danica
AfO	*Archiv für Orientforschung*		*ATJ*	*Ashland Theological Journal*
AfOB	Archiv für Orientforschung: Beiheft		*BA*	*Biblical Archaeologist*
ÄgAbh	Ägyptische Abhandlungen		BabAr	Babylonische Archive
AH	Achaemenid History		BAMA	British Academy Monographs in Archaeology
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*		*BAR*	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
AJN	*American Journal of Numismatics*		BARIS	British Archaeological Reports International Series
ÄL	*Ägypten und Levante*		*BASOR*	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
AnBib	Analecta biblica		*BBR*	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
ANESSup	Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement Series		BBRSup	Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplements
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton, 1969		BEAM	Beiträge zur Erforschung der antiken Moabitis (Ard el-Kerak)
AntOr	*Antiguo Oriente*		BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des Antiken Judentums
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament		BEHE	Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes études
AOS	American Oriental Series		BES	Brown Egyptological Studies
ARAB	*Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*. Daniel David Luckenbill. 2 vols. Chicago, 1926–1927		BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
			Bib	*Biblica*
ARCER	American Research Center in Egypt Reports		BibA	Bibliotheca aegyptiaca
ARM	Archives royales de Mari		BibJudSt	Biblical and Judaic Studies
ARMT	Archives royales de Mari: Transliterated and Translated Texts		BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
			BibSem	Biblical Seminar
ARWAW	Abhandlungen der Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften		*BIFAO*	*Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale*
			BIW	The Bible in Its World
AS	Assyriological Studies		BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
ASAE	*Annales du Service des antiquités de l'Égypte*		*BN*	*Biblische Notizen*
			BO	*Bibbia e Oriente*
ASORAR	American Schools of Oriental Research Archaeological Reports		BPC	Biblical Performance Criticism
			BRev	*Bible Review*
ASORB	American Schools of Oriental Research Books		*BSac*	*Bibliotheca sacra*
			BT	*The Bible Translator*
ASORDS	American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series		*BurH*	*Buried History*
			BW	Bible World
			BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament

BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft		*DOTHB*	*Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*. Edited by B. T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson. Downers Grove, IL, 2005
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Chicago, 1956–		*DOTP*	*Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. Edited by T. D. Alexander and D. W. Baker. Downers Grove, IL, 2003
CAJ	*Cambridge Archaeological Journal*		*EA*	*Egyptian Archaeology*
CANE	*Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. Edited by J. Sasson. 4 vols. New York, 1995		EA	El-Amarna Tablets. According to the edition of J. A. Knudtzon. *Die el-Amarna-Tafeln*. Leipzig, 1908–1915. Reprint, Aalen, 1964. Continued in A. F. Rainey, *El-Amarna Tablets, 375–379*. 2nd rev. ed. Kevelaer, 1978
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*			
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East			
ChrEg	*Chronique d'Egypte*			
CIS	Copenhagen International Series			
CMD	Classica et mediaevalia: Dissertationes			
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series		ÉABJ	Études annexes de la Bible de Jérusalem
CorBC	Cornerstone Biblical Commentary		*EAEHL*	*Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*. Edited by M. Avi-Yonah. 4 vols. Jerusalem, 1975–1978
COS	*The Context of Scripture*. Edited by W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger Jr. 3 vols. Leiden, 2003			
CRIPEL	*Cahiers de recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille*		EAH	Entretiens d'archéologie et d'histoire
			ÉAHA	Études d'archélogie et d'histoire ancienne
CRSAIBL	*Comptes rendus des séances de l'Academie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*		ÉBib	Études bibliques
			EEFM	Egypt Exploration Fund Memoir
CUSAS	Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology		EH	Essential Histories
			ÉPRO	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain
CWA	Cambridge World Archaeology			
DCH	*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Edited by D. J. A. Clines. Sheffield, 1993–		ÉRCM	Éditions Recherche sur les civilisations: Mémoire
			ErIsr	*Eretz-Israel*
DHA	*Dialogues d'histoire ancienne*		*ETL*	*Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses*
DJ	*Denver Journal*			
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert		FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
DMOA	Documenta et monumenta Orientis antiqui		FCI	Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation

FOTL	Forms of Old Testament Literature		*JAAR*	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments		*JANESCU*	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University*
FSBP	Fontes et subsidia ad Bibliam pertinentes		*JAOS*	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
GAP	Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha		*JARCE*	*Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*
GAT	Grundrisse zum Alten Testament		*JAS*	*Journal of Archaeological Science*
GM	*Göttinger Miszellen*		*JBL*	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
HACL	History, Archaeology, and Culture of the Levant		*JBQ*	*Jewish Bible Quarterly*
HALOT	L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden, 1994–2000		*JBS*	*Jerusalem Biblical Studies*
			JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
			JCSMS	*Journal of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies*
			JDS	Judean Desert Studies
			JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
			JERD	*Journal of Epigraphy and Rock Drawings*
HAR	*Hebrew Annual Review*		*JESHO*	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs			
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament		*JHS*	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
HO	Handbuch der Orientalistik		*JJS*	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
HR	*History of Religions*		JLSP	Janua Linguarum: Series Practica
HS	*Hebrew Studies*			
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs		*JMA*	*Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology*
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies			
HTIBS	Historic Texts and Interpreters in Biblical Scholarship		*JNES*	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*		*JNSL*	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*			
			JPSTC	Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary
HUCM	Monographs of the Hebrew Union College		*JSJ*	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods*
IAAR	Israel Antiquities Authority Reports			
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching		*JSOT*	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
			JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
ICC	International Critical Commentary			
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*		JSPub	Judea and Samaria Publications
Int	*Interpretation*			

JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*		NIDB	*The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by K. D. Sakenfeld. 5 vols. Nashville, 2009
JSSEA	*Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities*			
KUSATU	*Kleine Untersuchungen zur Sprache des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt*		NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Edited by W. A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, 1997
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel			
LAPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient		NSA	New Studies in Archaeology
LBI	Library of Biblical Interpretation		NSR	Numismatic Studies and Researches
LBNEA	Library of Biblical and Near Eastern Archaeology		*OA*	*Opuscula Atheniensia*
			OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
LCL	Loeb Classical Library		*OEAE*	*The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*. Edited by D. B. Redford. 3 vols. Oxford, 2001
LD	Lectio divina			
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies			
LSS	Levant Supplementary Series		*OEANE*	*The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*. Edited by E. M. Meyers. 5 vols. Oxford, 1997
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies			
MARI	*Mari: Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires*			
			OHAE	*The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*. Edited by I. Shaw. Oxford, 2000
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations			
MDAIK	*Mitteilingen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo*		*OHBW*	*The Oxford History of the Biblical World*. Edited by M. Coogan. Oxford, 2001
MPAIBL	Mémoires présentés à l'Academie des inscriptions et belles-lettres		OIC	Oriental Institute Communications
			OIE	Oriental Institute Essays
NABU	Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires		OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
NAC	New American Commentary		OIS	Oriental Institute Seminars
NCamBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary		OLA	Orientalia lovaniensia analecta
NCB	New Century Bible		*OMROL*	*Oudheidkundige mededelingen uit het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden*
NDA	New Directions in Archaeology			
NEA	*Near Eastern Archaeology*			
NEAEHL	*The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*. Edited by E. Stern. 5 vols. Jerusalem, 1993		OPBF	Occasional Publications of the Babylonian Fund
			OPBIAA	Occasional Publications of the British Institute of Archaeology in Ankara
NEASB	*Near East Archaeology Society Bulletin*		OPSNKF	Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament			

Or	*Orientalia*
OTL	Old Testament Library
OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studiën
PÄ	Probleme der Ägyptologie
PBA	Proceedings of the British Academy
PDRI	Publications of the Diaspora Research Institute
PEFM	Palestinian Exploration Fund Monographs
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PSBA	*Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*
QM	Qumranica Mogilanensia
RA	*Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*
RB	*Revue biblique*
REg	*Revue d'égyptologie*
RH	*Revue historique*
RHDFE	*Revue historique de droit français et étranger*
RIMA	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods
RINP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
RlA	*Reallexicon der Assyrologie*. Edited by E. Ebeling et al. Berlin, 1928–
RSO	Ras Shamra-Ougarit
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SAHL	Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
SAr	Serie archeologica
SARI	Sumerian and Akkadian Royal Inscriptions
SBLAB	Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
SBLABS	Society of Biblical Literature Archaeology and Biblical Studies
SBLAIL	Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Israel and Its Literature
SBLBES	Society of Biblical Literature Biblical Encyclopedia Series
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLRBS	Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
SBLSBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
SBLSCSS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SBLWAWSup	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World: Supplement
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SBTS	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
SCCNH	Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians
ScrHier	Scripta hierosolymitana
ScrM	*Scripta Mediterranea*
Sem	*Semitica*
SFSMD	Studia Francisci Scholten memoriae dicata
SHANE	Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SHJPLIMS	Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel Monograph Series

SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SO	Symbolae Osloenses
STO	Studi e testi orientali
SWBA	Social World of Biblical Antiquity
TA	*Tel Aviv*
TANE	Themes from the Ancient Near East, BANEA Publication Series
TAUIAM	Tel Aviv University Institute of Archaeology Monographs
TAUIAP	Tel Aviv University Institute of Archaeology Publications
TCRPOGA	Travaux du Centre de recherche sur le Proche-Orient et la Grèce antiques
TCS	Texts from Cuneiform Sources
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry. Translated by J. T. Willis, D. E. Green, and D. W. Stott. 15 vols. Grand Rapids, 2006
Them	*Themelios*
THOTC	Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary
ThSt	Theologische Studien
TLZ	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
Transeu	*Transeuphratène*
TranseuSup	Supplements to Transeuphratène
TSS	Texts and Studies for Students
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
TZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
UÄA	Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
UISK	Untersuchungen zur indogermanischen Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaft
ULIAOP	University of London Institute of Archaeology Occasional Publications
UNHAII	Uitgaven van het Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul
UNINOL	Uitgaven van het Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten te Leiden
UZKÖAI	Untersuchungen der Zweigstelle Kairo des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes
VAB	Vorderasiastische Bibliothek
VOK	Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
VWGT	Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUB	*Welt und Umwelt der Bibel*
WZKM	*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*
YNER	Yale Near Eastern Researches
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDMGSup	Zeitschrift des deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft: Supplementbände
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*

Introduction

Foundations for a History of Israel

Richard S. Hess

Why is history important? The well-known words of George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," are more than a century old and yet continue to provide a pragmatic rationale for the study of the past.[1] It is a sufficient argument in itself for study of the human past. Perhaps never in the history of the world has there been a generation of so many people who have been devoted to severing their ties with the past and embracing a present and future without an identity or self-reflection on who they are. In part, this is a factor created by the explosion of a generation of youth who outnumber those who are older. The United States Census Bureau estimates that about 44 percent of the world's population is under the age of twenty-five. The speed of electronic media and the interest placed on what is new mitigate value and concern for the past and the study of history.

This was not the case in the ancient world in which the Hebrew Bible[2] first appeared. Indeed, the sense of the past provided identity for people and

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1. George Santayana, *Introduction and Reason in Common Sense* (vol. 1 of *The Life of Reason; or, The Phases of Human Progress*; London: Archibald Constable, 1906), 284. The quotation is considered a paraphrase of a similar statement made earlier by Edmund Burke.

2. The terms "Hebrew Bible" and "Old Testament" may be used interchangeably in this book. Both refer to those thirty-nine books comprising the Protestant canon of the Old Testament and the Jewish canon of the Hebrew Bible.

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oriented them to a narrative yielding aspects that endured far beyond their own time and place. Thus the prophet Jeremiah could charge his listeners, "This is what Yahweh says, 'Stand at the roads! Look and ask for the ancient paths where the good road is. Walk in it and you will find a place of rest for your souls'" (Jer. 6:16).[3]

The prophet promised guidance and rest in the good way of history, of the past. That the people rejected this was attributed not to a new level of enlightenment but to a failure to connect with the heritage that gave them all the good things that they possessed. The past was a source of hope, strength, and encouragement. To reject it was to reject one's relationship with God, one's community, and one's family.

The study of history was in no way disconnected from the practices of faith and worship or from the daily activities of life. The former was true because God's presence and identity were recognized in the nation's past and in its hope for the future. Thus the Decalogue—the first series of statutes given in the Torah—began with a statement of self-identification that connected Yahweh, the lawgiver, with claims to the formation of the nation: "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves" (Exod. 20:2). How was God known? Yahweh was recognized by his historic acts of goodness in the context of Israel's history.

In the daily activities of life, there was also a connection with history. The people of Israel were just that: a people who recognized their origin from a common ancestor and were joined in kinship with one another through families and tribes whose lines traced back to a common origin. The land that produced the wealth for Israel to live as it did was recognized as a gift from God. God gave this land at a historical point in time through the disenfranchisement of the Canaanite peoples. The land was then allotted to families, and these inherited estates were passed down through history.

If perceptions of history in the twenty-first century differ significantly from those of biblical times, the role of history nevertheless is an important discipline. Whether in Israel or elsewhere, the ancients saw history in the context of the will of the divine. Modern study of history has shifted its overarching presuppositions away from the religious and into the realm of the ideological. Informed by the philosophies of this present age, history becomes an important means of identifying where we have been and thereby of understanding where we are going. That much of the Western world has lost that sense does not make the study of such history any less urgent.

One may ask, why study the history of ancient Israel? After all, if we have

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3. Scripture translations in this introduction are by the author.

limited time in our fast-paced society, and if there is so much to learn of tech-nology and related areas merely to survive, would it not be better to limit our study of history to that of our own country and perhaps of those other na-tions that are so powerful and exercise an influence on who we are to become in the future?

There are two fundamental fallacies to this. The first lies in the nature of humanity and its relationship to the purpose of the study of history. Contrary to the views of some social engineers, humanity has not fundamentally changed throughout the past centuries of recorded history. It may have refined its un-derstanding of aspects of science and the manipulation of the world in which we live; however, the fundamental nature of the human condition, in terms of the basic virtues and vices of individuals, families, and cities and nations, has not changed. One need only read the personal correspondence between kings, queens, and officials at and near Mari, a city in Syria from nearly four thousand years ago. The texts there reveal all the same emotions and personal concerns at root that modern exchanges on email, Facebook, Twitter, or the variety of other communication sources may contain.[4] People have not changed fundamentally, and so the study of the ancients is just as important as that of moderns.

It is even more important because, as the study of classics did for many centuries in the West, the study of ancient Israel provides an examination of a society different from the present, so much so that it becomes possible to stand outside of our own world and look at ourselves more critically and objectively than the perspective available to any philosopher of politics and sociology of the present age who ignores the past. Thus the ancient world is at once similar and different. Its history enables us to identify the enduring values, both virtues and vices, that remain common to all humanity. It also gives us a place to stand that is truly outside our own present age and the means to view this age from a profoundly different perspective.

Second, the study of ancient Israel's history is not merely the examination of a random and otherwise unrelated ancient civilization. Instead, it forms a foundation to the development of Western history and thought. On the level of arts and letters, no book has provided more of a model in terms of literary forms and expressions than the Hebrew Bible. In terms of law and society, no set of texts has more frequently provided the basis for legal bodies and jurisprudence in the history of Western civilization than the laws of the Old Testament. And, of course, the entire direction of Western civilization and of world history cannot be understood without the faiths most closely attached

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4. See Wolfgang Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari: A New Translation, with Historical Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (MC 12; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003).

to and evolved from ancient Israel: Judaism and Christianity. While the West no doubt built upon the ancient Greco-Roman culture for its understanding of philosophical categories and in those terms taught people for centuries how to think, it derived almost exclusively from ancient Israel and its heirs the morality and ethics that informed countless generations concerning the principles of how to live.[5]

Thus the study of the history of ancient Israel is not merely a footnote in the great collection of all human knowledge. Rather, it is the essential starting point for discerning more than two thousand years of human culture and history, for perceiving what remains today that is most important, and for preserving what we dare not forget as we prepare ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren for the future.

Purpose

In light of the importance of the topic, the purpose of this volume is to inquire into and to synthesize the major sources relevant to ancient Israel's history and to evaluate key issues of interpretation required of a critical study of that history. This work is designed to serve as an introductory text in the subject. It does not presuppose any knowledge of the region. However, it assumes that the interest for this particular subject lies especially with those who have a familiarity with the basic concepts and terms of the world of the Hebrew Bible or at least a willingness to become acquainted with them.

The book is designed to serve as a portal into the study of ancient Israel's history. The authors envision a text that brings the reader familiarity with major critical issues of interpretation. Because this history represents a wide variety of contributors, our concern is not to espouse any one confessional or ideological position. The authors of this volume hold in common a respect for the biblical text as a legitimate source in the study of Israel's history, but they also represent a variety of views within that general perspective. As such, this volume seeks to appreciate the value of various critical positions, even where authors may disagree with them. At the same time, we also wish to provide readers with an understanding of the major issues, an awareness of the sources, and a means to judge for themselves in reconstructing the history of Israel.

This introductory section briefly considers the major approaches to understanding what biblical history and Israelite history are and the methods used to

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5. For recent treatment of the influence of the Old Testament on the foundations of modern democracies, see Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

interpret the sources in order to arrive at their historical understanding. It also considers a major element of any study of history: chronology. By describing the means by which historians have attempted to set events onto a time line in the context of known events contemporary with Israel in the ancient Near East, it becomes possible both to identify the sequence of those events and to place the biblical narrative within the larger flow of history. This introduction concludes with an outline of the book and its organization.

Definition and Methods

Early Study (ca. 1850 to 1970)

The modern study of history begins with the German historian Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886). In his research and writing, he rejected views of evolution and the development of humanity. In place of generalizations, he examined particulars and especially based his research and writing on the sources to which he would refer. In this he rejected the universal history approach of Hegel that sought similarities and themes across civilizations. Although not interested in broad evaluations of historical directions, von Ranke did emphasize the role of God in understanding how history worked. Von Ranke is best remembered for defining his approach to history as "wie es eigentlich gewesen"—that is, "as it really happened." This interpretation of the phrase has led to a general rejection of von Ranke as overly simplistic and hopelessly idealistic, given the selectivity and bias inherent in all history writing. Yet in the view of many, the sense of the German "eigentlich" is misunderstood when translated as "really." Instead, in this context it is better translated as "essentially." This understanding comports well with von Ranke's emphasis on examining and remaining close to the sources in his approach to history.

When one turns to consider the role of the history of Israel, this complex subject has been and remains closely tied to the study of the biblical text. Most famous in this study from the late nineteenth century is the work of Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), whose *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* identified the development of the Pentateuch by describing four discrete literary sources. He consummated generations of research by placing them in a generally accepted historical sequence. While contributing to the history of Israel, this work proved far more influential as a study of the history of the literature of the Pentateuch.[6]

6. It also represents the most influential of many important works in the study of ancient Israelite religion and the history of Israelite religion. Although that is important as a field of research in itself, our focus in this volume is on history rather than on the history of religion(s).

Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932) served more directly to address the question of Israel's history through the study of traditions. He identified those materials that lay behind the written texts of the Bible. Although they had passed through generations of oral and perhaps written forms that may have molded and shaped them before being written in the form found in our present Bible, the original core of the history and its themes could be identified. In this latter process of identification of history, Gunkel was aided by the discovery of common literary forms and themes occurring in (what was then) the newly discovered and translated texts of Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt, along with the myths and other narratives found in them.

No historian of the twentieth century has had as much of an enduring impact on the study of ancient Israel as has Albrecht Alt (1883–1956). His theories on Israelite law, the ancestral "gods of the fathers," the formation of the state of Israel, tribal backgrounds, and a host of other matters either remain the starting point for discussion today or provide a major model that continues to be accepted. Alt used the understanding of societies and the social sciences contemporary to his time. This became influential in his models that synthesized the ancient Near Eastern, classical, and biblical evidence.

A final figure in the chain of early influential German scholars is Martin Noth (1902–1968). Along with Gunkel and Alt, Noth developed his theories of the historical growth of traditions now preserved in the Bible and of the use of the ancient Near Eastern and classical worlds as key sources for interpreting the biblical text. Noth's emphasis on the covenant "league" of twelve tribes as the key to early Israel's formation made a lasting contribution to the field even though some aspects of the hypothesis were rejected. To this should be added his contribution of the Deuteronomistic History—the theory that a single editor prepared and completed the history of Israel that we now have in the books of Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings. As is the case with Alt's work, Noth's analysis of the Deuteronomistic History remains an anchor in the discussion of Israel's history.

William F. Albright (1891–1971) was the dominant American scholar in biblical studies and related archaeological fields for some fifty years of the twentieth century. He pioneered biblical archaeology as it came to be understood methodologically, and he remains the chief American proponent of this area, which has brought untold numbers of students, volunteers, and readers into the study of the subject.

For a survey of studies and approaches to the latter, see Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007). For more on Wellhausen and other scholars discussed here, see Bill T. Arnold, "Pentateuchal Criticism, History of," *DOTP* 622–31.

Albright's primary interest was to provide an understanding of the historical claims of the Hebrew Bible and to use his mastery of the material culture of the ancient Near East and of the written texts from all relevant languages to assist in that effort. He contributed to the study of ancient Israelite history in too many areas to mention, but it should be noted that his major analysis of pottery stratigraphy from excavations at Tell Beit Mirsim provided the foundation for the correlation of all strata at all archaeological sites in the ancient Near East to absolute chronology. In this way it is possible to determine, for example, which level of ancient Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir) was attacked and destroyed by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 BCE. As a means for understanding the customs and culture of the Bible, Albright promoted the use of the texts from Ugarit, those from Nuzi, and others from Mari, all of which were discovered and many published during his career.

Albright was the first to announce the dating of the Dead Sea Scrolls to their now-accepted production between the second century BCE and the first century CE and thereby (along with his earlier dating of the Nash papyrus) to recognize the earliest Hebrew Bible manuscripts in existence. His rigorous typological methodology in pottery analysis and stratigraphy, historical geography, comparative Semitics, and cross-cultural customs contributed to a profound synthesis of biblical history that remains significant to the present. With the passing of many of his students, who themselves influenced so much of the field in the latter twentieth century, there emerged a variety of criticisms of his legacy. However, the very existence of these disagreements forty years after his death attests to the profound influence that he continues to exercise.

Of course, this is all too limited a list of influential scholars of the history of Israel who flourished between 1850 and 1970. One might also include the British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon, whose excavations in Jerusalem and Jericho, along with her publications, overturned assumptions and paved the way for the present study of the history of this region. There is also the French scholar Roland de Vaux, whose work in so many areas provided the magnificent synthesis of his own history of Israel—one that has stood the test of time. One might also mention the Ukrainian-born Israeli philosopher and scholar Yehezkel Kaufmann, whose writing on the history of Israel provided one of the first major studies from that land. His multivolume work remains perhaps the best example of the analysis of ancient Israelite history in opposition to the cultures and peoples contemporary with it.

Another important figure was Benjamin Mazar, president and chancellor of Hebrew University, whose essays pioneered many aspects of historical geography and can still be read with profit. He taught many of the major biblical historians and historical geographers who have profoundly influenced

these fields of Israeli scholarship, and his legacy includes a veritable family of archaeologists who have made an equally significant contribution to archaeology and its impact on biblical studies. Finally, Cyrus Gordon might be added because of his independent thinking that attempted to make connections across the Mediterranean and beyond, his influence on a generation of students, his mastery of the ancient Near Eastern languages and texts that few scholars could match when working with biblical Hebrew, and his advocacy of a method that held the Masoretic Hebrew text as being virtually without need of text-critical emendation.

1970s and 1980s

All these people and influences, as well as many others, have left an imprint on the field of ancient Israelite history that remains to this day. Where does one proceed from here? The past forty years of the discipline have seen an explosion both of knowledge and of competing methods not unlike that found in many other disciplines. The field remains extremely active, if less coherent.

In the 1970s and the 1980s one could identify important (English language) historical studies in the works of J. Maxwell Miller and John Hayes, John Bright, John Van Seters, J. Alberto Soggin, and Yohanan Aharoni. The work of Miller and Hayes represented an approach that accepted higher critical assumptions about the biblical text and made use of connections with the extrabiblical evidence.[7] Their volume presented the most detailed discussion of the sources and a careful recounting of the narrative. This work enjoyed sufficient popularity that a second edition was published in 2006.

John Bright's work had already appeared in 1959.[8] The second edition (1972) and then the third (1981) would come out in the period under consideration. His work represents the closest example of the ongoing influence of Albright, who was Bright's teacher. Many of the traditional arguments for Albright's particular interpretation of the Bible are retained. The study contains a great deal of information, but little in the way of new syntheses was added in the later editions.

Close to the Albright school, but cutting a path of his own, is Eugene Merrill and his *Kingdom of Priests*.[9] This work carefully follows the biblical texts and integrates archaeology and other extrabiblical sources as appropriate.

7. J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (2nd ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1986).

8. John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959).

9. Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987; 2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

Although John Van Seters had published an earlier critical analysis of the Abraham narratives of Genesis, his historical method as applied to the whole of the Hebrew Bible relied heavily upon genre analysis and the nature of the historical material that one might expect in a particular genre.[10] A heavy emphasis was placed upon the classical Greek sources as legitimate forms that most closely resembled anything like history writing in the Hebrew Bible. Thus Van Seters understood that the Israelites borrowed from the Greeks and therefore wrote in a time subsequent to them. Operating on these assumptions, he dated the production of historical literature in Israel into the Persian period and later.

The Italian scholar J. Alberto Soggin continued the traditional view that stressed the importance of sources.[11] The sources most useful in the reconstruction of history were those that used administrative and other documents that might be considered neutral in terms of bias. Therefore the earliest evidence for legitimate historical inquiry lay in the period of the monarchy and the preservation of records, lists, and other documents in the Bible. These should be essential elements in the reconstruction of any history.

The Israeli archaeologist Yohanan Aharoni produced a historical geography of the Hebrew Bible that resulted in two English editions, in 1967 and 1979.[12] As with Bright's work, the first edition appeared before 1970, but it gained influence during the 1970s and 1980s. This relied on the combined disciplines of the study of the geography and toponymy of the land of Israel as well as the analysis of all available historical sources. The effect of this study was to provide a summary of the available sources for the history of Israel and a close connection between these sources and the places where the events occurred.

1990 to the Present

The 1990s ushered in a new era of historiography of ancient Israel. It drew on the roots of the previous period but divided into three separate methodological approaches to how a history should be written. *The first approach* has been to read the biblical sources suspiciously and to build a history derived from social science models and reconstructions that either ignore the Bible or treat it as fundamentally flawed in comparison to other ancient Near Eastern sources. Although many using this perspective disagree with aspects of his

10. John Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).
11. J. Alberto Soggin, *A History of Israel: From the Beginnings to the Bar Kochba Revolt, AD 135* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM, 1984).
12. Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (trans. Anson F. Rainey; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967; 2nd ed., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979).

methodology, Van Seters remains the figure most representative of this view from the previous period who continues to be productive up to the present. *The second approach* has been to draw on the "critical orthodoxy" of the interpretation of biblical sources and use their testimony primarily within that context. This continues the basic approach of Miller and Hayes and that of Soggin. Behind them lay the work of Alt and Noth. *The third general avenue of approaches* has tended to treat the biblical text as a source similar to that of other sources. This category includes those who share the traditional critical approach with the second group, as well as those who do not rely heavily on this method. Rather, they see in the Hebrew Bible an ancient source that should be weighed and critically evaluated along with other ancient sources. This approach inherits the assumptions of Albright and Bright, who used the text as a foundation for comparisons with other sources. It also includes that of Aharoni, who saw how repeatedly the text provided a reliable source for the study of geography in the various periods in which it appeared.

Key to the development of these decades is the recognition that the literary nature of a text and the degree of its historical value have no relationship necessarily. There are several aspects to this point. V. Philips Long exemplified this concern with his appreciation of genres in terms of larger literary units that may be studied for their intent and purpose, and yet at the same time they should not be used to predetermine what a biblical text may and may not contain regarding history.[13] It is preferable not to classify biblical literature as fictional, ahistorical, or antihistorical only on the basis of its literary form or artistry. The nature of the literature as referential to historical and other truth claims should not be understood as compromised by the form or literary quality in which the text is presented. Long understood the biblical literature in terms of theological, literary, and historical dimensions. Indeed, most (perhaps all) of the ancient Near Eastern historical sources may be examined with these perspectives. Each one complements, rather than negates, the other. As Long noted, the historical dimension requires careful attention to what the text communicates and an evaluation of both internal consistency within the biblical literature and external consistency with other historically relevant sources.

Of similar importance is K. Lawson Younger Jr., whose 1990 study examines historical questions of the Bible within the context of ancient Near Eastern literature, specifically considering problems of genre identifications

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13. V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (FCI 5; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994). For important reading in the broad field, see idem, ed., *Israel's Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography* (SBTS 7; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999).

in previous scholarship.[14] On the one hand, history writing (or historiography) is not the opposite of fiction. That is to say, bad historiography does not necessarily make good fiction. On the other hand, history writing does not produce a record of fact. Instead, it provides a discourse that claims to provide a record of fact. Rather than fiction, Younger found figurative language in the historiography. Like Long, Younger identified internal elements and external elements. The latter comprised themes, motifs, and rhetorical devices that could be identified across the biblical and the ancient Near Eastern literary horizon. The former, the internal elements, comprised what Younger referred to as transmission codes. These comprised specific ideological components unique to the biblical historiography, as would be true of other ancient Near Eastern historiography with reference to its own particular culture and time. For Younger, ideology is not propaganda. Instead, he follows Clifford Geertz, the late and influential sociologist of religion, in arguing that it should be understood less prejudicially as a schematic image of social order. In this sense, ideology is a means of imposing order on the past that incorporates both literal and figurative language. The desire here is to avoid oversimplified conclusions of bias without appreciating the full impact of the cultural background that leads the author to communicate history in the manner that he or she chooses.

Having examined significant advances in literary and comparative/ideological studies with reference to historical investigations, we must consider the archaeological dimension. Two archaeological "discoveries" would have lasting impact on all future studies of ancient Israel's history. The first summarized some of the regional surveys that had been done by archaeologists in the previous two decades. In 1988 Israel Finkelstein published *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement*. Although more survey results would be published in the following decades (and although Finkelstein would reconsider his own conclusions), this work firmly established the fact that a previously unattested sedentary population appeared in the central hill country of the land of Israel around 1200 BCE,[15] as attested by almost three hundred new villages. This was stunning, as the previous period of time attested to hardly two dozen population centers in the same region. Since this coincided with the understanding of most biblical historians as to exactly when and where Israel first appeared in the southern Levant, it created a unique and key element for further study in this earliest period of Israel's history as a people.

14. K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (JSOTSup 98; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990).

15. Scholars work with both BC ("before Christ") and BCE ("before the Common Era") as designations for the same time period. We have tended to use BCE without any disrespect for the alternative but have also allowed the use of BC where authors have preferred it.

A second archaeological element was more in line with what could be called a discovery. This was the result of the work of archaeologist Avraham Biran, who had excavated for nearly three decades at the north Israelite site of Tel Dan.[16] On July 21, 1993, expedition surveyor Gila Cook was cleaning around the large gate area after a day of digging. As the evening light bathed the stones, she noticed that an inscribed fragment had been reused in an ancient wall. This discovery and that of an additional fragment a year later from the same Aramean monumental stela constituted the remains of a victory inscription set up by an Aramean king from Damascus in the late ninth century BCE.[17] In it the Aramean king mentions the Judean "house of David," a reference that has parallels only in the Hebrew Bible and only with reference to King David's family and dynasty. This attestation of the biblical David and his dynasty within about a century and a half of the monarch's life (by traditional dating) has, in the minds of most historians, established the reality of a David from this early period.

"Suspicious" Histories

These methodological evaluations became significant because the decade of the 1990s was also the period that witnessed the rise of what some have referred to as the minimalists. They have been called this on the basis of their general skepticism toward any historical value to the contents of the Hebrew Bible. Centered at the University of Copenhagen (Niels Peter Lemche and Thomas Thompson) and at Sheffield University (Philip Davies), this group has exercised significant impact upon the study of biblical history, even though their method cannot be described as the dominant one.

Thompson's 1992 *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* provides the most important illustration of this approach and will be reviewed here more completely.[18] The book's basic premise is that the biblical text is unusable as a source for ancient Israelite history.

Thompson begins his construction of Palestinian (not Israelite) history by using as his guide the ecological transformations brought about through cycles of wet and dry periods in the eastern Mediterranean world. He finds no evidence of any group called "Israel" before the first millennium BCE and so

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16. Avraham Biran and Joseph Naveh, "An Aramaic Stele from Tel Dan," *IEJ* 43 (1993): 81–98.

17. Avraham Biran and Joseph Naveh, "The Tel Dan Inscription: A New Fragment," *IEJ* 45 (1995): 1–18.

18. Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (SHANE 4; Leiden: Brill, 1992). The following discussion is adapted from Richard S. Hess, "Recent Studies in Old Testament History: A Review Article," *Them* 19, no. 2 (1994): 9–15.

denies any validity to the generally accepted mention of Israel on the Egyptian Merneptah Stela of 1209 BCE.

Thompson maintains that no political union could have existed in the time and place in which the Bible remembers the united monarchy of David and Solomon. This is apparently because the settlement of much of the Judean hill country had not yet taken place, and so there was no population to support a kingdom. However, the lack of population is sometimes itself a motivation for wars of conquest, such as those undertaken by the Hittites to replenish their own population.[19] Further, we do know that the Benjaminite region was settled at this time. This is also true for Jerusalem and Hebron along with other major sites in the Judean low hill country to the west. These are the same regions from which the early leaders of a unified Israel emerged and where they had their centers of rule. What does it mean to argue that the population was insufficient? Was the population of Macedonia sufficient for Alexander to create an empire, albeit short lived, of the known world from Greece to India? The already-mentioned Tel Dan Stela, with its inscription of the "house of David," calls into question all disputes concerning the existence of a David. This expression is used elsewhere (e.g., "house of Omri") to describe a dynasty and the historical founder of that dynasty. Hence this provides evidence for a David.

When Thompson considers the biblical text itself, he concludes that Genesis through 2 Kings has no coherent plot development, theme, ideology, or historiography; it is the product of antiquarian and traditionalist interests, a collection of a variety of tales and traditions within an editorial framework. In a major break with Van Seters, Thompson does not see the Hebrew Bible as containing historiography in the Greek sense of a critical intent to identify history. Thompson seems to be guided by the absence of a Hebrew word equivalent to the Greek word *historia*. Unfortunately, he does not provide the necessary and detailed comparative analysis from texts, especially those Hittite and Assyrian sources that he does understand as historiographic.

This same approach was followed by Mario Liverani, as expressed in the English title of his work *Israel's History and the History of Israel*.[20] "Israel's History" serves as creation of history with no necessary relationship to the time, place, and people that it purports to represent. In part two of the book, Liverani titles his discussion of this sort of history as "An Invented History."

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19. Bustenay Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1979).

20. Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel* (trans. Chiara Peri and Philip R. Davies; BW; London: Equinox, 2005); original ed., *Oltre la Bibbia: Storia antica di Israele* (Rome: Laterza, 2003).

However, the "real" history of Israel that Liverani purports to describe is titled "A Normal History." As with Thompson and the others, Liverani adopts a suspicious reading of the biblical text. However, unlike these others, he uses the text of the Old Testament as a significant source.

Also written from a suspicious perspective is the approach of the late Gösta Ahlström in his posthumously published *History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest*.[21] This text, however, moves us toward the second category, that of traditional critical orthodoxy. While Ahlström remains closer to the skeptical approach regarding the period before the united monarchy, he interacts with traditional higher criticism in the period from the united monarchy onward. Along with a fundamental trust in and detailed catalog of archaeological evidence, this approach anticipates much of the critical analysis of ancient Israel up to the present.

CRITICAL ORTHODOXY IN HISTORIES

In addition to the already-mentioned second edition of Miller and Hayes, the second and third editions of the multiauthored volume edited by Hershel Shanks also appeared at this time. While the first edition of this work (with the exception of the first chapter) closely integrates the evidence of archaeology, extrabiblical texts, and Hebrew Bible sources read in a traditional manner, many of the chapters of the later editions closely follow the critical approaches of this second category.[22]

Other histories were written in part as a response to the skepticism of the first category. A critical response was made to those who considered the Hebrew Bible of little or no historical value. The Oxford Old Testament seminar brought together the papers of some seventeen scholars under the editorship of John Day.[23] They argued that there was indeed evidence for history in the Hebrew Bible, and that elements of this history extended much earlier than had been maintained by those in the first category.

One of the contributors, the Syro-Palestinian archaeologist William G. Dever, wrote two volumes of his own that demonstrated where and how the preexilic texts of the Hebrew Bible correlated with known and current

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21. Gösta W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest* (ed. Diana Vikander Edelman; JSOTSup 146; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

22. Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall; Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1988); idem, *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (2nd ed.; Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999); idem, *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (3rd ed.; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2010).

23. John Day, ed., *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSup 406; London: T&T Clark International, 2004).

archaeological evidence and its interpretation.[24] Together these works demonstrated an important value to these data for questioning the assumptions of various postmodern social science models and for reexamining the value of the textual record from the periods of earliest Israel and the united monarchy.

A second arena of concern that Dever addressed was to critique the assumptions of the work of Israeli archaeologist Israel Finkelstein, popularized with the assistance of Neil Asher Silberman, in his volume *The Bible Unearthed*.[25] Their stated purpose is to present how new discoveries of the discipline of archaeology have overturned long-held assumptions about the essential reliability of the Hebrew Bible as a historical record. For each chapter the authors present a summary of the biblical account and then discuss ways in which archaeology has controverted this traditional understanding. The authors always present their interpretation of the archaeological data but do not mention or interact with contemporary alternative approaches.

An alternative approach to reading the biblical text through social science methods has been to apply the benefits of social science models to the data gained from archaeology. The detailed analysis and emphasis on archaeological method distinguished this approach from some in the first category. Thomas E. Levy edited the best example of this approach, covering the Holy Land from prehistoric to modern times, with each chapter written by an archaeologist who is a specialist in the period under consideration.[26] With the emphasis on the social archaeology and not on the biblical text, the work provides essential perspectives on the historical periods not available elsewhere.

Daniel E. Fleming has provided a recent synthesis of biblical, extrabiblical textual, and critical discussion.[27] His work isolates strata of historical text based on the understanding that the history represented by the northern kingdom of Israel predates that of Judah. He seeks to isolate the former and note where Judean editing occurs.

Among the many other scholars who work with these methods, we must mention finally the important work of Nadav Na'aman. Although his research

24. William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know, and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); idem, *Who Were the Early Israelites, and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

25. Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

26. Thomas E. Levy, ed., *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (New York: Facts on File, 1995).

27. Daniel E. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

has appeared primarily in the form of articles, a three-volume collection of his scholarly papers reveals how he has integrated the archaeological and extrabiblical textual evidence into an appreciation of critical views as applied to all periods of ancient Israel.[28]

HISTORIES BALANCING BIBLICAL AND EXTRABIBLICAL SOURCES

As we move into the third area of research, that which emphasizes the biblical text and the extrabiblical evidence but does not accept without question either the results of higher criticism or the skepticism of the first group, we can consider a variety of studies, both those that primarily react to the other areas and those that present new syntheses. Even here there is overlap as many of the studies seek to do both. Thus, while Kenneth Kitchen's *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* presents much in the way of critique against critical positions by applying comparative ancient Near Eastern evidence, we have in this tome a survey of the history of ancient Israel that provides a unique integration of the comparative data and biblical literature.[29] Again, conferences were convened and papers published in six volumes that ostensibly addressed concerns initially raised by Van Seters and later by the so-called minimalists, as well as other scholars who follow postmodern approaches.[30] These collected essays also advance the historical interpretation and understanding of every area of ancient Israelite history. The same may be said of the analysis that searches the philosophical foundations and critiques the assumptions of historians, as set forth by the Danish scholar Jens Bruun

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28. Nadav Na'aman, *Ancient Israel and Its Neighbors: Interaction and Counteraction* (vol. 1 of *Collected Essays*; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005); idem, *Canaan in the Second Millennium B.C.E.* (vol. 2 of *Collected Essays*; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005); idem, *Ancient Israel's History and Historiography: The First Temple Period* (vol. 3 of *Collected Essays*; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

29. Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

30. Alan R. Millard, James K. Hoffmeier, and David W. Baker, eds., *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994); V. Philips Long, David W. Baker, and Gordon J. Wenham, eds., *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of "Biblical Israel"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); James K. Hoffmeier and Alan R. Millard, eds., *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions; The Proceedings of a Symposium, August 12–14, 2001 at Trinity International University* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Daniel I. Block, ed., *Israel: Ancient Kingdom or Late Invention?* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008); Richard S. Hess, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Paul J. Ray Jr., eds., *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History* (BBRSup 3; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008). A sixth volume, though not the product of a congress, continues this tradition: James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary, eds., *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

Kofoed.[31] Perhaps the best example of a critical evaluation of the approach of traditional higher criticism, integrated with a historical survey of ancient Israel, is the 2003 history by Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III.[32] Of the approximately three hundred pages of text, one hundred are devoted to the questions of method and a critique of other approaches. The authors' strong background of literary analysis (see the summary of Long's earlier work above) and awareness of the critical approaches provide a unique contribution to the field of Israelite history.

The third method will always rely heavily on the comparative evidence and especially the written texts. In addition to what has already been noted, important contributions of the past two decades have included significant editions of Neo-Assyrian texts and other new texts from this ancient empire, as well as new readings of cuneiform and alphabetic texts from the southern Levant of the second and first millennia.[33] To this may be added the archive from thirteenth-century BCE Emar as well as the new readings and many new texts published from contemporary Ugarit, eighteenth-century BCE Mari, and the Luwian texts of the late second and early first millennia BCE.[34] For

31. Jens Bruun Kofoed, *Text and History: Historiography and the Study of the Biblical Text* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

32. Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

33. See, e.g., Hayim Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, King of Assyria: Critical Edition, with Introductions, Translations, and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994); Eckart Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften* (AfOB 26; Vienna: Institut für Orientalistik der Universität Wien, 1997); Shigeo Yamada, *The Construction of the Assyrian Empire: A Historical Study of the Inscriptions of Shalmaneser III (859–824 BC) Relating to His Campaigns to the West* (CHANE 3; Leiden: Brill, 2003); Hayim Tadmor and Shigeo Yamada, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC), Kings of Assyria* (RINP 1; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); Earle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)* (RINP 4; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); Kirk Grayson and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC), Part 1* (RINP 3/1; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012); Wayne Horowitz and Takayoshi Oshima, *Cuneiform in Canaan: Cuneiform Sources from the Land of Israel in Ancient Times* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration and Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006); Shmuel Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (trans. and ed. Anson F. Rainey; Jerusalem: Carta, 2008).

34. See, e.g., (on Emar) Daniel E. Fleming, *The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar: A Window on Ancient Syrian Religion* (HSS 42; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); idem, *Time at Emar: The Cultic Calendar and the Rituals from the Diviner's Archive* (MC 11; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000); Richard S. Hess, "Multi-Month Ritual Calendars in the West Semitic World: Emar 446 and Leviticus 23," in Hoffmeier and Millard, *Future of Biblical Archaeology*, 233–53; (on Ugarit) Marguerite Yon and Daniel Arnaud, *Études Ougaritiques I: Travaux 1985–1995* (RSO 14; Paris: Éditions recherche sur les civilisations, 2001); Brian C. Babcock, *Sacred Ritual: A Study of West Semitic Ritual Calendars in Leviticus 23 and the Akkadian Text Emar 446* (BBRSup 9; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014); Wilfred G. E. Watson and Nicolas

the large quantity of written evidence recently published from the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, see chapter 13 below, authored by André Lemaire. His mastery of relevant epigraphy is well known, and his publications of many primary sources from this period (and other periods) are too numerous to chronicle here.

For an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of this method, as well as the full use of newly published comparative data, see, in addition to the works of Kitchen and the six volumes of collected essays already mentioned, many of the entries in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* and the collection of essays in *Archival Documents from the Biblical World*, whose titles describe their contents: James K. Hoffmeier, "Understanding Hebrew and Egyptian Military Texts: A Contextual Approach" (xxi–xxvii); Harry A. Hoffner Jr., "Hittite-Israelite Cultural Parallels" (xxix–xxxiv); K. Lawson Younger Jr., "The 'Contextual Method': Some West Semitic Reflections" (xxxv–xliii); David B. Weisberg, "The Impact of Assyriology on Biblical Studies" (xliv–xlviii); and William W. Hallo, "Sumer and the Bible: A Matter of Proportion" (xlix–liv).[35] Finally, there is the useful discussion and enormous bibliography of Kenton L. Sparks's *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible*.[36] Although not concerned only with historiographical matters, this could be a starting point for a comparative survey of the relevant texts of any given period in Israel.

The philosophical underpinnings of all three methods continue to enjoy study and reflection. A good example is the recent study by Koert van Bekkum that critiques the philosophical assumptions behind the first two methods and seeks to use the comparative approach by first allowing the biblical text and the archaeological witness to speak for themselves, with their distinctive tools for analysis and interpretation.[37] Only then are the two compared and contrasted.

Wyatt, eds., *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies* (HO 1/39; Leiden: Brill, 1999); K. Lawson Younger Jr., ed., *Ugarit at Seventy-Five: Proceedings of the Symposium "Ugarit at Seventy-Five," Held at Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois, February 18–20, 2005, under the Auspices of the Middle Western Branch of the American Oriental Society and the Mid-West Region of the Society of the Biblical Literature* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007); (on Mari) Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari*; (on Luwian) John David Hawkins, *Inscriptions of the Iron Age* (vol. 1 of *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions*; UISK 8; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000).

35. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005); William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr., eds., *Archival Documents from the Biblical World* (vol. 3 of *The Context of Scripture*; Leiden: Brill, 2003).

36. Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005).

37. Koert van Bekkum, *From Conquest to Coexistence: Ideology and Antiquarian Intent in the Historiography of Israel's Settlement in Canaan* (CHANE 45; Leiden: Brill, 2011).

Today, if one were to look for an exemplary integration of the comparative method with a close attention to all relevant ancient Near Eastern, classical, and biblical texts and manuscripts, there is none better than the contribution of the late Israeli scholar Anson Rainey in *The Sacred Bridge*.[38] In a massive undertaking, he provides these original textual sources (as well as rabbinic sources) in transliteration and translation and integrates a comprehensive understanding of geography and archaeology to present a unique synthesis that portrays as closely as possible the history of ancient Israel.

With such a varied and enormous background in sources and interpretive approaches, there is not available any volume that can evaluate all that has gone before and provide a new and more complete synthesis in light of the most recent available evidence bearing upon the interpretation of ancient Israel. No work can serve as the final word on the subject. However, here we seek to introduce the interested reader to the study of ancient Israel by examining the story as traditionally told, the most important sources for interpretation, the major critical issues and problems with our understanding of the sources, and how they might best be synthesized.[39]

Chronology

There are two types of chronology: relative and absolute. Relative chronology seeks to place events and people in sequence. Examples of this are the sequence of Abraham, the exodus, and the monarchy. The biblical witness is unanimous in confirming this chronological sequence. Relative chronology can be much more specific. Thus 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings provide the length of each king's reign in Judah and Israel. So one can calculate the number of years from the beginning of the first king (Saul) and his reign through that of David and Solomon to the end of the united monarchy. And one can calculate the number of years from that event to the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of Judeans to Babylon. It is also possible to relate the reigns of other kings in sources outside the Bible. Thus, for example, Abram is contemporary with Tidal of the Goiim, Rehoboam with Shishak of Egypt, Hezekiah with Sennacherib of Assyria, Josiah with Neco of Egypt, and Jehoiachin with Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Except for Tidal, all of these leaders are attested outside the Bible and can be placed within a sequence of kings and

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38. Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006).
39. For further analysis, see Megan Bishop Moore and Brad E. Kelle, *Biblical History and Israel's Past: The Changing Study of the Bible and History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

rulers from their native lands. The Roman-period figure Ptolemy recorded lists of Assyrian and Babylonian kings, as Manetho did of Egyptian dynasties and their rulers. These can be correlated with the ancient Near Eastern records and—since the decipherment of the Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian, and other languages and scripts—with the thousands of texts that attest to rulers and sequences of kings.

The second type of chronology is absolute. This allows one to calculate exactly how many years ago an event took place. Historically, this system has used the birth of Jesus Christ as a dividing point in the eras, so that events before the birth are designated "BC" (before Christ) and those after the birth "AD" (anno Domini, "in the year of the Lord"). In biblical studies, as here, these designations are sometimes replaced with "BCE" (before the Common Era) and "CE" (Common Era).

In order to provide an absolute chronology for the events of ancient Israel, one would need some means of counting back from the present to an event mentioned in the sources of that time. This would be difficult since we do not have reliable lists of years between the present and so long ago in the past. However, in 1867 one of the first great Assyriologists, Henry Rawlinson, published an eponym list from the period of the Neo-Assyrian kings that changed the picture completely. The Assyrians named each year according to a king or important official, and they kept a list of these year-names in sequence according to the rulers. One of the names had attached to it a note that an eclipse occurred on a particular month. It was possible to calculate that date astronomically as June 15 or 16 in 763 BCE.[40] As a result of this piece of data, it was possible to fix the dates for the reigns of the kings of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the Neo-Babylonian Empire, and the Persian Empire. Corresponding connections with Egyptian chronology allowed for absolute dates there as well.

However, the resultant, detailed chronology in these empires did not solve the apparent contradictions in the biblical chronologies. Indeed, even within biblical books such as 1–2 Kings (setting aside the issues with 1–2 Chronicles) there seemed to be contradictions between the northern and southern reigns and their lengths and sequences. It was Edwin R. Thiele who solved the main elements of the problem and produced a reliable chronology for the rulers of Israel and Judah.[41] He found two systems of dating each king's length of

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40. See Alan R. Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire 910–612 BC* (SAAS 2; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, University of Helsinki, 1994), 2.

41. Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings: A Reconstruction of the Chronology of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951; 2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965; 3rd ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983). See also Kenneth A. Kitchen, "Chronology," *DOTHB* 181–88.

reign. The king's predecessor died during year X. In one case year X was not counted by the new monarch (it was called the "accession year" system), and in the other case year X was counted as one year. The former system was used in Babylon and Assyria, and the latter system was used in Egypt. The northern kingdom of Israel, perhaps influenced by the first king Jeroboam's stay in Egypt, began with the Egyptian system. The southern kingdom mostly followed the Assyrian system, as did both kingdoms in the eighth century BCE and later, when Assyria controlled the region.

Thus the major dates in the first millennium BCE include the following: David, in about 1000; death of Solomon and beginning of the divided monarchy, 931; end of Hoshea and the northern kingdom of Israel, 722; reform of Josiah, 622; Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and Judah, 587/586; beginning of Cyrus and the Persian Empire, 539.

As for the second millennium BCE, there are no certain connections to obtain an absolute chronology. Further, the dates in the biblical text are not intended to express precision, as seen by one of the first, that found in Genesis 15:13, 16, where the "four hundred years" from Abraham to the exodus are made equivalent to four generations. There is debate about when the Bible perceives the exodus, Israel's key event of deliverance from Egyptian slavery, to have taken place. Some say early, at 1447 BCE, on the basis of 1 Kings 6:1. Others contend that this date is similar to that in Genesis 15 and not intended to be exactly 480 years (a symbol for 12 generations of 40 years each). Instead, they propose that the traditions preserved in Exodus and the known archaeological realities of Egypt suggest a date sometime in the middle of the thirteenth century BCE.

Layout

We have divided the volume into chapters that move forward in time roughly according to the biblical story of Israel. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 consider important pentateuchal material that has special historiographical interest: the Genesis narratives, the exodus and wilderness records, and the covenants. In some cases the biblical texts were not written as history. In every case the literature was selective in its treatment of the events. Often the nature of the literature governed much of what was chosen and why it was chosen for inclusion in the written texts. Even where the literature comes closest to what looks to the modern reader as history, choices were made contingent on the purpose of what was being written. The same happens today, although we may have different purposes in mind when we write history or read and evaluate sources

for history. This section therefore is concerned with examining the type of literature involved and the manner in which it may and may not be used for historical purposes. Foundational to all history is the manner in which an understanding of the past is derived from ancient written texts. Historiography is more than the casual writing about past events; it also involves the evaluation of sources for their use in the re-creation of places or times.

The following chapters consider questions of Israelite history. Here the chapters appear in chronological order, from the beginning of the Iron Age (ca. 1200 BCE) until the end of the Hellenistic period (63 BCE). The former constitutes the earliest generally recognized appearance of an entity or people known as Israel in the southern Levant. The latter date marks the conquest of that same area by the Roman general Pompey and the beginning of Roman imperial rule. An exception to this is chapter 8, where we consider the historiographical value of the prophetic traditions. The acts and words of prophets dominate much of the Hebrew Bible and thus provide an important area for consideration.

As each chapter develops its theme, there is a concern to present four major areas for consideration. First, the chapter provides a summary of the biblical texts traditionally associated with the period or type of literature under consideration. This allows readers, regardless of their familiarity with the topic, to review the oldest and best-known source that has been used more than any other in the reconstruction of ancient Israelite history. It also prepares for a description and examination of other historical sources of importance. These are evaluated as to their worth. Second, the author considers major issues in the analysis of these sources and especially in their application to the study of the historical period or type of literature under consideration. Third, the dominant positions in the scholarly literature are outlined and discussed. Fourth, these are then evaluated in the light of existing evidence. The authors of the chapters organize these areas according to the manner they feel best addresses their topic. They present their own understanding of the issues and provide a summary of where the evidence and the major discussions lead. Authors have flexibility to address the issues under consideration in each chapter because of the distinctive features of each historical period.

1

The Genesis Narratives

BILL T. ARNOLD

The first book of the Bible presents several challenges when approached from the perspective of history and historiography. First and foremost among those problems is that the opening chapters describe characters and events in a world dramatically different from our own: a world with talking serpents, with life before cities, before agriculture, before music or metallurgy; a world in which humans were unified with one language; and more. We cannot begin to locate these characters and events in a particular time or place, which is, of course, one of the tasks of any study of history. These chapters are, in fact, presented from a perspective *before* history, if we assume that history is properly understood as a time when humans began to write accounts of the past (a definition that itself is difficult to refine). And so we will need to start by asking how these materials in the early chapters of Genesis may be examined, or even if they may be examined at all, from the perspective of history and historiography.

Second, and closely related to this first challenge, is the realization that the genre or type of literature that we find in the book of Genesis is unlike others, with its own subset of characteristics raising numerous questions when examined, again, from the perspective of history and historiography. We will need to explore the specific characteristics and qualities of these literary types and how exactly they speak to issues of history, or whether they in fact speak

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to issues of history at all. And as we will see, these distinctive literary features relate to the ancestral accounts of Genesis 12–50 as much as they do to the so-called Primeval History of Genesis 1–11.

Third, in the case of Genesis we are left with even less evidence from the ancient Near East than usual when studying the Old Testament and its parallels with the surrounding environment. We famously have literary parallels in creation accounts (especially from Mesopotamia), comparative materials in creation concepts (including from Egypt), and cultural features from the ancient world that are suggestive as parallels to certain elements in the ancestral narratives. But in terms of archaeological context, or extra-biblical confirmation of the characters and events of Genesis, we are left completely without trace. As a result, this chapter on the materials in the book of Genesis is especially challenging for a volume devoted to, as stated in the introduction, exploring "the major sources relevant to ancient Israel's history" and evaluating "key issues of interpretation required of a critical study of that history."

Methodology and the Refinement of Our Task

We have set as our purpose in this volume the exploration of the sources, those within the Bible and all other sources beyond it, in order to see what may be said about the historical realities treated in the Bible itself. Before getting far in this endeavor, however, we must admit certain obvious limitations on how much we can say, due to a lack of details in those sources. The challenges already introduced here make the task especially difficult in a chapter devoted to the book of Genesis. In such a setting our task is necessarily attenuated; we are left with searching for what one scholar has called "a critically assured minimum."[1] On the one hand, it is naive to think that we are capable of reconstructing what actually happened in the history of early Israel, especially in the period of Israel's ancestors, or even more especially the beginnings of world history. On the other hand, historians of all periods operate with degrees of probability and are tasked with discerning the likelihood of this or that event regardless of the time period or even the amount of relevant material available for investigation.[2]

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1. Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* (trans. Frederick H. Cryer; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 56. We should note, however, that Mettinger is using the phrase in a somewhat broader way in his discussion. See his discussion for more on what follows here about "possibilities," "probable conclusions," and "facts."
2. On the dangers of extreme skepticism and nihilism in the historical task, and with specific examples related to Israel's history, see Wilfred G. Lambert, "Mesopotamian Sources and

Because of these challenges and limitations, we are like scholars of all traditions and "schools" of investigation, using the best of our critical acumen and methods to draw conclusions about the historical realities of the biblical world.[3] In this process we must be willing to discern between (1) those conclusions that we consider essentially established, or "proven" and sometimes regarded as "factual"; (2) conclusions that seem most likely, although the evidence is less than sufficient to settle the matter once and for all; (3) conclusions that have sufficient evidence to establish their reasonable credibility, and for which we may use the term "plausible"; and (4) conclusions that are only possible, but for which we have no real evidence and about which we cannot make definitive statements. The latter are only possibilities in the sense that we can imagine them in the realm of human intellectual investigation; it is possible for rational, thinking humans to believe them. But to go beyond these conclusions is to assert mere fantasy or, in some cases, to explore the nature of faith itself, which is, of course, beyond the boundaries and capabilities of historical research.[4]

Our task of exploring the possible historical realia in Genesis is complicated still further by developments in the study of Israel's Scriptures in recent decades. Among many scholars it has become a common methodological datum to assume that the biblical text cannot be trusted when it comes to historical specifics (see the three methodological approaches discussed under "1990 to the Present" in the introduction). The basis for such an assertion, it is alleged, is that the textual evidence contained in the Bible has been "transmitted" or preserved through centuries by scribes, which, in the minds of some researchers, essentially disqualifies the biblical text as a primary historical source. In such an approach, archaeology and contemporary epigraphic data become "primary," and the biblical witness to ancient events is relegated to a "secondary" status.[5] An extreme version of this approach contends that

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Pre-Exilic Israel," in *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (ed. John Day; JSOTSup 406; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 352–65, esp. 362–64.

3. The use of "critical" here in no way implies a negative approach to our sources but rather refers to rigorous and intensive investigation of those sources, culling our greatest intellectual traditions in order to discern the most likely conclusions, whether we draw conclusions that we consider proven, probable, or only possible.

4. Absolute certainty of historical knowledge is impossible, but adequate certainty and reasonable certainty are entirely different matters. For theoretical introduction to this topic and recent bibliography, see Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic; Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2010), 31–107, and esp. 67–70 on absolute, adequate, and reasonable certainty.

5. For this approach, although in a more nuanced way than usually stated, see Lester L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 6–10, 35.

we must attempt to reconstruct Iron Age history in the Levant as though the Bible does not exist at all.[6]

The problem, of course, is that archaeology and epigraphy themselves need interpretation, and sometimes scholars are as inclined to privilege or overinterpret these data as severely as they accuse others of overreading the biblical text. Whatever status one attributes to the biblical text, primary or secondary, it is methodologically problematic to exclude the possibility of *any* historical realia being preserved in the written testimony simply because it is transmitted over long periods of time.[7] The possibility must always be left open that late sources, which typically are assumed to be secondary or tertiary, may contain more accurate historical information than sources taken as primary only because those sources are older or perceived as more tangibly related to the events such as archaeology or epigraphy.[8] More care is needed with all sources on a case-by-case basis when exploring these earliest periods of Israel's history. In the case of the book of Genesis, we are left with no specific evidence from archaeology or extrabiblical sources, as we have already noted. This leaves us only with the text of Genesis, and the methodology employed in this chapter does not assume an essentially skeptical stance relative to that textual witness. But I will also endeavor to avoid overreading or overinterpreting the text of Genesis as if it were a historical document, since this biblical book, perhaps above all others, requires particular attention to its genre or literary type. Our task requires that we ask in what sense the terms "history" and "historiography" may be applied to a book such as Genesis.

Finally, our task is complicated further by research in the past two hundred years on the origins and early sources behind the current text of Genesis. The book itself has been the primary starting point for investigations of alleged original sources of the Pentateuch, famously resulting in the isolation of

6. Gary Rendsburg has argued that this approach has a particular agenda, unsupported by facts and driven by ideology alone. He shows that one can, in fact, write a modest history of ancient Israel as though the Bible does not exist, based solely on archaeology and epigraphy, and that such a history would not be much different from the portrait found in the Bible. See Gary A. Rendsburg, "Israel without the Bible," in *The Hebrew Bible: New Insights and Scholarship* (ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn; New York: New York University Press, 2008), 3–23.

7. A point that Grabbe (*Ancient Israel*, 220) helpfully notes and at times models. See also the comments of Baruch Halpern in Baruch Halpern and William G. Dever, "Two Views of a History of Ancient Israel," review of Lester L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?*, *BASOR* 357 (2010): 77–83, esp. 77.

8. On the need for "finer discrimination" of sources in the historical endeavor, see Jens Bruun Kofoed, *Text and History: Historiography and the Study of the Biblical Text* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 41–43; Iain W. Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 56–62.

Ancient Alalakh

As we have noted, we have no specific evidence from archaeology or epigraphy confirming events described in the book of Genesis or mentioning any of the characters of the book. However, we have a body of literature from the ancient Near East suggesting cultural parallels to Israel's ancestors. For example, more than five hundred texts were discovered from two distinct periods in the history of the ancient city of Alalakh (modern Tell Atchana): the eighteenth–seventeenth and fifteenth centuries BCE. Alalakh was located on the southeast corner of the Hatay plain, on the Orontes River, in what is now southern Turkey (see fig. 1.1). Most of these inscriptions were written in Akkadian cuneiform on clay tablets, but reflect features of the local dialect. The Alalakh archive contains administrative records, a few treaty texts, and literary texts such as hymns and omens, as well as a statue inscription of King Idrimi from around 1500 BCE (although discovered in a later stratum). The Idrimi Inscription is an autobiographical account of the king's exploits after fleeing the kingdom when his father was murdered, living in exile for years, returning to Alalakh to reclaim the throne, and extending his rule into Hittite territory.[a]

Collectively, the texts of Alalakh illuminate the society and economic life at an important city-state of Syria-Palestine during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. Numerous social customs attested at Alalakh and known also from other sites, such as Ugarit and Nuzi, have been compared to the customs in the ancestral narratives. But such customs have been criticized as not necessarily distinctive to the Bronze Age and not helpful as direct comparisons to the ancestral practices. The method of drawing such comparisons has been refined, and we understand the limitations of making such connections. Nevertheless, the concentration of such a large number of these cultural parallels in a Bronze Age society on the Mediterranean coast remains suggestive as background to the ancestral narratives. These include (1) a betrothal gift for the wife's father, allowing the bridegroom to marry (Gen. 34:12); (2) provisions for the use of a surrogate mother in cases of barrenness after seven years (Gen. 16:1–4); and (3) seven years of barrenness before a second wife compared to Jacob's seven years of service before he was allowed to marry Rachel (Gen. 29:15–35).[b]

a. Tremper Longman III, "The Autobiography of Idrimi," *COS* 1.148:479–80.
b. Richard S. Hess, "The Bible and Alalakh," in *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations* (ed. Mark W Chavalas and K. Lawson Younger; JSOTSup 341; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 209–21, esp. 210–12; see also idem, "Seven Years of Barrenness before a Second Wife," *COS* 3.101C:252–53.

four primary sources (known as JEDP) and several secondary and redactional sources in the nineteenth century. The twentieth century saw significant revisions of this documentary hypothesis, as well as more than one challenge to

Figure 1.1.
World of Genesis
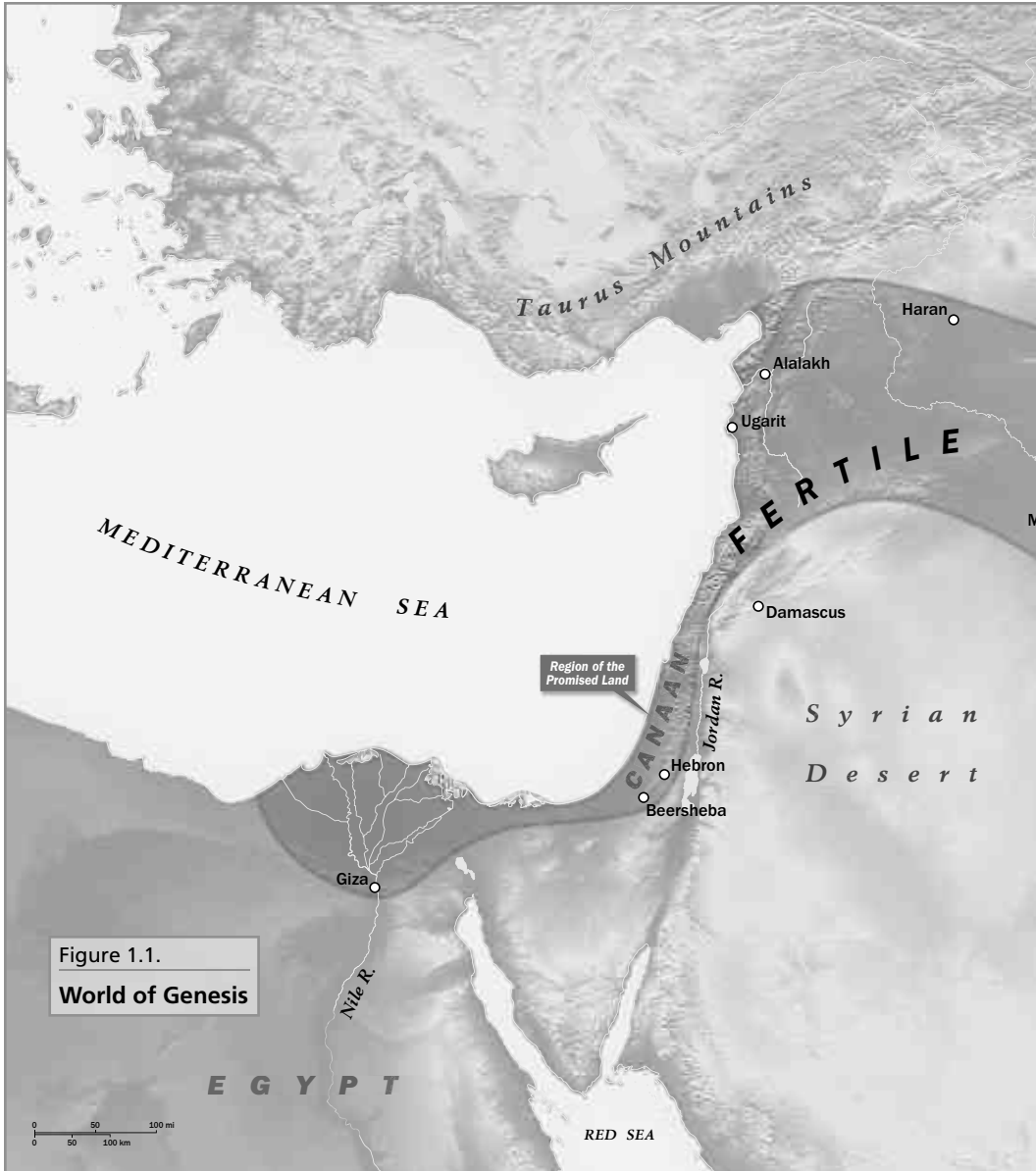
such a source approach altogether. In the first decade of the twenty-first century,
investigation continued unabated into the original sources of the Pentateuch,
including again Genesis as a primary focus, with special attention given to
the literary parameters of each source and their relative dating. Today, little

International Mapping
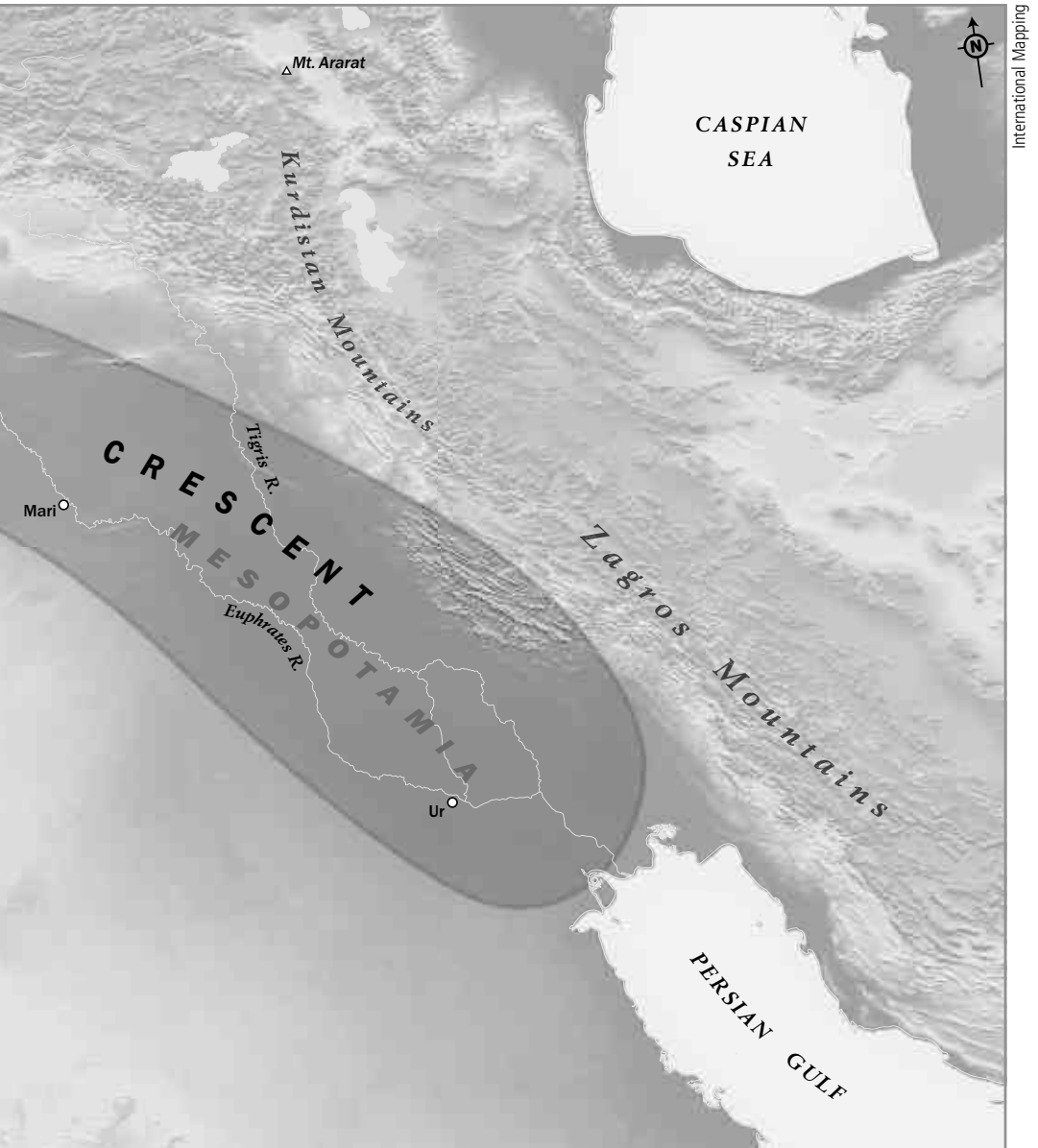
consensus has been reached on these issues, and a thorough review of the research is beyond the scope of the present task.

For our purposes it is sufficient to explain that the book of Genesis has largely been perceived as composed from two primary threads of materials,

priestly and nonpriestly traditions (sometimes referred to as P and non-P materials), although no general consensus has been achieved as to their extent or relative dates. The nonpriestly materials were compiled at some unreconstructed point in early Israel as an epic history (sometimes referred to as J, JE, or some similar siglum), and they formed one of the three expansive narrative complexes from ancient Israel.[9] It has been combined with the priestly materials to comprise the book of Genesis as an introduction for the Pentateuch as a whole. As such, this older epic history introduces the reader to the beginnings and development of the cosmos and humanity generally (parts of Gen. 1–11) and to the ancestors of Israel as explanation of Israel's origins (portions of Gen. 12–50). Regardless of one's conclusions about the specifics of how these materials were compiled in the present text of Genesis, I think it is helpful to acknowledge the two types of materials found in the book, priestly and nonpriestly.[10] In my view, either type of literary tradition is capable of preserving reliable historical information, and so I eschew skepticism as a legitimate position vis-à-vis the textual evidence. However, I also believe that literary features of these materials occasionally alert us to genres and literary types that are not intended to be taken as historiography in any modern sense of that term. Such complexity requires a nuanced methodology that takes each episode of the narratives individually in the process of assessing them for historical value.

Mytho-Historical/Pre-Ancestral Accounts (Gen. 1–11)

The people, places, and events described in the opening chapters of Genesis have no corresponding association with what we might call verifiable history. Events of these chapters (especially Gen. 1–4) cannot be confirmed or denied by the study of history, because history begins with the invention of writing. We know what we know about ancient people, society, and events primarily by the written records left behind, although archaeology and other social sciences contribute to our understanding of ancient history. The Primeval History (Gen. 1–11) addresses the origins of the universe, the creation of humanity, and the first institutions of human civilization.[11] We retain the term "history" in the title of this first unit of the Bible—the Primeval History—because, on the one hand, it arranges themes along a time continuum using cause and effect

9. See Bill T. Arnold, "History and Historiography, OT," *NIDB* 2:833–37, esp. 834–35.
10. See Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 46–59.
11. For details on the structure and content of Genesis, see Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (NCamBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1–12.

and generally uses historical narrative as the literary medium for communication. On the other hand, those themes themselves are the same ones explored elsewhere in the ancient Near East in mythological literature (creation of the universe, creation of humanity, the great flood, etc.). The Primeval History narrates those themes in a way that transforms their meaning and import, and for these reasons we may think of these chapters as a unique literary category, which some have termed "mytho-historical."[12] This designation in no way identifies these chapters as myths or mythical, but rather draws attention to the way certain themes that are explained through mythmaking elsewhere in the ancient Near East have been transformed in the Genesis narrative account.[13]

This unique blending or merging of literary categories—myth and history—in Genesis 1–11 is readily apparent in the way the chapters have been composed. These chapters are no simple history or example of ancient historiography. At most, we may say that mythical themes have been arranged in a forward-moving, linear progression, in what may be considered a historicizing literary form, using genealogies especially, to make history out of myth.[14] The famous personal names Adam (humanity) and Eve (life) provide both literary wordplay in the first biblical narratives and possess elements and roots that occur in the earliest West Semitic names attested outside the Bible.[15] The place name Eden (well-watered) also attests to an ideal garden with a description that contains clues connected to ancient realities.[16] Along with these, the land of Assyria and the rivers Tigris and Euphrates (Gen. 2:14) illustrate the merging of literary forms. This is Israel's version of ancient Near Eastern mythic history, in which a founding account is given of the universe, and events are traced back to a time in which the gods are the principal actors and reality is given essential features. In Israel's distinctive founding, mythic history events

12. Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Eridu Genesis," *JBL* 100 (1981): 513–29, esp. 528; Patrick D. Miller Jr., "Eridu, Dunnu, and Babel: A Study in Comparative Mythology," *HAR* 9 (1985): 227–51, esp. 231 (both reprinted in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11* [ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura; SBTS 4; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994]). Although Jacobsen and Miller are drawing comparisons esp. between ancient Near Eastern mythology and the priestly materials of Gen. 1–11, the literary category itself is helpful for all of the Primeval History.

13. On the near impossibility of defining "myth" and "mythology," see John N. Oswalt, *The Bible among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 32–46.

14. Richard H. Moye, "In the Beginning: Myth and History in Genesis and Exodus," *JBL* 109 (1990): 577–98, esp. 598.

15. Richard S. Hess, *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–11* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 14–24, 111–12, 131.

16. Richard S. Hess, "Eden—a Well-Watered Place," *BRev* 7, no. 6 (1991): 28–33; James A. Sauer, "The River Runs Dry: Creation Story Preserves Historical Memory," *BAR* 22, no. 4 (1996): 52–57, 64.

are traced back to a single creator, God, and the historicizing features are more prominent because of the prevalence of genealogies, as we will see.[17]

The prevalence of genealogical lists in the Primeval History is one of the most important literary features of this portion of Genesis (4:17–24, 25–26; 5:1–32; 10:1–32; 11:10–26). We have related materials from other cultures of the ancient Near East, and yet none of the extrabiblical examples have precise parallels with the use of genealogies in Genesis 1–11, either in form or function. Most ancient Near Eastern genealogies are intended to establish a certain status for a political leader or official, whereas in the Primeval History genealogies are blended with narrative portions to move the reader forward in history.[18] The characters involved are not political leaders rooted in the past; rather, they are key figures in religious history highlighted for their failures as much as for their successes.

Anthropological explorations of the genealogies of Genesis have demonstrated the highly sophisticated way in which they function in the book.[19] In general, Genesis has two types of genealogies: the "linear" or vertical genealogy, tracing a single line of descent, and the "segmented" or horizontal genealogy, which traces various descendants. Which of these two forms is used depends on its function in the text. In addition to these two forms, the genealogies of Genesis have three functions. First, by means of a process known as "divergence," each patriarch of ancient Israel is the father of other children who are not part of the Israelite ancestry and who become the ancestors of other people groups in the ancient world. Through such a process of differentiation, Genesis explains how Israel related to other populations of the ancient world. Second, Israel's lineage itself is traced through a straight line from Adam to Jacob in a process known as "invergence," in which only one son continues the Israelite ancestry. This lineal descent gives way to twelve subunits in a single generation with the children of Jacob (Gen. 29:31–30:24, counting Dinah; the birth of Benjamin is recorded in 35:16–21), and from that point forward a third process, known as "segmentation," becomes primary. With the children of Jacob, the genealogies of Genesis focus on the branches of the ancestral family, all considered within the covenant blessing

17. For comparison of Gen. 1–11 with Sumerian historiography (and ancient Near Eastern materials more generally) using the categories "contemporary history," "previous history," "legendary history," and "mythic history," see Richard E. Averbeck, "The Sumerian Historiographic Tradition and Its Implications for Genesis 1–11," in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context* (ed. Alan R. Millard, James K. Hoffmeier, and David W. Baker; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 79–102, esp. 97–100.

18. Richard S. Hess, "The Genealogies of Genesis 1–11 and Comparative Literature," *Bib* 70 (1989): 241–54 (reprinted in Hess and Tsumura, *I Studied Inscriptions*).

19. For some of what follows, and more bibliography on this topic, see Arnold, *Genesis*, 9–10.

of Israel's ancestry. Thus the book traces through this system of genealogies a line of descent for all humanity through twenty-five generations from Adam to the children of Jacob, creating a literary framework or skeleton for the entire book.

Most anthropologists and historians working with genealogies emphasize their origins in the oral culture of tribal societies and their fluid nature in telescoping and reorganizing details of a given genealogy. They function to provide social identification for a person or people group, or to establish the legitimacy of individuals within certain groups, rather than to trace the history of those individuals or groups. They are fluid because they can be adapted to reflect changing realities of the social groups. Some argue that such fluidity makes genealogies fictitious and of no historical value. A more fitting approach is to recognize that genealogies are not intended as historiographical documents in the first place, although at times they can contain elements that have historical value.[20] Their use in Genesis is more natural in the ancestral narratives (Gen. 12–36), and so it is possible that genealogies have been extended into the Primeval History in Genesis 1–11 as a means of overlaying formal literary continuity with those ancestral narratives and to provide unity for the book as a whole. In any case, the presence of genealogies in Genesis cannot simply preclude the possibility of historical value in these materials, any more than their presence can be taken as documented historical events.

The account of Noah and the great flood (Gen. 6:9–9:29) resembles similar accounts in the ancient world, especially in Babylonia, where we have remarkably close literary parallels in the famous Gilgamesh Epic.[21] The similarities between the Genesis account of the flood and Gilgamesh are so exact, especially in the episode of the birds—the raven and the dove (Gen. 8:6–12)—that we must admit some literary dependence in either direction, although there is little agreement about which direction. It is therefore possible to argue that the story arose from a specific historical flood that took place in parts of southern Mesopotamia, perhaps as early as 2900 BCE.[22] Yet the nature of the literary presentation is quite beyond anything like a verifiable historical account, so the characterization of these chapters as "proto-historical" seems most appropriate.[23]

20. For more discussion, and esp. for the helpful analogy of a corporation's "organization chart," see John H. Walton, "Genealogies," *DOTHB* 309–16, esp. 314.

21. For survey, see David Toshio Tsumura, "Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood: An Introduction," in Hess and Tsumura, *I Studied Inscriptions*, 27–57, esp. 44–57; Arnold, *Genesis*, 106–7.

22. William W. Hallo, "Antediluvian Cities," *JCS* 23 (1970–1971): 57–67, esp. 61.

23. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 166.

Sumerians

Sumer is the name of the alluvial plain at the mouth of the Persian Gulf in what is modern Kuwait and southern Iraq. The origins of the inhabitants of ancient Sumer (the Sumerians) remain completely shrouded in mystery, although we know much about their society and culture in the third millennium BCE. The earliest written texts in human history appear to have been in the Sumerian language, which is currently thought to be independent from known language families. The Sumerians appear to have been the inventors of writing itself, developed in their distinctive cuneiform impressions on clay, stone, and occasionally other materials.

Among other important cultural innovations, the Sumerians invented the sexagesimal system of counting, which gave us the 24-hour clock and the 360-degree circle. Scholars have also investigated the likelihood that Sumerian towns and neighborhood councils were the earliest experiments with democracy in human history. Together with their successors in southern Mesopotamia, the Babylonians, the Sumerians may be credited with establishing the philosophical, religious, and social infrastructure for ancient Mesopotamian culture for the next two millennia.[a]

The Akkadian versions of the Gilgamesh Epic, perhaps the greatest literary composition to come from ancient Mesopotamia, had Sumerian precursors. The Old Babylonian version of the epic from the early second millennium BCE probably was compiled by scribes using older disparate Sumerian stories about the great third-millennium king Gilgamesh from Uruk. They were then arranged in a single composition.[b]

a. Harriet E. W. Crawford, *Sumer and the Sumerians* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

b. See William L. Moran, "The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia," *CANE* 4:2327–36, esp. 2328–30. For translation of the Gilgamesh Epic, see Andrew R. George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian; Translated and with an Introduction* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1999), which includes translation of the Sumerian poems of Gilgamesh (141–208).

In sum, many readers of the opening chapters of Genesis will leave open the question of the historicity of these events, taking them as possible, no matter how remote the possibility may seem to us now. Others will admit the implausibility of those events as real or historically factual, largely because of specific literary features of the Genesis account. In truth, the situation perhaps is more complex because there may be vestiges of historical features embedded in the text, especially in Genesis 6–9; 10. But each such text needs to be examined on a case-by-case basis, and opinions will, of course, vary widely. Here it may be helpful to retain a distinction between "historical" and "literal." In other words, a text may be essentially metaphorical or symbolic

and still retain historical features or elements that reflect real events in time and space. Some of the events of the Primeval History may be historical but not literal.

Ancestral Narratives (Gen. 12–36)

The next extended unit of the book of Genesis traces events in the lives of ancient Israel's first ancestors, especially Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their families.[24] The task we have set for ourselves in this volume is to explore as much as can be known about the historical realities behind these narratives. As with the mytho-historical/pre-ancestral materials of Genesis 1–11, we have precious little to go on here—no extrabiblical references to these characters, no definitive archaeological traces of their lives or the events described in these chapters.

However, we are not completely left in the dark about Israel's ancestors. As we will see, we have a few Bronze Age cultural parallels that seem to relate to this early period, and the texts themselves preserve vestiges of what we may take as signs of the great age of the narratives, even if much of it may have been preserved orally and therefore beyond our ability to research.[25] In particular, the question of when the ancestors lived and how (or, some would say, whether) they actually relate historically to the later Israelites is tied to another question that we must address briefly: the "emergence" of ancient Israel in Syria-Palestine. I have put "emergence" in quotation marks because to speak of Israel's "conquest" of the land is already to prejudge the issues that scholars attempt to evaluate when assessing when and how Israel first appeared in the land.[26] The issues are exceedingly complex, but simply stated, scholars attempt to explain the evidence of archaeological surveys revealing a sudden population increase in a region previously sparsely populated in the central highlands of Syria-Palestine toward the end of the

24. We should not deny the essentially patriarchal nature of these accounts, although the term "patriarchal" in contemporary English imposes an inaccurate and pejorative connotation on Israelite culture. In point of fact, the wives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and other women in the narratives, often play roles that are surprisingly egalitarian in their perspectives. We must be careful not to impose our own egalitarian sensitivies upon such an ancient culture in a way that reflects our arrogance more than it does the realities of that society and its treatment of women. See Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *JAAR* 41 (1973): 30–48, esp. 31; Carol L. Meyers, "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?," *JBL* 133 (2014): 8–27.

25. We must think of ancient Israel as an "oral-and-written" culture and abandon the concept of orally preserved traditions developing first and then followed by their textualization. See Robert D. Miller, *Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel* (BPC 4; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011).

26. For details, see the discussion in chaps. 4 and 5 below.

Late Bronze Age.[27] These archaeological data are not in themselves in dispute or controversial; they are considered to be proven, or irrefutable, facts. Yet scholars are not agreed on their significance. And this illustrates the problems involved in reconstructing a history of early Israel and explains why the conclusions in this chapter especially are so tentative. One particular conclusion—entirely reasonable to consider, based on these archaeological realities—is that Israel's arrival in the land from outside Syria-Palestine is attested by the sudden population increase in the central highlands. But this is not the only possible explanation of the evidence. Scholars have explored the possibility that harsh weather conditions around 1200 BCE destabilized the major cities of Syria-Palestine and elsewhere, making it impossible for large urban sites to support their populations, which opted for living in villages in the highlands. Others have investigated the influence of a weakened Egyptian control of the coastal cities of the Levant, leading to migration of their inhabitants to the highlands. And, of course, the arrival of the so-called Sea Peoples along the coastal regions of the eastern Mediterranean was likely a contributing factor.

Regardless of these other contributing factors, it seems most likely that the new inhabitants in the central highlands of Syria-Palestine were population elements of what may be safely identified as "Israel" (see discussion in chap. 4, pp. 152–53), and that at least a portion of them escaped from slavery in Egypt and arrived in the central highlands after many years in the desert. Our task, then, is to consider the claims of the Pentateuch that this new group in Canaan had ancestry extending back to "wandering Arameans" (Deut. 26:5), presumably seminomads relying predominantly on small-cattle pastoralism for subsistence and having possession of no land of their own. The ancestral narratives of Genesis claim to fill in the details of this ancestral heritage. The text contains hints at the historical context, although, as we have noted, no extrabiblical evidence has confirmed the details. So, for example, Abram is promised that his descendants would return to Canaan and settle there "in the fourth generation" from his lifetime (Gen. 15:16). The ancestral family is consistently perceived in Israelite tradition as living "long ago" (*mēʿôlām*, "from of old, since ancient time" [Josh. 24:2–4]) and "from the days of old" (*mîmê qedem*, "from days of antiquity" [Mic. 7:20]). These biblical references and others suggest a setting for the ancestral age many centuries before the period of Moses and the exodus (Exod. 12:40; 1 Kings 6:1), which itself is impossible to date precisely. Thus the

27. An increase from 25 to nearly 300 excavated sites in the hill country, with an estimated population growth from 12,000 to approximately 60,000. See Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 114–15.

authors of the Bible assumed an ancestral period in the Bronze Age, perhaps in the early second millennium BCE.[28] The question for the historian, then, is precisely when their ancestors lived, or, in the mind of some, if they existed at all.

Parallels with ancient Near Eastern cultural features have been investigated as a means of understanding the historical background of Israel's ancestors, with mixed results. It was argued nearly forty years ago that the Genesis account contains closer parallels to the customs reflected in first-millennium-BCE Babylonian legal texts than in the second-millennium texts, and that the ancestral narratives in particular contain historical anachronisms reflecting their late date of composition and lack of historical value.[29] Many cultural parallels from the second millennium BCE had been proposed for ancestral customs, especially from the ancient city of Nuzi in Mesopotamia.[30] However, closer scrutiny of those parallels reflected a flawed comparative methodology, so that the results have been largely abandoned. Arguments for the antiquity and authenticity of the ancestral accounts in Genesis based on those comparisons have been dropped as invalid. Some scholars have concluded that the Genesis accounts of the ancestors were ideological fictions from a much later period, as late as the postexilic period. Taken in this way, the ancestral traditions of Genesis reflect only the Israel of the Iron Age, not that of any Bronze Age ancestors. In fact, the period of the ancestors disappears altogether.[31] Others of a more moderate approach have concluded that the ancestral narratives contain bits of data reflecting great antiquity, and they prefer to speak of the ancestral narratives as a composite "of historical memory, traditional folklore, cultural self-definition, and narrative brilliance."[32]

28. For a dated but still helpful summary of the possible dates for the ancestral period, see J. J. Bimson, "Archaeological Data and the Dating of the Patriarchs," in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (ed. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman; Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1980), 53–89, as well as other essays in that volume.

29. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (BZAW 133; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974); John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975). For a helpful survey, see Gordon J. Wenham, "Pondering the Pentateuch: The Search for a New Paradigm," in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (ed. David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 116–44.

30. Barry L. Eichler, "Nuzi and the Bible: A Retrospective," in *Dumu-E₂–Dub-Ba-a: Studies in Honor of Åke W. Sjöberg* (ed. Hermann Behrens, Darlene Loding, and Martha T. Roth; OPSNKF 11; Philadelphia: Samuel Noah Kramer Fund, University Museum, 1989), 107–19; Maynard Paul Maidman, *Nuzi Texts and Their Uses as Historical Evidence* (ed. Ann K. Guinan; SBLWAW 18; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

31. Maynard Paul Maidman, "Historiographic Reflections on Israel's Origins: The Rise and Fall of the Patriarchal Age," *ErIsr* 27 (2003): 120*–28*.

32. Ronald S. Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 46.

When it comes to archaeology and epigraphy, which some would call the "primary" sources of evidence, we must admit that the ancestral narratives are no better attested than the Primeval History. Investigation of individual sites mentioned in the ancestral narratives has been inconclusive, although we have a great deal of information about many of the locations mentioned in Genesis 12–36.[33] Recent investigation has turned attention to a consideration of what we can know about the original homeland of Israel's ancestors in and around Haran or, more generally, in northern Iraq and inland Syria. We have evidence of a long tradition of urbanization in the region, with large autonomous city-states and tribal polities. While this type of investigation is suggestive, it leaves us with nothing in the archaeology specifically attesting to the Israelite ancestors or confirming the text of Genesis. This leads one scholar to argue that the archaeological details are able only to "provide a plausible context for early Israel, if not provide subtle hints about its origins."[34]

Potentially more fruitful have been attempts in recent years to study the tribal confederacies revealed in thousands of texts from the ancient city of Mari as the cultural background for the Israelite heritage extending back to the Middle Bronze Age.[35] This comparative research has been reinvigorated by a surge of publications and information from the French team working on the Mari archives, led by Jean-Marie Durand since 1981.[36] One tribal confederation in particular, the Yaminite (or Binu Yamina), occupied locations such as Haran in North Mesopotamia and presents a tantalizing possible connection with the biblical "Benjaminites." It is possible to argue that Israel included the tribe named "Benjamin," because of its background in the Syrian tribal division. The shared names present a clue "that there were ancient Binu Yamina somewhere in Israel's ancestry, probably not limited to the tribe of Benjamin."[37] Since Israel's

33. Bimson, "Archaeological Data," 65–82. For a defense of the idea that the so-called anachronisms of the ancestral narratives are instead adaptations, or literary updates, see Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Abraham and Archaeology: Anachronisms or Adaptations?," in *Perspectives on Our Father Abraham: Essays in Honor of Marvin R. Wilson* (ed. Steven A. Hunt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

34. Mark W. Chavalas, "The Context of Early Israel Viewed through the Archaeology of Northern Mesopotamia and Syria," in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History* (ed. Richard S. Hess, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Paul J. Ray Jr.; BBRSup 3; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 151.

35. Daniel E. Fleming, "Genesis in History and Tradition: The Syrian Background of Israel's Ancestors, Reprise," in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions; The Proceedings of a Symposium, August 12–14, 2001 at Trinity International University* (ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Alan R. Millard; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 193–232.

36. For introduction and overview, see Jack M. Sasson, "The King and I: A Mari King in Changing Perceptions," *JAOS* 118 (1998): 453–70, esp. 457–59.

37. Fleming, "Genesis in History," 219; idem, "Mari and the Possibilities of Biblical Memory," *RA* 92 (1998): 41–78.

ancestral origins are identified in Genesis as associated with pastoralists near Haran in northern Mesopotamia, it seems more than plausible that those origins can be illuminated by the Mari texts as a specific tribal heritage descended from the Syrian Binu Yamina of the Bronze Age. In light of this connection, a further link could be the Amorite tribal term *ḫibrum*, used at Mari to refer to the component of the Binu Yamina population based in the backcountry and traveling with the flocks. This could be related to the biblical Hebrew term *ʿibrî*, "Hebrew."[38] All of this information from Mari is suggestive as background for Israel's ancestors, but at least one prominent scholar has warned against an overly eager "historicizing effort" that will distort the study of the Bible by chasing "that most elusive of Grails, the quest for the historical Abraham."[39] While his cautionary note and scholarship are laudable, the possibility of a historical Abraham seems far more likely than that of someone finding *the* Holy Grail. The quest for the historical Abraham will no doubt continue, and it seems that the Mari evidence is a rich resource for future investigation.

Sociologically, the ancestral family would have been much the same as other people groups living in the Levant. The "father's house" (*bêt ʾāb* [e.g., Gen. 12:1]) was the most important feature of the society. It consisted of an extended family of up to three generations and served as the center of religious, social, and economic life. These households were structured further into "families" or "clans" (*mišpĕḥôt*), social spheres between the smaller "father's house" and the larger tribe.[40] These distinctions occur more than once in the ancestral narratives (Gen. 20:13; 24:7). For example, this includes the initial call of Abram to leave his father's house, which was essentially a call to launch out as a new *paterfamilias*. He did this even though he was childless and had no assurance that he himself would in fact become a father and therefore be able to establish a new "house" (Gen. 12:1).

Whereas later Israelites lived in permanent structures made of sun-dried bricks placed on stone foundations and roofed over with wood crossbeams, their ancestors are consistently portrayed as living in tents (e.g., Gen. 12:8; 13:3, 12; 18:1).[41] This claim of a tent-dwelling heritage for Israel's ancestors is corroborated by (1) an extensive vocabulary in biblical Hebrew for things tent-related, (2) a generally favorable perception of tents and nomadism in

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38. Fleming, "Genesis in History," 220–21.

39. Jack M. Sasson, "Mari and the Holy Grail," in *Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible* (ed. Steven W. Holloway; HBM 10; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 198.

40. Lawrence E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1–35, esp. 20–22.

41. Oded Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (SBLABS 5; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 16–21; Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (LAI; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 21–35.

Mari

The ancient city of Mari (modern Tell Hariri, located near the present-day border between Syria and Iraq) was an important exchange city on the west bank of the upper Euphrates River (see fig.1.1). The city existed from the early third millennium BCE until its destruction by Hammurapi around 1760 BCE. We have extensive archives from the kingdom period of Mari's history, from the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries BCE. The nearly twenty-five thousand documents discovered at Mari cast remarkable light on the Amorite culture and society of the region, even while we have a wealth of other documentation and resources for the Old Babylonian period of Mesopotamian history (ca. 2003–1595 BCE).[a]

In particular, the Mari texts have revealed how Zimri-Lim, a powerful king of Mari during the early eighteenth century BCE, ruled over an Amorite tribal state (specifically, a "Simʾalite" tribal state), balancing his roles as Amorite tribesman and king of an urban-based empire.[b] The tribal culture of Amorite Mari shares proximity in space, language, and chronology with ancient Israel, as the two share a physical region and a family of languages. In most chronological reconstructions, the end of Old Babylonian Mari culture was separated from the beginning of Israel's culture by a few centuries. Therefore, cultural features may easily have been transmitted, borrowed, or otherwise shared between Amorite Mari and early Israel.

In addition to the comparisons between the Mari evidence and Israel's ancestors, we have reason to explore comparisons between Mari and David's united monarchy. The Mari archive has challenged our traditional assumptions that tribal groups necessarily abandoned their patrimonial structures when establishing new urban-based state polities and therefore our assumptions about conflict between "town and tribe." Such comparisons may eventually illuminate even further our understanding of Saul and David as both tribal chieftains and the first royal figures in early Israel.[c]

a. Jean-Claude Margueron, "Mari," *OEANE* 3:413–17.
b. Fleming, "Mari and the Possibilities," 54. The details of this Amorite tribal culture raise fascinating possibilities for homologous comparisons with Israel's ancestors (as opposed to analogous comparisons, which are less direct parallels). On the distinction between "analogy" and "homology," see Jack M. Sasson, "About 'Mari and the Bible,'" *RA* 92 (1998): 97–123, esp. 98–99.
c. Daniel Bodi, *The Demise of the Warlord: A New Look at the David Story* (HBM 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010).

biblical literature, (3) an ability to move between permanent and impermanent buildings (e.g., Gen. 33:17–18), and (4) the possibility that the later Israelite architecture of permanent houses evolved from tent structures.[42] Separately,

42. Michael M. Homan, *To Your Tents, O Israel! The Terminology, Function, Form, and Symbolism of Tents in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (CHANE 12; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 29–59. Although generally favorable toward nomadism, later Israel did not embrace a

each piece of evidence is inconclusive, but together they converge to lead us to this general conclusion: "It is unlikely that someone would invent a tent-dwelling heritage were it not true."[43] This conclusion about the improbability of later Israelite authors inventing such a feature of their ancestral heritage is one that can be repeated, as we will see, when we consider a number of religious features of the ancestral narratives.

However, such a nomadic or seminomadic and pastoralist heritage for Israel's ancestors is not completely disconnected from the land. Each of the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—is closely associated with specific geographic regions of the promised land, and even with specific villages and cities within those regions. So the children of Jacob settled in the central hills of what would become northern Israel, especially in the area north and northeast of Shechem (Gen. 33:18; 35:4).[44] His grandfather Abraham is associated with the southern highlands, around Hebron and its open-air sanctuary at Mamre (e.g., Gen. 13:18; 18:1). Isaac appears to have lived in the Negev around Beersheba (Gen. 26:23). The Genesis narratives do not portray Israel's ancestors as vagabonds or nomadic drifters, moving from place to place, with no association or connection to the settled areas. On the contrary, they appear as tribal chieftains, connected to the settled areas and interacting with the local inhabitants. In this way, Israel's ancestors appear in the Genesis narratives with both tribal and pastoralist features, again perhaps related to the older Amorite tribal culture illustrated in the Mari archives, showing how tribal structures related to the older settled society.[45]

The religious expressions and practices of Israel's ancestors, as portrayed in the Genesis account, are quite different from later Israelite religion. Perhaps the most obvious is the name of the God they worshiped, which is almost always an "El"-type name (e.g., "El-Shaddai" [Gen. 17:1]; "El-Elyon" [Gen. 14:18]), rather than "Yahweh" as defined and worshiped by later Israelites. The concept of "holiness" so central to later Mosaic conceptions of relating to God (from Exod. 3:5 onward) is missing in the ancestral accounts of Genesis. Not only that, but also ancestral worship was unmediated; it was not regulated by a priest or prophet. Israel's ancestors worshiped in open-air sanctuaries near trees

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romantic notion of nomadic life, making it unlikely that they invented such a tradition about their origins from thin air. See Kenton L. Sparks, "Israel and the Nomads of Ancient Palestine," in *Community Identity in Judean Historiography: Biblical and Comparative Perspectives* (ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Kenneth A. Ristau; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 9–26.

43. Homan, *To Your Tents*, 45.

44. For conjecture about the historical circumstances that led to their departure from northern Mesopotamia in the second millennium BCE, see André Lemaire, "La haute Mésopotamie et l'origine des Benê Jacob," *VT* 34 (1984): 95–101.

45. See Fleming, "Mari and the Possibilities"; idem, "Genesis in History."

Figure 1.2.

Abram travels to Egypt
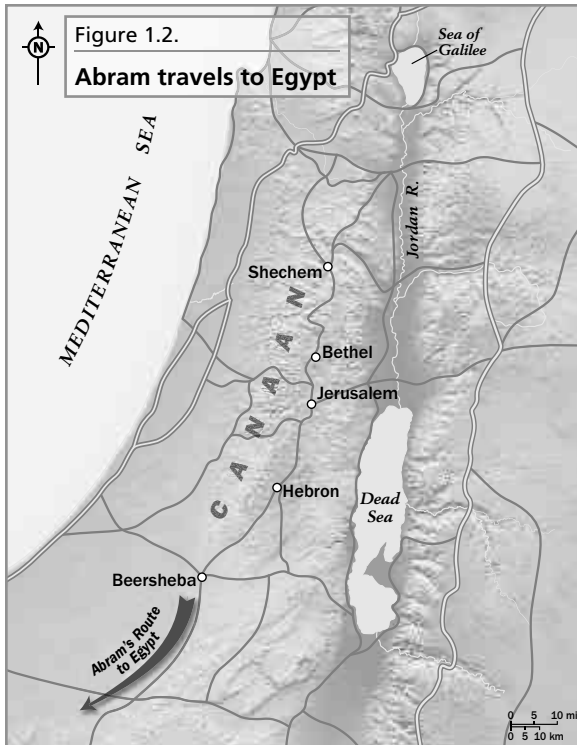
(e.g., Gen. 12:6–7; 13:18) or pillars (e.g., Gen. 28:18; 31:13), apparently unaware of any prohibitions against the worship of Baal or injunctions against Canaanite religious expression. Later religious festivals and holy days receive hardly any attention in the ancestral narratives. Israel's ancestors related to the religions of the surrounding peoples without hostility and, in at least one case, with open acceptance (Gen. 14:17–21).[46] These features and others mark the religion of Israel's ancestors as distinct from the Mosaic Yahwism of the rest of the Pentateuch and from later Israel as reflected in the Historical Books and the Prophets. The data suggest that the Genesis traditions about the religion of Israel's ancestors are genuinely ancient and pre-Yahwistic: "The depiction of religion in Genesis 12–50 may indeed have a claim to origins in part from the period prior to the emergence of Israel as a national Yahweh-worshiping community."[47]

All of this points to the conclusion that Israel's ancestors known to us in the Genesis accounts were real individuals, living during a period of time only imprecisely understood but likely in the Bronze Age, and at some distance from the authors of the biblical texts. The extrabiblical evidence does not

46. For a more complete list of features of ancestral religion, see the convenient summary in Hess, *Israelite Religions*, 149–51. In a more theological, even homiletical vein, John Oswalt has argued the Bible's claims that it derived its understanding of reality, an understanding radically distinct from all others in the ancient world, directly from the "human-historical experiences" of Abraham, which Oswalt contends is a strong argument for the historicity of Abraham ("Abraham's Experience of Yahweh: An Argument for the Historicity of the Patriarchal Narrative," in *Perspectives on Our Father Abraham: Essays in Honor of Marvin R. Wilson* [ed. Steven A. Hunt and Marvin R. Wilson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 33–43, esp. 42).

47. Hess, *Israelite Religions*, 151.

demand the historicity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but "it certainly allows it, in accord with the biblical data."[48] Israel understood these accounts to be fundamentally factual, and without that factuality "the patriarchal narratives have sense but not reference."[49]

The Joseph Narrative

As we have seen, the Primeval History is justifiably identified as "mytho-historical" literature. Given what we have seen in the ancestral narratives of Genesis 12–36, those narratives might best be understood as Israel's protohistorical "traditional epic."[50] When we come to the final portion of Genesis, the Joseph narrative (Gen. 37–50), we find a different type of literature altogether, one that is most often identified as a "novel" because of its continuous story line with multiple scenes, carefully plotted suspense, and artfully crafted denouement.[51] For some, this genre identification means that these chapters are complete works of fiction, or that they must be an artistic invention of the author. But such an assumption is not necessary. We might just as easily think of the Joseph novel in terms of a "historical" novel, written with a high degree of literary sophistication, which does not, however, preclude authentic historical features of the account.[52] We have seen that genuine historical memories can be preserved in "secondary" and later sources, and similarly they can easily be preserved in artful and polished literary compositions. We should not presume a skeptical approach to the text simply because it is well written.

48. Alan R. Millard, "Abraham," *ABD* 1:40.

49. John Goldingay, "The Patriarchs in Scripture and History," in Millard and Wiseman, *Patriarchal Narratives*, 29. For the philosophical foundations for a "qualified correspondent" theory of truth emerging among nonminimalists working in the field, see Megan Bishop Moore, *Philosophy and Practice in Writing a History of Ancient Israel* (LHBOTS 435; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 29–31, 108–35, 183.

50. Frank Moore Cross, "Traditional Narrative and the Reconstruction of Early Israelite Institutions," in *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (ed. Frank Moore Cross; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 22–52; David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); Abraham Malamat, "The Proto-History of Israel: A Study in Method," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. Carol L. Meyers and Michael Patrick O'Connor; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 303–13.

51. Arnold, *Genesis*, 17, 313–17. The Joseph novel itself in the narrower sense is Gen. 37; 39–45; and bits of Gen. 46–50. Provan, Long, and Longman (*Biblical History*, 108, 122) refer to the "novella-like Joseph story" and to its "novella-like quality."

52. Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (trans. David Smith; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 295–96.

The task before us, then, is to explore what we can and cannot know about the historical details of the Joseph narrative. As with the Primeval History and ancestral narratives, we have no direct confirmation in extrabiblical evidence for any of the events narrated here. We have no ancient Near Eastern sources naming Jacob or his children. We do not know the name of the pharaoh who knew Joseph, nor do we possess archaeological data confirming Israel's presence in Egypt. In the twentieth century, this absence of evidence led to the conclusion among some that we have no historical traces in the Joseph narrative, and that (together with the ancestral narratives of Genesis) the Joseph narrative is "hardly possible and totally improbable."[53]

Yet no one would deny that there "is no narrative in the Old Testament that reflects so immediately and vividly acquaintance with and wonder at a foreign land" as much as the Joseph narrative reflects ancient Egypt.[54] Since the development of Egyptology as a technical discipline, numerous scholars have investigated the Egyptian background to the Joseph narrative as a means to discern historical realia in the text of Genesis.[55] Of the Egyptian elements that have been investigated, a few of the most pertinent examples are slavery in Egypt, Egyptian personal names, the presence of Semites from Canaan living in the Egyptian Delta, perceptions and practices of dreams and magic in ancient Egypt, and the potential significance of Joseph's investiture and status.[56] Although some of these many Egyptian elements in the Joseph narrative may be denied or contested in their individual particulars, the cumulative weight of the evidence affirms that the picture portrayed in the Joseph narrative is "compatible with what is known from Egyptian history," and that the body of evidence suggests that the main points of the Joseph narrative are "plausible."[57] As with the ancestral narratives of Genesis 12–36, plausibility is the most that we can expect when searching for confirming details of these events.[58]

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53. Thompson, *Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, 328. This conclusion often is accompanied by the assertion that biblical narratives do not need to contain any historical value in order to be true (ibid., 326–30).

54. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37–50: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 29.

55. For convenient introduction to this body of research, see James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 78–79.

56. Ibid., 83–95; Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 343–52; de Vaux, *Early History of Israel*, 297–310.

57. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, 223, 226.

58. The Mari texts discussed above are also pertinent to the pastoralist mode of subsistence illustrated in Joseph and his family (Gen. 37:12–17), leaving us with a picture in the Joseph novel that is, as Daniel Fleming says, "remarkably plausible." See Daniel E. Fleming, "From Joseph to

I close with one particularly striking textual connection between an Egyptian source and the Joseph narrative. The so-called Report of Bedouin is a model letter or scribal exercise from the time of Pharaoh Merneptah (ca. 1213–1203 BCE), referring to certain Shasu tribes that apparently were Semitic pastoralists allowed to enter the eastern Nile Delta peacefully from the region of Edom.

> We have just let the Shasu tribes of Edom pass the Fortress of Merneptah-hetephermaat—Life, Prosperity, Health!—to the pool of Pithom of Merneptah-hetephermaat, of Tjeku, in order to revive themselves and revive their flocks from the great life force of Pharaoh—Life, Prosperity, Health!—the perfect Sun of every land.[59]

The phrase "in order to revive themselves and revive their flocks" is reminiscent of Joseph's assertion that God sent him ahead of his brothers in order to preserve life and "to keep alive" survivors from among them (Gen. 45:5, 7; cf. 47:25). This Egyptian text and others referring to the Shasu confirm the presence of Semitic tribal groups from Syria-Palestine moving to Egypt and rising to positions of power and influence. It would be premature to assume that these pastoralist Shasu tribes were related to the early Israelites. However, their journey and experiences are at least reminiscent of those described in the Joseph narrative for Jacob's family. And the parallel is attractive because of the Bible's witness that Israel and Edom were close relatives (Gen. 25:23–24), and that Yahweh is a deity who emerged from Seir and Edom (Deut. 33:2; Judg. 5:4; Hab. 3:3). In my view, it is plausible, perhaps probable, that the Report of Bedouin reflects the same general social movement represented by the settlement of Jacob's family in the Nile Delta—that is, the movement of Semitic pastoralists (small-cattle shepherds, tending sheep and goats) into the eastern Nile Delta in order to sustain themselves and their livestock, presumably in a time of famine.

David: Mari and Israelite Pastoral Traditions," in *Israel: Ancient Kingdom or Late Invention?* (ed. Daniel I. Block; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 78–96, esp. 84–86.

59. Adapted from the translations by James P. Allen, "A Report of Bedouin," *COS* 3.5:16–17; John A. Wilson, "The Report of a Frontier Official," in *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (ed. James B. Pritchard; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 235–36. Compare also pp. 51–52 below.