The Politics of the Ancestors

Edited by

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Mohr Siebeck

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The Politics of the Ancestors

Exegetical and Historical Perspectives
on Genesis 12–36

Edited by

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in collaboration with Friederike Neumann

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Preface

In Old Testament research, it has long been recognized that the ancestral narratives present not simply a prehistory for the later Israelite people; these narratives rather describe through the ancestors and their kin groups fundamental relationships between the later Israelite people and their neighboring nations. The ancestral narratives treat social convergences and divergences, present conjunctive and disjunctive features, show possibilities and limitations of peaceful coexistence, and even at points display the integration of outsiders. The ancestral narratives thus have a pronounced political character.

In recent scholarship, new insights into the formation of the Pentateuch, as well as new insights into the history of ancient Israel and its neighboring countries, affect also the political interpretation of the ancestral narratives. Several texts, which in previous research were held to be very old, are now read against a late historical background. The political relationships between Israel/Judah and the neighboring nations are, to some extent, seen in a rather different light. Thus, several issues, not least regarding the political interpretation of the ancestral narratives, are controversial at the moment and subject to a comprehensive re-examination.

This volume gives a broad overview of these trends in current research on the ancestral narratives. It evolved out of the papers presented at an international conference that took place on January 15–17, 2016, at the Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg, Germany.

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Mark G. Brett
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Introduction

Mark G. Brett / Jakob Wöhrle

The ancestral narratives of the book of Genesis have a decidedly political character. According to Gen 32:29 Jacob is named Israel and thus, together with his forefathers Abraham und Isaac, he is introduced as the ancestor of the later people of Israel. But in addition, Abraham's nephew Lot is presented as the ancestor of the Ammonites and Moabites, Abraham's firstborn son Ishmael as the ancestor of the Ishmaelites, and Jacob's twin brother Esau as the ancestor of the Edomites. Accordingly, the ancestral narratives reflect self-conceptions of a later Israelite people who are located among neighboring peoples. These narratives treat social convergences and divergences, and illustrate the possibilities and limitations of peaceful coexistence or of the integration of outsiders.

In Old Testament scholarship, this political character of the ancestral narratives has always been acknowledged. However, up to recent times, scholars often claimed that the political outline of the ancestral narratives is just the result of a secondary redactional reworking of these narratives, which, originally, aimed at a different object and intention. For example, according to Hermann Gunkel, the ancestral narratives, or rather the older *Vorstufen* of these texts, should be understood as legends or fairy tales, as stories told in order to touch the hearts of the audience.[1] William Albright, in contrast, thought that the ancestral narratives should be read, in large measure, as historically reliable reports about the (pre-)history of the later people of Israel.[2] And according to Claus Westermann, the ancestral narratives, in their kernel, should be taken as old family stories, which inform the reader about certain family affairs like concerns for offspring, death and inheritance.[3] According to all of these scholars, the older narratives, be they legends, historical reports or family stories, acquired their current political shape – with the protagonists presented as the ancestors of the later people of Israel and their neighboring peoples – not before a late stage of their literary development.

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[1] GUNKEL, Genesis, esp. XIII–XXVI.
[2] ALBRIGHT, Stone Age, esp. 179–189.
[3] WESTERMANN, Genesis II, esp. 1–90.

However, in more recent research, scholars like Erhard Blum could show that the ancestral narratives are from the outset political stories.[4] Already the oldest literary kernels of the ancestral narratives present Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as their relatives as ancestors of the later people of Israel and their neighboring peoples. For example, the birth story of Jacob and Esau describes Esau in Gen 25:25 as being "red" (*'admonî*) and "hairy" (*śeʿār*), and with this wordplay the text clearly alludes to the land of Edom and the mountains of Seir as the dwelling place of the later Edomite people. The ancestral narratives need not be traced back to older legends, historical reports or family stories, which were just secondarily transformed into political narratives. The ancestral narratives are rather from the oldest literary kernels politically shaped. They can be read as etiologies of Israel, through which the ancestors present fundamental issues regarding the formation of the later Israelite community and neighboring people groups.

In current research on the ancestral narratives, some other key assumptions can no longer be held without detailed argument. In older research, scholars explained the formation of the ancestral narratives on the basis of the traditional documentary hypothesis, to which Julius Wellhausen gave its classic form.[5] According to the documentary hypothesis, a first version of the Pentateuch and hence also of the ancestral narratives emerged with the Yahwist, commonly dated not later than the 10th century BCE, i.e., already at the beginning of the monarchic period. Thus, the basic outline of the ancestral narratives and their political concepts had to be explained against the background of this very early time.

In the last few decades, scholarly views about the formation of the Pentateuch have radically diversified.[6] Although there are still important proponents of the documentary hypothesis, for instance in the manner of the so called neo-documentary hypothesis,[7] newer paradigms of Old Testament research (in the German speaking countries, but also beyond) challenge several basic assumptions of this classic theory. Some scholars adhere to the idea of sources but question the early dating of the Yahwist.[8] Moreover, a growing number of scholars have abandoned the documentary hypothesis as a whole.[9] According to their view, the Pentateuch and thus also the ancestral narratives arose out of small individual traditions, which over centuries were enlarged and connected, at first to smaller and then to larger collections. In such mod-

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[4] BLUM, Komposition, esp. 478–506.

[5] WELLHAUSEN, Composition.

[6] For an overview over the recent debate about the formation of the Pentateuch cf. the comprehensive volume GERTZ et al. (ed.), Formation.

[7] BADEN, Composition.

[8] VAN SETERS, Abraham; LEVIN, Jahwist.

[9] Cf. the collected volumes GERTZ et al. (ed.), Abschied; DOZEMAN / SCHMID (ed.), Farewell; GERTZ et al. (ed.), Formation.

els, the Pentateuchal framing of the primeval history, ancestral narratives and the exodus story emerged not before a very late stage. The connections between these elements stand at the end and not at the beginning of the formation of the Pentateuch.

These radical changes in recent Pentateuchal scholarship are also of major importance for the political interpretation of the ancestral narratives. While older research had to explain large parts of the ancestral narratives, and the political concepts implied by these texts, as stemming from the early monarchic times, recent approaches are able to explain these narratives in a more differentiated way. It is now possible to trace multi-levelled literary developments of the ancestral narratives, occurring over centuries – from the early monarchic period down to the later Persian times. This allows us to appreciate a multi-faceted history of the ever-new reflections upon the relationship between Israel and the neighboring peoples.

This volume offers comprehensive insights into such new approaches to the political contours of the ancestral narratives. The articles focus upon a range of important topics regarding the political intention of the ancestral narratives, considering each of their component elements and at various literary levels.

The first part of the volume treats significant political threads of the ancestral narratives. *Ronald Hendel* in his introductory article "Politics and Poetics in the Ancestral Narratives" reads this material as a "biography of a nation" which unfolds with a poetic imagination. Making use of anthropological models, he finds different views of the relationship between the central people group and their neighbors. He shows, for example, how the ancestral narratives time and again contrast the ancestors and their relatives as civilized / human on the one hand and barbarian / wild on the other, but how, especially in later phases of the narratives' literary development, this construct is softened in order to show a more peaceful coexistence of the ancestors and their relatives.

Reinhard G. Kratz' article "Die Verheißungen an die Erzväter: Die Konstruktion ethnischer Identität Israels" gives a comprehensive overview of the different promises to the ancestors, their significance for the formation of the ancestral narratives as well as the political concepts behind the various literary levels. According to Kratz, the older promises like Gen 12:1–3 present a certain self-perception of the later Israelite people, which is independent from kingship and state and thus, according to his view, emerged after the downfall of the northern kingdom. The later promises within the priestly texts (Gen 17) or the post-priestly texts (Gen 15) then further develop this concept with regard to questions of lineage or the inheritance of the land.

In her article "What if They're Foreign? Inner-Legal Exegesis in the Ancestral Narratives," *Megan Warner* shows how late texts of the ancestral narratives deal with and further develop issues of the legal tradition, especial-

ly concerning the question of ethnicity. For example, the story about the expulsion of Ishmael in Gen 21:8–21 interacts with the law about the rights of the firstborn in Deut 21:15–17. The Genesis text highlights the significance of the ethnicity of the mother, which the Deuteronomic law leaves unconsidered. However, other narratives like the subsequent story about the sacrifice of Isaac Gen 22:1–19 undermine a more exclusivist view of Gen 21:8–21 so that the ancestral narratives as a whole give a differentiated, well-balanced interpretation of the Deuteronomic law.

Konrad Schmid's article "Die Priesterschrift als antike Historiographie: Quellen und Darstellungsweise der politischen und religiösen Geschichte der Levante in den priesterschriftlichen Erzelternerzählungen" explains the political concept of the priestly passages within the ancestral narratives against the background of the early Persian period. He deals, for example, with the inclusivist theological concept of P, according to which it is one and the same God, the creator of the earth, who stands behind the different religions of the peoples. Additionally, P pursues the (Persian) concept of a world divided in different people with their respective countries and presents this as the God-given and final state of the world.

A universalizing tendency in the ancestral narratives' theology is also the central topic of *Mark G. Brett's* article "YHWH among the Nations: The Politics of Divine Names in Genesis 15 and 24." These two chapters clearly differ from P texts on some key points, and Brett shows that the late Hexateuchal texts Gen 15 and 24 share not only the divine name YHWH, but they present YHWH'S territory as stretched across the whole Persian empire. Additionally, these post-Priestly texts stress that the adherence to YHWH is more important than endogamy or even obedience to the law. Developing quite different theologies of divine naming, both P and the Hexateuchal redactions provide critical alternatives to the exclusivist Judean politics of the circles behind the books of Ezra–Nehemiah.

Beginning with a thematic literary approach, the article by *Yairah Amit,* "The Place of Exile in the Ancestors' Narratives and in their Framework," emphasizes the significance of exile for understanding the ancestral narratives. Time and again these narratives describe how the ancestors have to leave the land, but they also return. The ancestors can thus be understood as models for exemplary exiles. Through the ancestral protagonists, these narratives show that exile is part of human life, which may even have its advantages, especially when it is restricted to a temporary phase in the people's story.

The second part of the volume treats the political significance of the matriarchs. *Sarah Shectman* in her article "Israel's Matriarchs: Political Pawns or Powerbrokers?" shows that unlike the patriarchs, whose families embrace several sub-lineages, the matriarchs establish exactly these sub-lineages. It is precisely the different wives of the patriarchs who, in these narratives, effect

the separation of the ancestors and their relatives into several, though related, kinship groups.

Besides this more exclusivist tendency, *Irmtraud Fischer* in her article "Rahel und Lea bauten ganz Israel auf – Rebekka ermöglichte eine gemeinsame Identität" shows that the matriarchs fulfill also a more inclusivist function when they mediate, in some of the ancestral narratives, between the ancestors of the later Northern kingdom and the later Southern kingdom. For example, Isaac, the son of Abraham, the ancestor of the South, marries Rebekah, the mother of Jacob, the ancestor of the North. Similarly, the wives of Jacob – Leah (the mother of Judah) and Rachel (the mother of Joseph) – also correlate with the later people from the South and from the North.

The third part of the volume deals with political issues regarding the Abraham and the Jacob narrative. *Oded Lipschits* in his article "Abraham zwischen Mamre und Jerusalem" traces the history of the Abraham tradition from its earliest stages up to its present shape. Based upon literary and archaeological considerations, he claims that Abraham originally was a local figure memorialized around the cultic site of Mamre near Hebron. In the early monarchic period, when Hebron was integrated into the kingdom of Judah, Abraham became an ancestor of the whole south. In later, post-exilic times, due to the combination of the Abraham and the Jacob traditions, the significance of Abraham was then enhanced to become an ancestor for all Israel.

Thomas Römer in his article "Die politische Funktion der vorpriesterlichen Abrahamtexte" treats the formation and the political intention of the older pre-priestly Abraham narratives. The oldest kernel of these narratives, the story about Abraham and Lot in Gen 13*; 18–19*, deals with the relationship between an in-group and the Ammonites and Moabites. Through Abraham and Lot, the narrative highlights the peaceful coexistence between the core community and these neighbors. An even more integrative tendency can be seen in the later narratives about Hagar and Ishmael, which show that the God of Abraham is also their God and thus the God of the later Ishmaelites.

In his article "Hagar und Ismael: Politische Aspekte im Wandel der Überlieferungen," *Matthias Köckert* challenges the common assumption that Ishmael stands for the Arabian tribe *šumuʾil* known from extra-biblical sources. According to his view, Ishmael has rather to be seen as the ancestor of nomadic Arab groups more generally. By referring to Ishmael, the ancestral narratives reflect upon the relationship between Israel and these nomadic groups, especially with regard to the inheritance of the land. The texts suggest that these nomadic groups have no share in the land of Canaan and thus need to restrict themselves to their own territories.

The article "Abraham Traditions and Cult Politics in the Persian Period: *Moriyyāh* and *Šalēm* in Genesis" by *Christoph Nihan* provides a new explanation of the references to the place names *Moriyyāh* in Gen 22 and *Šalēm* in

Gen 14. According to Nihan, *Moriyyāh* stands for the cultic center of Samaria in Shechem, while *Šalēm* stands for the Judean cultic center in Jerusalem. On this basis, the ancestral narratives present the integrative view that both of these cult places can be traced back to Abraham and are thus equally legitimate.

Omer Sergi's article "Jacob and the Aramaean Identity of Ancient Israel between the Judges and the Prophets" focuses on the historical background of the early Jacob story. He argues that through Jacob and Laban an early narrative reflects the relationship between the northern Jacob clan and the Aramean Laban clan, both of whom lived around the transitional zone of the Gilead. It describes close affinities between Jacob and Laban and thus it points to an Aramean identity of the people of Israel. Additionally, however, it also describes the separation of Jacob and Laban, which marks a political separation (possibly beginning in the 8th century BCE) between the groups descendant from these ancestors.

In his article "Koexistenz durch Unterwerfung: Zur Entstehung und politischen Intention der vorpriesterlichen Jakoberzählung," *Jakob Wöhrle* explains the formation and the political outline of the Jacob narrative. He reconstructs an older Jacob-Esau-story, which through the ancestors envisages a political subjugation of the Edomites. Later authors, however, connected the Jacob-Esau-story with the Jacob-Laban-story and added a new ending to this combination in Gen 32–33, which now describes Jacob's self-submission before Esau. It its current form, the Jacob narrative thus depicts nothing else than the abandonment of older imperial expectations and opts for the people's self-submission before the Edomites, suggesting that this should lead finally to a peaceful coexistence between these two people groups.

Christian Frevel in his article "'Esau, der Vater Edoms' (Gen 36,9.43): Ein Vergleich der Edom-Überlieferungen in Genesis und Numeri vor dem Hintergrund der historischen Entwicklung" investigates the territorial concepts for Edom detectable behind the Jacob-Esau-narratives in Gen 25–36 and the book of Numbers. He shows that most parts of Genesis and Numbers locate the Edomite territory not, as often supposed, east of the Arabah, on the Edomite plateau, but rather in the southern Negev. Against this background he explains the different geographical concepts behind the references to Edom in Genesis and Numbers and relates them to specific historical and political situations from the 9th century down to Persian times.

The final part of the volume gives exemplary insights into the political reception of the ancestral narratives in early Jewish literature and in Islam. In his article "The Reception of the Abraham Narrative in the Book of Jubilees" *Jacques T.A.G.M. van Ruiten* shows how the book of Jubilees takes up and develops the ambiguous depiction of the Abraham narrative into a more exclusivist one. It uses the Abraham narrative to plead for the separation from the nations and, especially, to warn of mixed marriages. With this, the book

of Jubilees reveals the most extreme position within the early reception history of the Abraham narrative.

However, as *Beate Ego* shows in her article "'Nimm dir eine Frau aus dem Geschlecht deiner Väter' (Tob 4,12): Die Rezeption der Erzelternerzählung im Tobitbuch," not only the book of Jubilees, but also the book of Tobit uses and develops the ancestral narratives in a rather exclusivist way. The book of Tobit takes up certain motives from the ancestral narratives in order to substantiate and legitimize the imperative for endogamy. In presenting the protagonists of the Tobit story in line with the ancestors, the book of Tobit suggests that they are worthy descendants of the ancestors and thus part of the real Israel.

George Brooke in his article "The Politics of the Patriarchs in the Dead Sea Scrolls," gives a comprehensive overview of the political reception of the ancestral narratives in the Dead Sea Scrolls. These scrolls refer again and again to the ancestral narratives and relate these narratives to the specific time and situation of the Qumran community. The political receptions of the ancestral narratives within the Dead Sea Scrolls focus, for example, upon the specific ethnos of Yehud, the inheritance, control and extent of the land, the status and role of Jerusalem and of the Hebrew language.

Finally, in his article "The 'Other' Ishmael in Islamic Scripture and Tradition," *Reuven Firestone* traces the reception of Ishmael/Ismāʿīl in the Qurʾan. In particular, he illuminates a rarely considered reference to a person called Ismāʿīl, who, at all likelihood, is not Ismāʿīl, the son of Abraham, but rather a martyr from the time of the separation between the Sunnī and Shiʿa communities. Not least by taking up features from the earlier Ishmael/Ismāʿīl tradition, the presentation of this "other" Ishmael receives its specific political character.

The current volume thus provides a wide range of insights into the political implications of the ancestral narratives. These narratives are the product of a centuries-long debate about the formation of a people, and about the contested relationships between this people and neighboring groups. The texts show both exclusivist and inclusivist tendencies. There is evidence of a will to political separation, at various times, but also a readiness to overcome divisive factors in search of peaceful coexistence. Several essays show how the narrative proposals for peaceful coexistence are especially clear in the social imagination of the Priestly traditions.

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Part I

Political Threads
in the Ancestral Narratives

Politics and Poetics in the Ancestral Narratives

Ronald Hendel

> *Genealogy is an imagined thing.*
> Ibn Khaldun[1]

The ancestral narratives in Genesis 12–36 are what Benedict Anderson calls a "biography of a nation." By "nation" he means "an imagined political community ... imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[2] Ancient Israel was such a political community, and the ancestral narratives are one mode by which it imagined itself into being. The narratives provide a medium for "apprehending the world, which ... made it possible to 'think' the nation."[3] The ancestral narratives are, in this respect, deeply political, since they are a discursive means of collective self-fashioning.

Although politics and poetics are usually regarded as two discrete domains, one having to do with social institutions and the other with literary art, the ancestral stories combine both domains. Any attempt to analyze their meanings that isolates the one from the other – drawing a boundary between politics and poetics – is bound to be inadequate. Politics and poetics are words that rhyme (as do their Aristotelian ancestors, πολιτική and ποιητική), and they also conceptually rhyme in these narratives. Politics and poetics comprise a complex dialectic, in which literary art and ethnic self-fashioning come together.

In this essay I will address two salient aspects of this relationship of poetics and politics in the ancestral narratives. First, I will discuss the ways that genealogical narratives project a map of ethnic relationships in time and space. Second, I will explore the representational poetics of these ethnic relationships, focusing on the contrasting traits of civilization and barbarism in the characters of the ancestors. Through these semiotic means – genealogical

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[1] IBN KHALDUN, Muqaddimah §1.2.8: "al-nasabu amrun wahmiyyun," quoted in RHANI, Genealogy, 47. My thanks to Asad Ahmed for the translation.
[2] ANDERSON, Communities, 6.204. See PARDES, Biography.
[3] ANDERSON, Communities, 22.

world-maps and conceptual contrasts of civilization and barbarism – these narratives constitute an ethnopoetics, a way of fashioning the *ethnos* and its cultural boundaries through the magical realism of ancestral memories.[4]

Preliminary Postulates

In my description of the ancestral narratives as political-literary discourses, I am making several interrelated claims, some of which are controversial in contemporary biblical scholarship. The following two positions cannot be fully unpacked or defended here, but I wish to flag them in order to acknowledge their conditionality, and so that those with different positions can – perhaps – practice a suspension of disbelief in order to entertain my larger analysis.

1. There was a pre-exilic "imagined community" that defined itself by genealogical descent from Jacob/Israel. This community included northern and southern tribes, and this ascription of genealogical descent was a cross-cutting feature during the divided monarchy. I base this inference on biblical texts from different genres – tribal poetry, prophecy, and narrative – and from different provenances (north and south), which refer to the people as the descendants of Jacob/Israel, often using the two names in parallel.[5] The kinship terms "children of Jacob/Israel" and "house of Jacob/Israel" are multivalent, and in some uses refer solely to the northern tribes or kingdom. However, in other uses they refer to the southern tribes or kingdom, as in texts from Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah that arguably stem from the eighth-seventh century BCE.[6] These texts indicate a cultural memory of ancestral descent from Jacob/Israel that was shared by northern and southern tribes in the Iron II period.
2. The ancestral narratives in Genesis 12–36 are literary crystallizations and reinterpretations of oral narrative traditions that were widely known in this community. Hence, when Hosea, Micah, or Jeremiah refer or allude to Jacob (Hos 12:2–13; Mic 3:9; Jer 9:3), their contemporary audience would have been able to identify the narrative relationships that these discourses activate.[7] Similarly, when the exilic prophets Ezekiel and Second Isaiah re-

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[4] This essay develops ideas sketched previously in HENDEL, Abraham, 105–107 ("Genealogical Time"); IDEM, Epic, 111–131 ("Jacob and Esau").

[5] Jacob/Israel in parallel: in tribal and early poetry: Gen 49:2; Num 23:7, 10, 21, 23; 24:5, 17; Deut 33:10, 28; in classical prophecy: Hos 12:13; Isa 5:7; 9:7; Mic 1:5; 3:1, 8–9; Jer 2:4; in non-P narrative: Exod 19:3.

[6] See WILLIAMSON, Judah; KRATZ, Israel; FLEMING, Legacy, 47–55.

[7] See ZAKOVITCH, Interpretation, 106–108; BLUM, Hosea.

fer to Abraham as the people's ancestor (Ezek 33:24; Isa 51:2), their contemporary audience would already identify with this ascription of genealogical descent.[8] However, I do not think it likely that the Iron II or exilic audiences knew these stories from the text of Genesis 12–36 or its constituent sources (even though I ascribe the composition of the major non-P sources [viz. J and E] to the Neo-Assyrian period).[9] The general features – protagonists, conflicts, genealogical relationships – of these narratives were arguably part of the cultural memory of ancient Israel in this period. That is, the stories that "made it possible to 'think' the nation," in Anderson's terms, were known to that nation, even if in a different form or medium (oral tradition) than we have them in Genesis.

Here, following Erhard Blum, I maintain a distinction between the conceptual content and the literary formulations of the ancestral narratives. For the ancestral narratives, Blum writes, "the conceptual and the literary context must be strictly distinguished."[10] Against those who would see the extant literary texts as the *origin* of their conceptual content, I claim that the literary formulations of the ancestral narratives presuppose a repertoire of cultural memories, which were multiform and revisable. To use the terms of linguistics, I assume a cultural *langue* of which the texts are instances of *parole*.

Genealogical Time and Space

In tribal and kinship-based cultures such as ancient Israel, genealogies and ancestral narratives provide a conceptual map for political relationships and other current practices. By these discursive means, such cultures root the present in the authoritative past. As Andrew Shryock observes for the "genealogical imagination" in modern Bedouin culture:

Genealogies are both a structure and a history. It would be wrong to conclude from this fact (as so many ethnographers do) that tribal history is not really about the past; more to the point, the past, for tribespeople, is obviously inseparable from the present. History is *now* as it happened *then*.[11]

The dynamics of the genealogical imagination are clearly at work in the ancestral narratives of Genesis. The stories and the genealogical relationships are about the past *in* the present, using the past to organize and make intelli-

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[8] See RÖMER, Abraham, 161–169.

[9] See HENDEL, Context, 52–63. This argument is supported on different grounds by the literary revisions of J and E texts (including the Covenant Code) in Deuteronomy; see, e.g., BADEN, Redaction; LEVINSON, Deuteronomy; OTTO, Deuteronomium.

[10] BLUM, Verbindung, 88.

[11] SHRYOCK, Nationalism, 35.

gible the complex relationships of the present world. As we can see throughout the Pentateuch and Former Prophets, genealogical relationships inform many political relationships, including alliances and rivalries, and provide a web of connections that makes the socio-political world thinkable and navigable.

Genealogies are an ideological model that connect time and space. As Anne Porter writes about Near Eastern tribe- and kin-based societies, "kinship itself was, and is, the means of time-space distanciation."[12] Genealogies encode socio-political relationships into what Edward E. Evan-Pritchard calls the dimensions of "structural time" and "structural space."[13] In a genealogy, the temporal depth of the common ancestor (viz. structural time) correlates with social or territorial distance (viz. structural space) in any given relationship. The following diagram illustrates this correlation. The baseline from A to B is social distance in the present, and the broken lines meet at the latest common ancestor:[14]

A   B
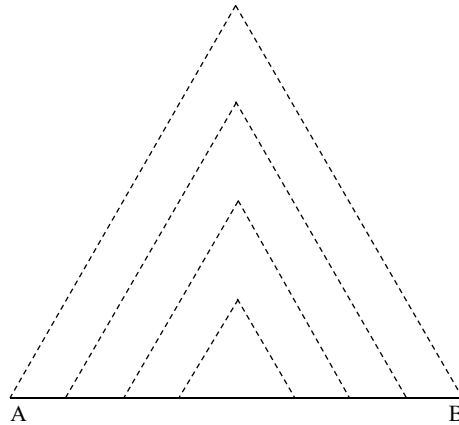
The more distant the "structural space" of the current socio-political relationship, the deeper is the "structural time" of the common ancestor. This is the language of genealogical time and space in the ancestral stories of Genesis. It roots present relationships in the ancestral past, and uses a scale of social and territorial distance to determine the depth of the connective past.

In the ancestral genealogy, there is a strong boundary in structural space-time between internal relationships, viz. internal to the community of Israel, and external relationships, viz. with foreign peoples. The internal relation-

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[12] PORTER, Dimorphism, 208.
[13] EVANS-PRITCHARD, Nuer, 104–110; see also GLUCKMAN, Politics, 273–275. On the utility of this type of analysis for ancient Near Eastern genealogical texts, see WILCKE, Thought.
[14] See EVANS-PRITCHARD, Nuer, 106.

ships descend from Jacob/Israel, who is the latest common ancestor for the twelve tribes, and the external relationships descend from more distant ancestors – Isaac, Abram, Lamech, and extending back to Noah. The ancestral genealogy in Genesis 12–36 is organized in four generations of structural time, each featuring the latest common ancestor of a set of current polities or segments. The first three tiers relate Israel to external polities, and the fourth tier maps Israel's internal segments:

<pre>
                    1. Terah
        ↙   ↓   ↘
     Abram   Nahor   Haran
        ↓   ↓   ↓
     Isaac   Aram (12 sons)   Lot
        ↓   ↓
  Jacob/Israel   Ammon and Moab

                    2. Abram
        ↙   ↓   ↘
  Ishmaelites   Isaac   South Arabians
(of Hagar, 12 sons) (of Sarah)   (of Qeturah)

                    3. Isaac
              ↙   ↘
       Esau (Edom)   Jacob/Israel

                 4. Jacob/Israel
                       ↓
        12 sons/tribes and one daughter
          (of four wives and co-wives)
</pre>
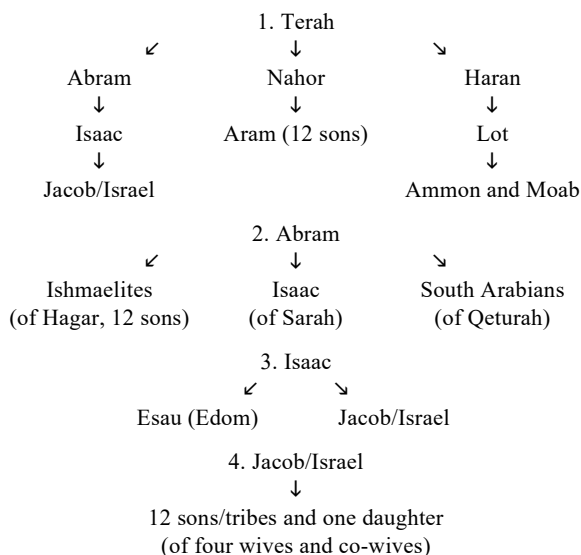
It is not immediately clear why the external polities are arranged in this order. If we take geography into account, we may be able to see how these relationships fit together by relationships of distance and contiguity. Starting from the first tier, Aram is a relatively distant region from Israel. It is centered on "the land of Nahor" (the middle Euphrates region) and extends eastward into Mesopotamia and westward to the northern Transjordan (Nahor's younger son Maacah is an Aramean region east of the Sea of Galilee).[15] Aram is like Israel in having twelve segments (Nahor's twelve sons), but is distant in structural space and time. Israel has a relatively higher status than Aram, since it is descended from Terah's firstborn son. The status of the firstborn son, however, will be complicated in the next generations.

Ammon and Moab are arguably structurally distant from Israel because they are contiguous with Aram. That is, they are grouped together in a north-south axis of Transjordanian peoples. According to this configuration, the contiguity of Ammon and Moab with Aram to the north has greater salience

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[15] Gen 22:24; see Deut 3:14; Josh 13:11, etc.; and recently BERLEJUNG, Arameans, 342–344.

than their contiguity with Edom to the south. It is not clear why this should be so – because the polities of Aram were older or more influential? – but this link illustrates the associative logic of genealogical networks in time and space.

The structural distance of the next tier – South Arabians and Ishmaelites – also correlates with geography. These are peoples of the Levantine deserts to the south and east of Israel. Ishmael dwells in "the wilderness of Paran" south of Edom (Gen 21:21; E), and his descendants dwell from Egypt to Assyria in the Levantine deserts (Gen 25:18; P). The sons of Qeturah dwell in the "land of the east" in the Arabian desert (Gen 25:1–6; J). Since these peoples are more distant than Edom, they are farther away in structural time and space. The first two tiers could be interchanged in terms of structural distance, but the Aramean/Middle Euphrates link is a better beginning point in structural time because it is the locale of Abram's "house of the father," the ancestral homeland where his journey begins.[16]

In the third tier, the structural proximity of Edom to Israel correlates with its territorial proximity. The kinship between Jacob/Israel and Esau/Edom may also rely on another kind of territorial-cultural bond. As scholars have long noted, YHWH's associations with Edom, Seir, and Teman in archaic and classical poetry (Deut 33:2; Judg 5:4; Hab 3:3) correlate with Israel's "brotherhood" with Edom.[17] This could be part of the reason for the structural closeness with Edom, as contrasted with the relative structural distance from Ammon and Moab.

Other neighboring peoples – the Philistines and the descendants of Canaan – are even more structurally distant. These neighbors are classed as descendants of Ham (Gen 10:13–19; J), and their common ancestor with Israel – Noah – is far deeper in structural time than Terah's lineage. The ethnic boundaries with these peoples are structurally more distant, for a variety of cultural reasons, than the boundaries with the other Abrahamic and Terahite peoples.[18]

Given the internal semantics of these configurations, it is difficult to argue that the genealogical structure is a secondary literary overlay on the stories. Rather, the genealogical relationships are part of the conceptual content – or better, the repertoire of cultural memory – that the narratives articulate. The genealogical relationships and conflicts are what the stories narrate, leading inevitably to the *telos* of the genealogical present, which is the people of Israel.

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[16] In P the journey begins in Ur of the Chaldeans; this is arguably a revision of the earlier tradition in which the homeland is in Haran; see HENDEL, Context, 61–62 and references.

[17] See, e.g., SMITH, Memoirs, 27–28.153–154.

[18] See, e.g., HENDEL, Abraham, 11; CRÜSEMANN, Solidarity, 70–71.

The dialectic between the genealogy and the stories is aptly described by Blum:

The stories of origins (*Ursprungsgeschichten*) tell family stories with which the hearers/readers see themselves in a continuity of descent. In addition, the narrated world and the addressees' world are *etiologically* correlated. In this correlation it is essential that the ancestors as characters in a plot do not "stand for" ancient tribes or peoples, but they *are* those tribes or peoples.[19]

I would emphasize that the "family" that the stories narrate include not just Israel and its tribes, but Israel and its external neighbors, who are members of an extended family. In the ancestral stories of Genesis 12–36, the rivalries are between the lineal ancestors of Israel and the ancestors of these other peoples.

In sum, while there was probably some fluidity in these genealogical relationships in the cultural memories of the north and south (e.g., Abram may have had a less prominent role in northern traditions, since in our texts he is mostly associated with southern locales), it is difficult to divorce the genealogical structure *in toto* from the individual ancestral stories. In light of the importance of genealogical time and space in political relations in tribal societies, it would be surprising if this importance did not obtain throughout Israelite history. That is, these genealogical relationships were arguably a property of the general conceptual content of ancient Israelite traditions as well as their specific literary formulations. If the ancestral stories are the "biography of a nation," then it is self-evident that relationships with other nations are a central part of this biography. Politics and the poetics are bound together in the spatiotemporal dialectic of ancestral narratives and genealogies.

The Ethnopoetics of Civilization and Barbarism

By "ethnopoetics" I mean the strategies, tropes, and generic conventions that were native to ancient Israelite literary practices. In the current context, I also mean the way that these literary practices constructed ancient Israel's collective identity as an *ethnos*, including its boundaries and relationships with other *ethnoi*. Poetics refers to literary "making" (ποίησις), and I refer here to the making of narrative and ethnic identity.

Ethnopoetics presumes the existence of an ethnic group, which is also a controverted topic. I rely on the sociological concept that was clearly enunciated by Max Weber:

We shall call 'ethnic groups' those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent ... [T]his belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists ... it is

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[19] BLUM, *Jacob*, 186.

primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity. This belief tends to persist even after the disintegration of the political community.[20]

In this definition, we can see how ethnicity is a "subjective" or culturally constructed property that can correspond to a territorial polity and can also transcend it, as in the case of ancient Israel and post-destruction and diasporic Judaism. More important, it emphasizes that ethnicity is deeply rooted in the concept of common descent and the dynamics of the genealogical imagination.

The ancestral narratives – and their conceptual content – construct the ethnic boundaries for ancient Israel, defining its relationships with ethnic "others" and writing a script for the collective "self." As Andreas Wimmer writes, the system of ethnic boundaries "divides the social world into social groups – into 'us' and 'them' – and ... offers scripts of action – how to relate to individuals classified as 'us' and 'them' under given circumstances."[21] The genealogical narratives not only describe ethnic relationships, but also provide maps for negotiating them. Through its construction of ethnic boundaries, the ancestral narratives make it possible to "think" and "act" the nation within a network of ethnic dichotomies and differences.

Where there are boundaries, there is also conflict. Among the Bedouin, as Shryock observes, "History ... is a polemical endeavor, overtly contentious, apologetic and offensive by turns."[22] Part of the "polemical endeavor" of the ancestral stories is a dichotomy between civilization and barbarism, which projects a boundary between Israel and its ethnic others. As Claude Lévi-Strauss demonstrated, the stylized discourses of myth and ritual often use contrasts of nature and culture as signifiers for contrasts of a social nature. He writes, "Men's conceptions of the relations between nature and culture is a function of modifications of their own social relations."[23] This contrast is often mobilized to describe the difference between one's own group – which is civilized and fully human – and foreign others who are characterized as barbarian and wild, living in a state of nature. This is the ethnopoetics of civilization and barbarism.

This discursive trope is a commonplace in the ancient Near East.[24] In the Sumerian text "The Marriage of Martu," the nomadic Amorites are described as savages who do not know the arts of civilization, including religion, cuisine, clothing, knowledge, houses, and burial. They are violent creatures of the wilderness:

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[20] WEBER, Economy, 389. See recently WIMMER, Boundary, and, in biblical studies, BRETT (ed.), Ethnicity.

[21] WIMMER, Boundary, 9.

[22] SHRYOCK, Nationalism, 33.

[23] LÉVI-STRAUSS, Mind, 117.

[24] See HENDEL, Epic, 111–131; MOBLEY, Man; see also KIRK, Myth, 132–171.

Their hands are destructive and their features are those of monkeys; he is one who eats what Nanna forbids and does not show reverence. They never stop roaming about ... they are an abomination to the gods' dwellings. Their ideas are confused; they cause only disturbance. He is clothed in sack-leather ..., lives in a tent, exposed to wind and rain, and cannot properly recite prayers. He lives in the mountains and ignores the places of gods, digs up truffles in the foothills, does not know how to bend the knee, and eats raw flesh. He has no house during his life, and when he dies he will not be carried to a burial-place.[25]

In the Gilgamesh epic, Enkidu is created as a wild and hairy man of the wilderness, who is ignorant of cooked food, clothing, sex, and beer.[26] Egyptian descriptions of the "vile Asiatic" partake of the same dichotomy of barbarism versus (Egyptian) civilization.[27] This contrast of civilization versus barbarism is a central feature of the ethnopoetics of Genesis 12–36.

The polemical quality of ethnic boundary making is also turned around and mobilized against the ethnic "self" in the ancestral narratives, and in the allusions to the ancestral stories in the classical prophets where Jacob's deceptions are recalled to impugn the people and their ancestry (esp. Hos 12:2–13; Jer 9:3). Revolving ascriptions of praise and blame, honor and shame, are endemic to the poetics of genealogical narratives.

The clash of civilization and barbarism in the ancestral stories of Genesis communicates a scale of values, in which civilization is held to be superior to its opposite. This scale of values also parcels out honor and shame. Shameful behavior correlates with uncivilized existence, and honorable behavior epitomizes civilized values. The imagery of civilization and barbarism in these narratives is a literary actualization – an "objective correlative" – of the code of honor and shame.

Yet this code is complicated – particularly in the J narratives – by a countervailing tendency: a critical sensibility toward Israel's ancestors. As commentators have long observed, in many stories Israel's ancestors are far from perfect. Abram's ruse during the descent to Egypt in Genesis 12 preserves his life at the expense of Sarah's honor. He is called out for this fault by the Egyptian Pharaoh, and Abram stands silent. Sarah behaves cruelly to her maidservant, Hagar, and Abram is again silent. Jacob is a trickster in his manipulation of Esau, and his mother Rebekah is also a trickster in their joint deception of Isaac. Jacob pays a price for his deceptions in the later series of tricks and counter-tricks with Laban in Haran, and in his sons' deception of him in the story of Joseph. There is irony and domestic humor in several of these stories, but their self-critical nature in a "biography of a nation" is quite striking. The oppositionality of genealogical narrative has both an outward

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[25] The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature: http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr171.htm.

[26] See recently WESTENHOLZ / KOCH-WESTENHOLZ, Enkidu.

[27] See BRESCIANI, Foreigners.

force – in constructing ethnic boundaries with neighboring foreign peoples – and an inward force in the self-criticism of Israel's ancestors. Notably, as we will see, these complications disappear in the P counter-version of the ancestral narrative.

Let us turn to examine of the ethnopoetics of civilization and barbarism in the representations of character in the first three tiers of the ancestral genealogy: Abram and Lot (father of Ammon and Moab); Isaac and Ishmael (father of the Ishmaelites), and Jacob and Esau (father of the Edomites). These foreign peoples are not only territorial neighbors but are also historical peers, having emerged during roughly the same period, in the wake of the Late Bronze – Iron Age transition. The collapse of the Egyptian empire in Canaan precipitated the rise of Israel and the Transjordanian polities, and the domestication of the camel during this period was a spur to the migration of Arab tribes to the Levantine deserts. These peoples are cultural neighbors in time and space, which focalized these ethnic boundaries in Israel's genealogical imagination.

The narratives of these relationships are mostly in the non-P narratives of Genesis 12–36. I will focus on the narratives from the J source (which I regard as a continuous stratum within the non-P Pentateuch),[28] and will comment later on the P accounts.

Abram and Lot (Ammon and Moab)

Lot, Abram's nephew, is a member of Abram's extended family, the "house of your father" (בית אביך, Gen 12:1). Lot accompanies Abram to Canaan for two reasons: (1) Lot's father has died (Gen 11:28), therefore Abram has a claim of social authority over him, and (2) Abram and Sarai have no children, because "Sarah was barren; she had no son" (Gen 11:30). As long as Abram remains childless, Lot is his heir. The concurrence of these two events explains why, when Abram and Sarai journey to Canaan, "Lot went with him" (Gen 12:4). Lot accompanies them to Canaan because of the prerogatives of genealogy.

The cultural contrast between Lot and Abram begins in the land of Canaan with their geographical separation. The cause is contention between their herdsmen: "There was a conflict (ריב) between the herders of Abram's flocks and the herders of Lot's flocks" (Gen 13:7). Abram's response shows him to be an ideal head of household, conducting his family affairs with honor and generosity:

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[28] I prescind from entering here the debates about J and other non-P sources; see HENDEL, God, and the spectrum of views in DOZEMAN et al. (ed.), Pentateuch.

Genesis 13:8–9
[8] Abram said to Lot: Please, let there not be conflict between me and you and between my herders and your herders, for we are kinsmen.
[9] Is not the whole land before you? Please, separate from me: if to the north, then I will go south; and if to the south, then I will go north.

Abram is deferential to Lot, giving him the choice of land. Both of his injunctions are marked with the polite particle, "please" (נא), emphasizing his tact and generosity toward his nephew.

It is not clear whether Lot should accept this polite offer. According to the code of honor and shame, it would be more honorable to insist that the *paterfamilias* has priority. Lot arguably shows rashness in choosing the best land. As Hermann Gunkel observes, "Lot is self-serving."[29] This deviation from the code of honor is the first in a sequence of fateful decisions. The narration of Lot's choice bodes ill for Lot's future:

Genesis 13:10–11
[10] Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that whole Jordan valley was well-watered – before YHWH destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah – like the garden of YHWH, like the land of Egypt, all the way to Zoar.
[11] And Lot chose the whole Jordan valley, and Lot journeyed eastward, and every man one separated from his kin.

The narratorial aside, "before YHWH destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah," explicitly foreshadows the disastrous outcome of Lot's choice. What he "sees" as an ideal landscape will be transformed – as the narrator sees and reveals to us – into a blasted wilderness. The language of the shame and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is rhetorically linked to Lot's decision.

Lot's descent into shame accelerates after he moves to Sodom.[30] His relationship to the strangers at the gates of Sodom is initially honorable, but his behavior while they are in his house becomes equivocal. The problem involves the clash of civilization and barbarism. As Robert Alter observes, the behavior of the men of Sodom is "the biblical version of anti-civilization."[31] The men seek to gang-rape the strangers, which would shame and humiliate the guests, obliterating the obligation of hospitality. Lot rightly chooses to protect the guests, upholding his obligation as host. However, he does so by offering up his virgin daughters to be gang-raped in their stead. This is shameful behavior, violating Lot's obligation to protect his daughters from sexual violence. Lot's choice here is a tragic one – he upholds one value of civilization by abandoning another. In so doing, Lot destroys his family honor, both by his words and by the impending deeds, the violation of his daugh-

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[29] E.g., GUNKEL, Genesis, 174.
[30] See the fuller discussion of the narrative dynamics of Genesis 19 in HENDEL / KRONFELD / PARDES, Gender, 77–91.
[31] ALTER, Sodom, 151.

ters' bodies. As it happens, the guests and the daughters are saved from violence when the angelic guests blind the men of Sodom. Since they cannot see, they cannot penetrate Lot's house or any of the bodies inside it.

Lot's shameful behavior regarding his daughters is turned back on him when he and his daughters take refuge in a cave. This locale is the refuge of wild creatures, the inverse of a civilized house. In this wild place, his daughters get Lot drunk and rape him on successive nights. Every aspect of this scene represents the antithesis of civilized behavior – rape, incest, drunkenness, and pregnancy out of wedlock. The reversals and ironies are rich. Lot violated his kinship obligation to his daughters, and they intensify this violation by committing incest with him. He gave them up to be raped, and they do the same to him, but doubled over two nights.

Yet Lot's daughters are not wholly culpable, because they believe that they are acting to preserve life. They wrongly think that they and their father are the last people on earth, and they perform this bed-trick "so that we may preserve seed through our father" (Gen 19:32, 34). They intentionally, but understandably, violate civilized norms. But their plan is also poetic justice for Lot's previous behavior. Their shameful behavior is a measure-for-measure response to his. This scene is an intensification of the "anti-civilization" in Sodom, which now aptly occurs in a cave.

At the end, Lot's honor is shattered permanently. He is the father of bastard children, whose names memorialize his shame. The firstborn daughter names her son "Moab" (מואב), which plays on a *Leitwort* of kinship in this scene, "from our/their father" (מאביהן, מאבינו), which occurs multiple times. The younger daughter names her son "Ben-Ammi" (בן־עמי), which literally means "son of my kinsman." These sons are, respectively, "the father of Moab" and "the father of the Ammonites until today" (Gen 19:37–38). The Moabites and Ammonites, according to this polemical narrative, trace their descent to bastards, to the infamy of incest and transgression. They are children of the cave, shamed by an uncivilized ancestry.

Lot does not inherit from Abraham. After the parting of the ways, Abram has two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Lot's genealogy branches off, yielding two foreign peoples, Moab and Ammon. Their origins are intertwined with Israel's, since they descend from the same ancestral patriline. The genealogy asserts a consciousness of close relationship with these peoples. But the branching of Moab and Ammon from the main trunk is also a branching away from the code of honor and civilization epitomized by Abraham. Lot's character and actions effect a moral break in the social structure. His story illustrates the oppositional and polemical quality of the genealogical narrative, even as its literary art shocks and persuades.

Isaac and Ishmael (Ishmaelites)

In Genesis 16, after the separation of Lot from Abram's household, Sarai offers her maidservant to Abram to produce an heir. The maidservant, Hagar, is an Egyptian slave, presumably acquired in Egypt when Pharaoh gave maidservants to Abram in his brideprice for Sarai (Gen 12:16). Sarai now loans her slave to Abram to be a surrogate mother, because "Sarai, Abram's wife, had not borne children for him" (Gen 16:1). This story resumes the problem of genealogical succession.

The name Hagar is an ethnonym for Arab tribes, probably those that inhabit the Levantine desert and northern Arabia.[32] The son she bears to Abram is Ishmael, which is another (overlapping or synonymous) ethnonym of Arab tribal people in that region. The Ishmaelites are seen later in Genesis, when Joseph's brothers encounter "a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with camels bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, to take them down to Egypt" (Gen 37:25). The Ishmaelites add a slave – Joseph – to their train of goods, purchasing him for twenty shekels. These Ishmaelites are Arab tribespeople who ply the trade routes between Transjordan, Egypt, and other depots.

The Arab tribes of Transjordan and southward are well-documented in Neo-Assyrian sources beginning in the ninth century. A tribal chief, "Gindibu the Arab" brought "a thousand camels" to the battle of Qarqar against the Assyrians (853 BCE), in a coalition that included Israel, Damascus, and Ammon.[33] The Arab tribes, then as now, were regarded by their urban and agrarian neighbors as semi-civilized nomads. In ancient Near Eastern texts, as Michael Macdonald observes, the Arab is represented as "a constant wanderer in far-off waterless deserts full of dangerous animals, an incorrigible brigand and pillager, incurably violent, and refusing to accept any authority."[34] The Arab is a wild man, dwelling on the margins of the civilized world, at home in a violent and lawless desert.

The representations of the characters of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis mobilizes this opposition of civilization and barbarism. When Hagar becomes pregnant, she becomes insouciant: "her mistress was lowered in her eyes" (Gen 16:4). When Sarai, her social superior, acts harshly toward her, the slave-girl flees to the wilderness (Gen 16:7). An angel meets her at a well in the northern Sinai, near Qadesh on the trade route to Shur. This is a Hagarite/Ishmaelite locale in the desert. Here the angel announces that she is pregnant with Ishmael and proclaims his destiny: "He will be a wild-ass of a

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[32] See KNAUF, Art. Hagar. In an Egyptian inscription on a statue of Darius I, "Hagar" arguably designates Arabs of the Levantine desert region and "Maka" designates east Arabia; see HOYLAND, Arabia, 19–20 and fig. 1.

[33] See EPHʿAL, Arabs, 21.75–77; RETSÖ, Arabs, 126–128.

[34] MACDONALD, Arabia, 1359.

man (פרא אדם), his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him" (Gen 16:12). Ishmael, the ancestor of Arab peoples, will be a barbarian, living outside of the territory and norms of civilization – violent, stubborn, lawless, a man like a wild ass of the desert.

Notably, the metaphor of the Arab as a wild ass occurs in the Assyrian annals, in a description of the flight of Samsi, queen of the Arabs, from the army of Tiglath-Pilesar III (733 BCE): "She, in order to save her life, [... set out] like female onager [to the de]sert, a place (where one is always) thirsty."[35] The word for onager (viz. wild ass) is the feminine of *parû*, which is cognate to Hebrew *pere'*, the word applied to Ishmael. It is possible that the description of the Arab as a wild ass (onager) of the desert was a trope, an objective correlative of the ethnic stereotype.

The angel's speech complicates the opprobrium of Ishmael as a "wild ass of a man" by granting honor and blessing to his lineage. The angel says to Hagar, "I will greatly increase your offspring; they will be too numerous to count" (Gen 16:10). This echoes YHWH's previous promise to Abram, "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, which if a man can count the dust of the earth, so may your offspring be counted" (Gen 13:16). The wording is slightly different in the two promises, but the trope of having more offspring than one can count is identical. As commentators have observed, this promise places Hagar in parallel to Abram as the bearer of ancestral blessing.[36] The Abram-Hagar-Ishmael lineage bears, in this respect, a degree of honor comparable to the main lineage of Abram-Sarai-Isaac-Jacob. Ishmael is a wild man, but he is also the son of Abram, and as such partakes of the blessing of abundant offspring. Like Israel, Ishmael has twelve sons.

The ethnopoetics of Hagar and Ishmael yields a complex portrait of a people that is both barbarous and honorable, violent and blessed. Genesis 16 depicts him as a kind of noble savage, father of a people that is not wholly civilized yet not to be despised. As a son of Abram by Sarai's slave, he is a liminal figure, living betwixt and between civilization and wild nature. In the genealogical field, he is a counterpart and rival to civilized Isaac. He inhabits the barbarous world that surrounds civilization and is the violent master of that world.

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[35] Trans. TADMOR / YAMADA, Inscriptions, 106 (#42); see EPH'AL, Arabs, 36; RETSÖ, Arabs, 132–133.

[36] See, e.g., NIKAIDO, Hagar.

Jacob/Israel and Esau (Edom)

The rivalry of Jacob and Esau is the most salient instance of the ethnopoetics of civilization and barbarism in the Bible. Jacob, the younger twin who prevails over his older brother, is consistently described with the traits of civilization. Esau, in contrast, is a man of the wilderness, uncivilized and uncouth, traits that are emphasized in the twins' early years prior to their separation. The contrast between the brothers makes it clear that the civilized son will prevail, yet there are also complications, ironies, and self-critique. The ancestors of Israel and Edom have a fraught sibling rivalry.

When the twins are born, "the first one came out reddish (אדמוני) all over, like a hairy (שער) cloak, and they called his name Esau (עשו)" (Gen 25:25). This description defines Esau as a red and hairy creature, an animal-like man. The description of his body also rhetorically invokes his genealogical identity and locale: "reddish" (אדמוני) plays on Edom (אדום), and "hairy" (שער) plays on Seir (שעיר). The text associates the name Esau (עשו), by a quasi-midrashic wordplay, to "hairy" (שער). Like other hairy men – e.g., Enkidu – Esau is portrayed as a wild man, whose domain is outside of civilization. He grows up as a hunter, at home in the territory of wild animals: "When the boys grew up, Esau was a man skilled in the hunt, a man of the fields" (Gen 25:27). Esau's skill is in killing wild animals. He is a predator in the wilds.

In contrast to his brother, "Jacob was a civilized (?) man (איש תם), who dwelled in the tents" (Gen 25:27). The meaning of the adjective תם is somewhat hazy, but HALOT aptly defines it here as "well-behaved, civilized" in semantic contrast with the "man of the field" (איש שדה).[37] Moreover, Jacob's physical body contrasts with Esau's. As he says to his mother, "my brother Esau is a hairy man (איש שער), but I am a smooth man (איש חלק)" (Gen 27:11). This contrast – smooth versus hairy – expresses the contrast of civilization and barbarism. The smooth man of the tents is the opposite – in body, locale, temperament, and knowledge – of the hairy man of the fields. As noted above, Esau's "hairy" body also evokes his locale in the wilderness of Seir. But Jacob's description as a "smooth man" has a further connotation. The quality "smooth" (חלק) connotes, in behavioral terms, cleverness and deception. This too is part of Jacob's character. He is a civilized man in contrast to his barbaric brother, but he is also a clever deceiver who tricks his brother and father. This web of deceptions will later entangle him when he meets another trickster, his uncle Laban. Jacob's civilized quality, in short,

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[37] HALOT, 1742; it unpacks the semantic field of תָּם as follows: "the general sense of the adj. is also 'complete, perfect,' a sense which develops in different ways with different usages: a) physical perfection as applied to the body; b) socially perfect; c) correct in law; d) ethnically and morally correct."

has its own complications. This is the self-critique of Jacob/Israel in the heart of his genealogical story.

The ethnopoetics of civilization and barbarism play out most dramatically in Jacob's deceptions of Esau (Gen 25:29–34) and Isaac (Gen 27:1–45). The latter also involves gender politics, as Rebekah, who loves her domestic son, Jacob, is arrayed against Isaac, who loves Esau due to his taste for wild game (Gen 25:28). The contrast of civilization and barbarism is here gendered, with the hunt as a characteristically masculine practice, and domestic work in the tents – e.g., cooking – as a characteristically female practice. The two parents love the child best who displays mastery of their respectively gendered spaces and practices.

The contrasts of civilization and barbarism are drawn sharply in Jacob's deception of Esau. The scene opens with a focus on their occupations: "Jacob was cooking a stew, and Esau came in from the field, and he was hungry" (Gen 25:29). The man of the tents is cooking – doing domestic work – while the man of the field returns from his apparently unsuccessful hunt. The man of the fields is now in his rival's domain, and he is weak from hunger. Like a fly in the spider's web, Esau is susceptible to Jacob's civilized wiles. Esau's first words expose his crude character: "Feed me from this red red stuff (האדם האדם הזה), for I am hungry" (Gen 25:30). Esau is so inarticulate that he cannot name the food that Jacob is cooking. He calls it by its color – "red red stuff" – which also plays on his body's redness. The narratorial aside adds, "Therefore they call his name Edom." His ethnicity and his crude behavior are lexically intertwined. The verb he uses for his plea, "feed me" (הלעיטני), may also have a negative connotation. In the only other probable occurrence of this verb in biblical Hebrew, it refers to lions that "swallow" (להטים) humans,[38] and in rabbinic Hebrew this verb only refers to animals. It may be a colloquial word, used mostly in animal husbandry, and as such describes Esau as animalistic in his stumbling request for food.[39]

Jacob's response turns the conversation to commerce and inheritance, two eminently civilized domains. To Esau's plea, "Feed me," Jacob responds, "Sell, now, your birthright to me" (Gen 25:31). The two imperative verbs are in contrasting semantic domains. Jacob's request is unfair, yet he makes the hard sell. Esau replies: "Behold, I am about to die, what is my birthright to me?" But he is not on the verge of death, he is merely hungry from hunting in the fields. He thinks with his appetite, not his intellect. Esau is easily relieved of his birthright because of his simplicity as a "man of the field." Even after he wolfs down his stew, he has no second thoughts, no interiority. The rapid sequence that ends the story leaves no time for regrets: "Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew. He ate and he drank and he rose and he left. And Esau

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[38] Ps 57:5, with an interchange of *'ayin* and *he*; HALOT, 533.
[39] See ALTER, *Art*, 51.

despised the birthright" (Gen 25:34). As Robert Alter comments, "Esau's precipitous character is mirrored stylistically in the rapid chain of verbs."[40] Like the wild animals that he hunts, Esau is a man of appetite and action, driven by self-preservation. Commerce, inheritance, and genealogical status escape him. The civilized man of the tents expertly outwits him.

Yet the terse style of this exchange also allows one to sympathize with this wronged barbarous man, for he does not seem to understand what he has done. This potential for sympathy becomes actual in the ensuing story of the deception of Isaac, in which Rebekah and Jacob jointly trick the blind *pater-familias* out of the patriarchal blessing. Rebekah transforms the smooth man of the tents into the hairy man of the field by dressing Jacob in Esau's clothing and covering his arms with hairy animal skin. She similarly transforms the domestic goats into a meal of wild game by her culinary skill (resuming the theme of cooking from the previous story). But the degree of deception in this story is almost too much for Jacob. He replies anxiously to his mother, "What if my father feels me, and I seem to him like a mocker, and bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing." (Gen 27:12). Deception of the father is a dangerous game. In this arena of family politics, Rebekah asserts her authority – over Jacob, Esau, and Isaac – in her emphatic reply, "Your curse be upon me, my son. Just heed my voice, and go fetch them for me" (Gen 27:13). Within the domestic domain, Rebekah is the authority. Jacob obeys his mother's command, and the ruse succeeds.

Yet, while Jacob gains the ancestral blessing, Esau wins our sympathy. When he returns from his successful hunt, his exchange with his father is heart-rending. The *Leitwörter* of kinship terms – "father," "son," and "brother" – provide a resonant backdrop:

Genesis 27:32–35
[32] Isaac, his father, said to him: Who are you? He said: I am your son, your first-born, Esau.
[33] Isaac shook with a very great trembling, and he said: Then who was the one who hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I blessed him, and now he will stay blessed?
[34] When Esau heard his father's words, he cried out with a great and very bitter cry, and he said to his father: Bless me too father.
[35] And he said: Your brother came in guile, and he took your blessing.

Through clever ruses, the resourceful pair, Rebekah and Jacob, gain the birthright and the patriarchal blessing – the בכרה and ברכה, respectively – but the older brother, Esau, and the blind father, Isaac, win our sympathy. Their twin emotional responses – "a very great trembling" and "a great and very bitter cry" – are stylistically powerful and generate irresistible pathos. Yet Esau soon plots revenge, which sways our sympathy back to Jacob. The moral

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[40] ALTER, *Art*, 52.

ambiguity of the cultured trickster and his primitive adversary takes many turns in this narrative.

At the end of the conflict, when Jacob returns from his exile, he rhetorically restores the blessing to Esau. He says, "Please take my blessing (ברכתי) that has been brought to you, for God has favored me, and I have everything. And he pressed him, and he took it" (Gen 33:11). But this is mere political speech, intended to placate Esau. The brothers are now marked as different *ethnoi*: Esau, the "man of the field," is now living "in the land of Seir, the field of Edom" (Gen 32:4). He is now a wealthy and honored chief, and is accompanied by four hundred men (Gen 33:1, 9). Jacob has his wealth, wives, and children, including twelve sons who are ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. At the end Esau returns to his home is Seir, and Jacob returns to Israel.

In this final encounter, the presence of Esau's men suggests that the conflict may not be over. In response to this implicit threat of violence and revenge, Jacob summons all his rhetorical guile. After he rhetorically restores the blessing to Esau, Esau presses Jacob to join him in Seir – another potentially dangerous trap – and Jacob resists with more verbal deceptions. When they finally part Jacob journeys to the Israelite borderlands, where he builds a house (בית) for his family and huts (סכת) for his herds – for which reason the place is called Sukkot (סכות, Gen 33:17). Jacob remains the domestic man, who dwells in the structures of civilization, separate from his brother, who rules in the fields of Edom.

The ethnopoetics of civilization and barbarism in the Jacob-Esau stories are pervasive and nuanced. Jacob is the exemplar of culture, in contrast with the wild man Esau. Israel is the civilized node of the ancestral genealogy, while Edom is a primitive older brother who branches off the main trunk. The father of the Edomites is a nomadic hunter, who, like Enkidu, hearkens back to the primeval state of humankind. Jacob/Israel, the younger son, prevails, but there is a price to be paid – the anxiety of civilization, the guilt of ancestral conflict, the fear of fierce foreigners.

In history, the Edomites were a tribal people, often represented in ancient texts as tent-dwelling pastoralists, but who were also involved in copper manufacture and trade.[41] The pastoralists of Edom are mentioned in an Egyptian text from the reign of Merneptah, contemporary with the first mention of the people of Israel: "We have finished with allowing the Shasu of Edom to pass the Fortress of Merneptah in Tjeku, to the pools of Pi-Atum that are in Tjeku, to keep them alive and to keep alive their livestock" (Papyrus Anastasi VI.51–61).[42] The tribal pastoralists of Edom/Seir are also attested in the commemoration of a military campaign by Ramesses III: "I destroyed the

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[41] See LEVY, Nomads.
[42] Trans. KITCHEN, Evidence, 27; see also MACDONALD, Edom, 232.

Seirites, the clans of the Shasu, I pillaged their tents with their people, their livestock likewise, without limit" (Papyrus Harris I).[43]

In the Bible, Edom is mentioned early and often. The "chiefs of Edom" (אלופי אדום) are mentioned in the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:15) along with the chiefs of Moab. In a reference to unknown events of the eighth century, the rivalry and brotherhood with Edom are evoked in Amos's oracle against Edom:

Amos 1:11–12[44]
[11] Because he pursued his brother with a sword,
    and he destroyed his young women,
And he maintains his wrath without end,
    and he guards his anger forever,
[12] I will send fire against Teman,
    and it will consume the fortresses of Bozrah.

In post-exilic texts, the enmity with Edom becomes more pronounced. For instance, the book of Malachi begins with a venomous taunt: "'Is not Esau Jacob's brother?' declares Y<small>HWH</small>. 'But I love Jacob, and I hate Esau. I have laid waste his hill country, and given his territory to the jackals of the desert'" (Mal 1:2–3). The ethnic boundary between Israel and Edom is deeply etched in biblical texts, and is colored by the conceptual contrast of civilization and barbarism.

Conclusions: Endings and Afterlives

When we last see these ancestors of foreign peoples in the non-P narratives of Genesis, they are living in the wilderness. Lot's bastard children, Moab and Ben-Ammi, are born in or near the cave in the wilderness east of the Dead Sea (Gen 19:36–38; J); Ishmael "dwelled in the wilderness of Paran" in northwestern Arabia (Gen 21:21; E); and Esau is returning to the hill country of Seir, south of the Dead Sea (Gen 33:16; J). The territorial contrast with Israel is not only center versus periphery, but arable land versus wilderness and desert. The genealogical contrast of civilization versus barbarism is written into the landscape. This provides a "sense of an ending" for these ancestral rivalries, in which the ethnic boundaries are geographically permanent.

But there are other endings in other versions of these ancestral stories. In the P stratum of the ancestral narratives,[45] Ishmael rejoins Isaac at the death of Abraham: "His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him" (Gen 25:9). This statement is followed by P's genealogical formula – "These are the genera-

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[43] K<small>ITCHEN</small>, Evidence, 27.
[44] For the philological and historical issues, see P<small>AUL</small>, Amos, 63–67.
[45] See W<small>ÖHRLE</small>, Fremdlinge.

tions of Ishmael" (Gen 25:12) – which introduces the list of Ishmael's twelve sons, who are all tribal chiefs (נשיאם), followed by a notice of Ishmael's death at a ripe old age (Gen 25:12–17). This ending fulfills God's promises in P that Ishmael will be fruitful, produce twelve chiefs, and become a "great nation" (גוי גדול; Gen 17:17–20). This is a subsidiary promise to Isaac's, but a generous one nonetheless. Notably, there is no conflict in the P account of Ishmael, not between Sarah and Hagar, or Isaac and Ishmael. God's blessings for Ishmael come at Abraham's behest: "Would that Ishmael might live in your favor" (Gen 17:18). This is a remarkable request, because it is the only time that Abraham – or any ancestor – speaks to God in the P source. There is no barbarism in Ishmael's condition; he is simply outside of the line of the eternal covenant (ברית עולם; Gen 17:7), which passes from Abraham to Isaac. Yet Ishmael's lineage has his own greatness.

Similarly, the end of Esau in P accrues to his honor. In language that echoes the Ishmael account, Esau rejoins his brother at the death of their father Isaac: "His sons Esau and Isaac buried him" (Gen 35:29). P's genealogical formula follows – "These are the generations of Esau" (Gen 36:1) – which introduces a series of lists of Esau's descendants, including tribal chiefs (אלופים) and kings. There is no conflict between Esau and Jacob. The reason for Esau's geographical separation from Jacob is a repetition of the reason for Lot's previous separation from Abraham. Compare these two separations:

> *Genesis 36:7 (Jacob and Esau)*
> For their possessions were too many to dwell together, and the land of their sojourning could not sustain them.

> *Genesis 13:6 (Abram and Lot)*
> The land could not sustain them to dwell together, for their possessions were too many, and they could not dwell together.

These are peaceful territorial and genealogical separations. The one conflict in the P account of Esau concerns marriage and ethnic boundaries. Esau's marriage with Hittite women causes "bitterness of spirit for Isaac and Rebekah" (Gen 26:35). This is the reason that Isaac blesses Jacob instead of Esau (Gen 28:1–8). To make amends, Esau marries one of Ishmael's daughters (28:9), apparently unaware that Ishmael's line is foreign. Esau misconstrues the ethnic boundaries, but not through barbarism or malice. In the P source, the genealogies branch apart without drama. Ethnic boundaries are defined by the covenant and marriage law, but outside these boundaries peoples can still prosper. In the P source, the definition and maintenance of ethnic boundaries have been "rationalized" in Weber's sense, that is, brought under the rule of law and bureaucratic institutions (viz. rules adjudicated by the priestly hierarchy).

Although P includes the separation of Lot and Abraham within its series of genealogical separations, there is no mention of the birth of Ammon and

Moab. This may be due to a redactional omission, which left a P verse on the cutting room floor, or may indicate that the genealogy has adjusted itself to historical contingencies in an era when Ammon and Moab were no longer neighboring polities. Nebuchadnezzar's armies destroyed these two nations in 582–581 BCE, ending their political history. Ammon and Moab continued to be geographical names, but were no longer nations or *ethnoi*. If the P narrative was written after this time, in the exilic or post-exilic era, then this genealogical adjustment would be expected.[46]

The redescription of ancestral relationships in P illustrates the flexibility of the genealogical imagination. Yet P's irenic view of ancestral relationship is unusual. Contention over ethnic boundaries is usually the norm, given the polemical quality of genealogical discourse. Ezekiel 33 provides a glimpse into such controversy, where the people of the land and the Babylonian exiles are in dispute over who are the true heirs of Abraham. Some people of the land claim that exile from the land cancels this genealogical status, asserting (according to Ezekiel) "To us the land was given for inheritance" (Ezek 33:24). Ezekiel responds with a harsh prophecy: "Those who are in the ruins shall fall by the sword" (Ezek 33:27). The wordplay of "in the ruins" (בחרבות) and "by the sword" (בחרב) makes his genealogical riposte clear. The prerogatives of genealogical descent from Abraham are not to be trifled with.

The importance of these genealogical ties continues to resonate in later revisions and counter-memories. In the New Testament, Paul famously claims that the followers of Christ are the true children of the Abraham, displacing the Jews. He reinterprets the genealogy to express this claim: Hagar "corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her people," and Sarah "corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother" (Gal 4:25–26). To Paul, the slavery of Jews to the law makes them the sons of the slave, Hagar, whereas the freedom of Christ's followers makes them the sons of the free wife, Sarah. The Jews are redefined as sons of Ishmael, and the Christians are the true Israel. This genealogical revision – breathtaking as it is – reorganizes the past to affirm the theological-political claims of Paul's imagined community. A similar genealogical revision occurs centuries later, when post-Qurʾanic sages argued that Ishmael was the child of the promise, whom Abraham was commanded to sacrifice in Mecca. After

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[46] Note that Moabite and Ammonite origins can be used in Second Temple literature to ascribe foreignness, as in Nehemiah's opposition to "Tobiah the Ammonite" – a prominent Israelite with a Yahwistic name. Here the attribution of foreignness is a weapon in a new episode of ethnic boundary making: the attempt to impose a strong ethnic boundary between Judah and the other tribes; see KNOPPERS, *Nehemiah*. In contrast, an irenic view of Moabite origins is expressed in the book of Ruth, who bravely restores her dead husband's (and her mother-in-law's) Judahite lineage.

God spared Ishmael's life, Abraham and Ishmael proceeded to build the holy site of the Kaʿba in Mecca.[47]

There is a dialectic of politics and poetics in the ancestral narratives of Genesis 12–36, which continues in various forms in the afterlives of these stories in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The claims and counterclaims in these genealogical discourses are part of the history of ethnic self-fashioning and boundary making. Although the dynamics of these narratives – including the conceptual clash of civilization and barbarism – are often subtle and complex, they illustrate the authoritative weight of the past in ancient Israelite culture. The past could be reconfigured, argued over, and refashioned, but it could not be dispensed with, as is often the case in our postindustrial cultures. In the premodern world, the past was a constant presence, regulating relationships, obligations, identity, and honor. Thomas Mann, in his biblical novel, *Joseph and His Brothers*, captured this sense well: "For we walk in the tracks of others, and all life is filling in the mythic forms with the present."[48] It is important to stress that these mythic forms were malleable, always in dialectic with the present. The tracks are moveable, and the forms migrate to new configurations.

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[47] See FIRESTONE, Journeys.

[48] MANN, Joseph, 611: "Denn wir wandeln in Spuren und alles Leben ist Ausfüllung mythischer Formen mit Gegenwart." See further ASSMANN, Life.

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Die Verheißungen an die Erzväter

Die Konstruktion ethnischer Identität Israels

Reinhard G. Kratz

1. Das literarische Problem

Den Verheißungen an die Erzväter kommt eine Schlüsselrolle in der Pentateuchforschung zu. Auf sie stützen sich so gut wie alle Hypothesen: die Quellenhypothese in allen ihren Varianten – der literarhistorischen,[1] überlieferungsgeschichtlichen,[2] redaktionsgeschichtlichen,[3] historiographischen[4] oder narratologischen Spielart[5] – ebenso wie die Alternativen, die auf der Basis der Unterscheidung von priesterschriftlichem (P) und nicht-priesterschriftlichem Textbestand (klassisch JE) stärker mit der Fragmenten- und Ergänzungshypothese arbeiten.[6]

Ich selbst sehe mich eher der zweiten Gruppe zugehörig, teile aber auch viele Einsichten und Einwände mit der ersten Gruppe, wobei es auf die Gruppenzugehörigkeit nicht ankommt.[7] Es arbeitet heute (fast) jeder mit einer Kombination von Fragmenten-, Quellen- und Ergänzungshypothese. Die Unterschiede, die die Situation der Forschung so verworren erscheinen lassen, resultieren nicht aus den Hypothesen, sondern der konkreten Analyse. Dabei geht es um zwei fundamentale Fragen: a) welche Bestandteile des überlieferten Texts älteren Vorlagen, einer größeren Erzähleinheit, Quelle oder Grundschrift oder Ergänzungen zugerechnet werden; b) wie das Verhältnis des nicht-priesterschriftlichen Textbestands zur Priesterschrift und zum Deuteronomium zu bestimmen ist. Es führt daher nicht weiter, über Modelle und literarische Postulate wie den Jahwisten, Elohisten, Jehowisten, Erhard Blums D-Komposition oder das Münsteraner „Jerusalemer Geschichtswerk" zu diskutieren, wenn nicht klar ist, über welchen Text konkret geredet wird.

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[1] WELLHAUSEN, Composition.
[2] NOTH, Überlieferungsgeschichte.
[3] LEVIN, Jahwist.
[4] VAN SETERS, Prologue; DERS., Life.
[5] BADEN, Promise.
[6] RENDTORFF, Problem; BLUM, Komposition, u.a.
[7] KRATZ, Komposition; zu den methodischen Fragen vgl. DERS., Analysis.