Abraham's Family

Edited by
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A Network of Meaning in Judaism,
Christianity, and Islam

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Preface

This volume presents a scholarly journey through the centuries on what many religious and ethnic groups have understood as "Abraham's Family." To make this happen many institutions and individuals contributed time, money, thoughts, and also trust.

The research presented in this volume was part of a project at Åbo Akademi University in Finland and Marburg University in Germany funded by the Academy of Finland (Suomen Akatemia) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in 2015 and 2016. The project concluded with a conference at the Theology Faculty in Marburg in September 2016. At this conference several outstanding scholars as well as post-doc researchers and PhD students from Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States presented and discussed their ideas on Abraham's Family in their particular field of research.

Marburg, Easter 2018   Lukas Bormann

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Introduction

Abraham, whom the apostle Paul calls the "father of us all" (Rom 4:16), was already a central figure in Judaism and came to be important in Christianity and Islam, so that it is now very common to call this three religions 'the Abrahamic religions.' Some aspects of Abraham are common to all three religions: Abraham as the first monotheist or the first opponent of idolatry is one example. Some characteristics are emphasized by one of the three religions: in Judaism Abraham is 'the father of Israel' and also the 'first proselyte'; in Islam Ibrahim is pictured as 'the leader of the first community of true Islam'; in Christianity Abraham is understood as both 'the father of faith' and the paradigm (gr. *typos*) of every Christian believer. However, Abraham is not remembered alone, but with his family. Since more than two decades intense scholarly work has been devoted to investigating and discussing Abraham as a center-piece of religious memory and identity-building, but very seldom it is recognized that it is not only Abraham itself as a single and dominating figure but his family which is reflected upon to discuss both connections and boundaries between different but related religious and ethnic groups. In this process of remembering and redefining Abraham his family history and tradition have also been used, modified, enlarged or shortened in order to explain, encourage, legitimize or challenge ethnic or religious groups from the middle of the sixth century B.C.E. or earlier and even still today. The Abraham tradition is an issue of narrative and counter-narrative, memory and counter-memory. Besides the well-known ideas about Abraham as an outstanding figure his family is also used to define both borders of identity and connections to other groups. Moreover Abraham's family is brought in as a network of meaning to express opposition, antithesis or common ground within and between different religious movements. The most famous example is the idea of the two sons of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, presenting two different branches of the Abraham heritage with the aim of explaining the antagonisms and the connections between different ethnic and religious groups.

Additionally, some interdisciplinary aspects should be taken into consideration. Political science, cognitive science and linguistics emphasize that the term *family* is not only a term to denote kinship, but is also used

as a metaphor and concept of meaning to evoke previous knowledge about family and to transfer it to different areas such as ethnicity, distribution of power, ethics, and gender relations. Family as a network of meaning works as a conceptual frame to confirm or to define anew the center and the margins of social entities, to relate and to disconnect different parts of a network, or to involve a special family understood as prototypical (in our case Abraham's family) into a new conceptual frame, which means a different historical and religious context.

For the purpose of this volume the term 'Abraham's family' covers the traditions of the ancestors and descendants of Abraham named in Gen 11–36 from his forefathers Nahor and Terah (Gen 11:22) to the families of his grandchildren Jacob and Esau and their descendants (Gen 25:23–26; 36:1–43). The contributions to this volume discuss the presentation, enlarging, shortening, re-narrating and reception of Abraham's family in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The topics cover Hebrew Bible / Old Testament, Second Temple writings, New Testament, Rabbinic literature, Greek, Latin and Syriac church fathers, and also Jewish medieval interpretation and a twelfth-century Arabic travel report of a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Part I Abraham's Family in the Old Testament collects contributions which deal with the Abraham tradition of the Hebrew Bible and its historical and literary foundations. *Konrad Schmid* analyzes Abraham's family from the perspective of the literary history of the Pentateuch. He demonstrates that it is possible to define at least three main stages of the development of the Abraham tradition in the Pentateuch. He starts with the youngest literary strata, the post-priestly Abraham tradition which is dominated by God's commandment to Abraham to sacrifice his son (late Persian period), goes on to the priestly Abraham, who is seen as the common origin of many nations described as a family system (early Persian period) and ends with the presumable earliest pre-priestly Abraham tradition in which the national identity of Israel is negotiated (722 to 587 B.C.E.). *Antti Laato* asks about traces of political ideologies and diplomatic needs preserved in the Abraham tradition which has its roots in the times of the united monarchy under David and Solomon, when this monarchy was supported by Egypt. *Magnar Kartveit* presents the evidence in the Hebrew Bible, the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint in connection to various ancient Jewish sources and later Samaritan traditions to demonstrate how the Samaritans related both Abraham and Joseph to Mount Gerizim, the main sanctuary of this ethno-religious group. *Lotta Valve* reflects on marriage as a central issue of Abraham's family tradition.

In the story of the wooing of Rebekah (Gen 24) several layers of interpretation can be detected. Some issues of this very detailed and elaborate story were passed over in silence by the reception history, while others were re-narrated and even further developed along halakhic principles in rabbinical sources.

Part II Abraham's Family in Ancient Jewish Literature starts with an investigation into Abraham's Family in the Book of Jubilees by *Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten*. He demonstrates that the Jubilees account is closely determined by the Abraham tradition of the book of Genesis, but stresses certain aspects of the family relations distinct from Genesis as, for example, proper lineage and the separation from the nations. However, even Jubilees was interested in the continuation of some family bonds, particularly in elaborating Abraham's affection to Ishmael. *Aliyah El Mansy* reflects on the impact of masculinity studies on the research of the reception history of Abraham's family. She finds in the re-narrating of Jacob and Esau by Jubilees two concurrent types of masculinity. Jacob is presented as the representative of a hegemonic masculinity whereas Esau represents a marginalized masculinity which is seen as endangering the model of Jewishness preferred by the book of Jubilees. *Jesper Høgenhaven* investigates Abraham and his family in Qumran Biblical Exegesis. In these texts Abraham is related especially to the priests, Levites and Zadokites. Abraham is seen as a founder of sacrificial practices and plays a legitimizing role for the priestly leaders of the Qumran community. *Michael Becker* works out some conceptual patterns which are used in ancient Jewish and Christian exegesis of the Aqedah (Gen 22). He argues that the idea of an "effective death" of Jesus may be related to some patterns of the retelling of the Aqedah in the Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum. *Christian Noack* starts his consideration of Abraham's Family in Philo with the distinction of three types of Biblical commentaries produced by Philo of Alexandria with different aims and audiences. On this basis Noack demonstrates Philo's implication that his audience has in mind the full network of Abraham's family, had learned the etymological meaning of their names and will follow his allegorical interpretation which aims to win the souls of the hearers or readers for the true philosophy which is identical with the Jewish faith.

In *Part III Abraham's Family in the New Testament* the three main groups of New Testament writings which engage in the reception of Abraham's family are discussed: the letters of Paul, Luke-Acts, and the letter to the Hebrews. *Lukas Bormann* reflects on the unique designation of Abraham in Rom 4:1 as "forefather" on the background of the use of

this term in literary, papyrological and epigraphical sources. Paul designates Abraham with this term to lay the ground for his controversial redefining of Abraham's family as a model for the people of God, but surprisingly none of the deutero-Pauline literature followed these ideas and did not even mention Abraham. *Angela Standhartinger* applies some insights of intersectionality theory and historical family studies on Hagar, a marginalized figure in Abraham's family, who is presented in ancient Jewish text as a 'distant relative' to this family. *Christfried Böttrich* emphasizes that the figure of Abraham has many facets of meaning in Luke-Acts and ties together the past and the future. In distinction to Paul, Luke is not interested in Abraham as an example of faith but in his role as an image of hope and an eschatological figure who inhabits the role of a 'symposiarch in the eschaton.' *Guido Baltes* concentrates on a parable in the gospel of Luke which is called by many exegetes the center of this gospel: the Prodigal Son. He demonstrates that it is possible to read the presentation of the two brothers in this parable against the background of the siblings Jacob and Esau. *J. Cornelis de Vos* turns to the interpretation of Abraham's family in the Letter to the Hebrews. He addresses the way in which the author of Hebrews uses the figures of Abraham and his family for his ideas about a family for all but also narrows the membership to an eschatological perspective for pedagogical reasons. *Eva-Maria Kreitschmann* investigates conceptual patterns of Abraham's family-network used in the New Testament. The so-called patriarchal triad and the reference to Abraham as father is re-interpreted in a way which allows connecting the history of Israel to those outside this ethno-religious entity. Other parts of the family network are used especially by Paul to clarify but also sometimes to intensify conflicts between different groups.

In *Part IV Abraham's Family in Early Christian Literature* the reader of this volume will find a detailed 'tour d'horizon' through the reception of Abraham's family in ancient Greek and Latin patristic exegesis provided by *Martin Meiser*. Abraham's family is seen by these authors as 'familia sacra.' However, this view causes many moral concerns which lead to exegetical questions and psychological reflections of the circumstances of the behavior of the members of this family. *Anni Maria Laato* points to the fact that tradition shared by religious groups leads more often to division than to common ground. The interpretation of the prophecy of Rebecca's sons in Gen 25:19–26 by the church fathers is an example of such division between Christians and Jews through the centuries building a long tradition of different interpretations. *Michaela Durst* turns to a topic to which scholars in recent years have paid more and more attention: the

anti-Christian polemics of the emperor Julian the Apostate. His universal concept of nations includes the notion that Abraham and his specific 'ethnos' is not different from other ethnic groups and as such more related to the Hellenistic concept of national diversity than to Christianity which claims to be the true Israel.

Part V Abraham's Family in Jewish Exegesis and in Encounter with Islam presents some intriguing insights on the importance of Abraham's family in Islam and the influence of the Islamic tradition building on both Christianity and Judaism. *Reuven Firestone* focusses on Hagar and Ishmael as key personages in Islamic tradition. Although the Qur'an knows nothing of Hagar and little of Ishmael, both personas appear in detail in some early extra-Qur'anic literature and become crucial figures in the foundation story of Islam. *Mariano Gomez Aranda* demonstrates the variety and even debate within medieval Jewish exegesis about the conflict of Jacob and Esau. The main issues were the conflict between righteousness and wickedness, between rabbinic education and idolatry, and between the people of Israel and other nations. *Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler* demonstrates that Abraham and his family were both prototypes of monotheistic faith and the inventors of religious practices. She analyzes the travel account of Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217) on his pilgrimage to Mecca, the place of Ibrahim, where he arrived in 1183. In performing the rites at this holy place Muslims became part of the narrative of Ibrahim, Ishmael, and Hagar. *Catalin-Stefan Popa* focusses on the role of Abraham in the Christian theological discourse in the early Islamic period presented in the Syriac tradition. In response to the everyday reality of Islamic rule Syriac Christians connected Abraham closer to the Christian doctrine of the trinity and to Christology.

The rich variety of the contributions leads to further questions and provokes further scholarship in many areas. Altogether they demonstrate that from the very beginning of the Abraham tradition right up to its contemporary reception the single figure of Abraham was not sufficient for the purposes of the interpreters. When Abraham was remembered and previous interpretations of Abraham were challenged it was in most cases unavoidable to engage with Abraham's family as a network of meaning to define the center and the margins of ethno-religious groups.

Part I
Abraham's Family in the Old Testament

Remembering and Reconstructing Abraham

Abraham's Family and the Literary History of the Pentateuch

Konrad Schmid

1. Who is Abraham?

In the Hebrew Bible, especially in the book of Genesis where three quarters of all instances of "Abraham" can be found, Abraham and his family are not just a genealogical topic. In the framework of the concept of "Abrahamic religions" (which was so successful that it even led to the establishment of a corresponding chair at the University of Oxford in 2008),[1] Abraham is often perceived as the first monotheist, believing in the creator God. But in the Hebrew Bible this is only a marginal notion, basically relying on one single verse, Gen 15:6, which is very difficult to understand and to translate (who is "he," "he," and "him"? what is the meaning of the *wᵉqatal* hiphil form of אמן?):[2] "And he believed YHWH; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness." From a biblical perspective, the notion of Abraham as the first "believer" must be relativized. First, according to Gen 4:26, Yahwism is as old as Enosh: "To Seth also a son was born, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to invoke (לקרא) the name of YHWH."

Secondly, even though Gen 15 is supported by Gen 22 which portrays Abraham as an unconditional believer, the focus of Gen 15 is not on

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[1]Nuanced or even critical evaluations of the concept are provided by Ulrike Bechmann, "Die vielen Väter Abrahams: Chancen und Grenzen einer dialogorientierten Abrahamrezeption," in *Impuls oder Hindernis? Mit dem Alten Testament in multireligiöser Gesellschaft* (ed. Joachim Kügler; Münster: Lit, 2004), 125–150; Idem, "Abraham und Ibrahim: Die Grenzen des Abraham-Paradigmas im interreligiösen Dialog," *MTZ* 57 (2007): 110–126; Jon D. Levenson, "The Conversion of Abraham to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation* (eds. Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman; JSJSup 83; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 3–40; ; Idem, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[2]Cf. Manfred Oeming, "Der Glaube Abrahams. Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte von Gen 15,6 in der Zeit des zweiten Tempels," *ZAW* 110 (1998): 16–33.

monotheism. Rather, Abraham is the recipient of promises as well as a partner in God's covenant, according to Gen 15. Nevertheless, the idea of Abraham's conversion to biblical monotheism, i. e. Yahwism, is not absent from the Hebrew Bible, but it occurs in only one single instance, in Josh 24:2:

"And Joshua said to all the people: 'Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors – Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor – lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods.'"

Thus Josh 24 presupposes that Abraham and his family were idolators back in Mesopotamia, and only by YHWH's calling of Abraham (Josh 24:3) did he become a Yahwist.

The beginning of the Abraham story in Gen 11 is silent about such a conversion of Abraham from idolatry to Yahwism. We only learn from Gen 11:31 that Terah, Abraham's father, and Abraham originally lived in Ur Kasdim in Southern Babylonia, but then left for Haran in Northern Syria:

"Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out together from Ur Kasdim to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there."

According to Gen 11:32, Abram's father Terah died in Haran. And this is the point in Abram's history where he receives a comprehensive promise (Gen 12:1–3), notably still in Haran:

"And YHWH said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"

Since it is YHWH who speaks to him in Gen 12:1–3 without introducing himself as such, there is no indication that Abram is viewed as having a different religion besides adhering to YHWH. The conceptual differences between Gen 11 and Josh 24 are results of their different literary historical and theological positions. Neither Gen 11:31 nor Josh 24:2 is an early text: Gen 11:31 is assigned to the so-called Priestly document ("P") which probably belongs to the early Persian period, and Josh 24 is a post-Priestly text, as vv. 6–7 demonstrate quite clearly its dependence on the Priestly version of the crossing of the sea (Exod 14).[3]

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[3]Cf. Konrad Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 197–213.

Apparently, the authors of Josh 24 wanted to polemicize P's pluralist notion of the compatibility of the world's different religions in terms of an inclusive monotheism, and to highlight their opinion that the default religion outside of Israel is neither Yahwism nor any kind of anonymous version of it. According to Josh 24, even Abraham had to convert to Yahwism when he came to Israel. The Priestly Primeval History in Gen 1–11, on the other hand, holds that every human being has a notion of "Elohim" and even enjoys the benefits of "Elohim's" covenant with mankind in Gen 9. From a biblical perspective, Abraham was thus an important figure predominantly because he was the recipient of YHWH's call, promises and blessings (as opposed to being important for monotheism), as Isa 51:2 maintains:

"Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many."

In this vein, Abraham became the subject of a variety of interpretations.[4] His family is a family born out of promises and of endangered promises.

In this paper, I would like to address the notion of Abraham and his family in a diachronic perspective and present the development of the Abraham tradition in the Pentateuch from the later to the earlier phases. But beforehand, an important remark is in order which pertains to the overall organization of the Pentateuch and is of fundamental significance for understanding the Abraham traditions within it. It is one of the most noteworthy features of the Pentateuch that it not only presents the life of Moses and God's giving of the law to him, but that the Moses story has a broad introduction: that is, the book of Genesis.

The book of Genesis contextualizes and universalizes the Moses story and Israel's Torah within world history. Most remarkably, one of Moses' most important forefathers, Abraham, is not only presented as an ancestor, but as a figure with a theological legacy of his own that is, firstly,

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[4]Cf. Reinhard G. Kratz, "'Abraham, mein Freund': Das Verhältnis von inner- und außerbiblischer Schriftauslegung," in *Die Erzväter in der biblischen Tradition* (eds. A. C. Hagedorn and H. Pfeiffer; FS M. Köckert; BZAW 400; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 115–136; Idem, "'Öffne seinen Mund und seine Ohren': Wie Abraham Hebräisch lernte," in Idem, *"Abraham, unser Vater:" Die gemeinsamen Wurzeln von Judentum, Christentum und Islam* (ed. T. Nagel; Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), 53–66; Christfried Böttrich et al., *Abraham in Judentum, Christentum und Islam* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009). For the significances of the wives of the so-called "patriarchs" see Irmtraud Fischer, "Das Geschlecht als exegetisches Kriterium. Zu einer genderfairen Interpretation der Erzeltern-Erzählungen," in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History* (ed. A. Wénin; BETL 155; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 135–152.

not based on the law,[5] and, secondly, is not limited to the ethnological scope of Israel, but also includes other nations, such as the Arabs and the Edomites, since they are part of Abraham's offspring as well – the Arabs through Ishmael, Hagar's son, and the Edomites through Isaac, Sarah's son.[6]

For the first point, it was especially a short study of Walther Zimmerli from 1963 which established the theological specifics of God's covenant with Abraham over against the covenant on Mount Sinai:[7] The covenant with Abraham is one-sided, as can be seen particularly from Gen 17:7 where the second half of the so-called "covenant formula" is deliberately missing ("and you shall be my people" or the like):

"I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you."

This is very loaded language, and there can be no doubt that Zimmerli is right in maintaining that Gen 17 alludes the Sinai covenant, replacing it and moving God's main covenant from the time of Moses to the patriarchal period. The covenant with Abraham secures the identity of God's people without the Sinaitic law. Therefore, it is one-sided, and cannot be broken. There is only an obligation on the side of God, not on the side of his human partners.

But – and this pertains to the second point mentioned above – who exactly is God's partner in covenant according to Gen 17? Apparently, as the text says (vv. 4, 7), it is Abraham and his offspring which includes Ishmael and Isaac and their descendants, thus forming an entity that is clearly broader than Israel alone. Abraham is presented as a kind of "ecumenical" ancestor in Gen 17, to take up the wording of Albert de Pury.[8] The fact that Gen 17:4 mentions "nations" ("you will be the father

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[5]Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, *Abraham in the Book of Jubilees: The Rewriting of Genesis 11:26–25:10 in the Book of Jubilees 11:14–23:8* (JSJSup 161; Leiden: Brill, 2012).

[6]John T. Noble, *A Place for Hagar's Son: Ishmael as a Case Study in the Priestly Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016).

[7]Walther Zimmerli, "Sinaibund und Abrahambund: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der Priesterschrift," *TZ* 16 (1960): 268–280; Idem, *Gottes Offenbarung: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament* (TB 19; München: Kaiser, 1963), 205–217.

[8]Albert de Pury, "Abraham: The Priestly Writer's 'Ecumenical' Ancestor," in *Rethinking the Foundations: Historiography in the Ancient World and in the Bible* (eds. Steven L. McKenzie et al.; BZAW 294; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2000), 163–181; cf. Konrad Schmid, "Judean Identity and Ecumenicity: The Political Theology of the Priestly Document," in *Judah and Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (eds. Oded Lipschits et al.; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 3–26.

of a variety of nations" (והיית לאב המון גוים) shows that the Abraham story is not just developing a family plot, but that the family scenery eventually serves another, political purpose,[9] as Julius Wellhausen had already highlighted for the overall context of Gen 12–36: "The material is not mythic here [in the patriarchal narrative], rather national."[10] In addition, Wellhausen noted that the stories about the patriarchs and their wives were not historically or politically relevant *for the time of the narrative, but rather for the time of its narrators*:

"However, we cannot gain any historical knowledge about the Patriarchs here [in Gen 12–50], but only about the time in which the stories about them came to be among the Israelite people. This later period is projected into the dim and distant past and is mirrored there like a mirage."[11]

Despite the backlash regarding the antiquity of the patriarchal narratives or even their historicity in the wake of Gunkel and Albright,[12] Wellhausen's political interpretation of the patriarchal narrative has been successful in the long run and been taken up by Erhard Blum, Mark Brett, Jakob Wöhrle[13] and others. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their wives

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The term "Abrahamische" or "Abrahamitische Ökumene" was coined by Karl-Josef Kuschel, see IDEM, *Streit um Abraham: Was Juden, Christen und Muslime trennt – und was sie eint* (München: Kaiser, 1994) (see 13 n. 4 for the difference between "abrahamisch" and "abrahamitisch"); IDEM, "Abrahamische Ökumene? Zum Problem einer Theologie des Anderen bei Juden, Christen und Muslimen," *ZMR* 85 (2001): 258–278; IDEM, *Juden – Christen – Muslime. Herkunft und Zukunft* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 2007); HANS KÜNG, "Abrahamische Ökumene zwischen Juden, Christen und Muslimen: Theologische Grundlegung – praktische Konsequenzen," in *Stifterverband für die die Deutsche Wissenschaft: Jahresversammlung 1991 des Landeskuratoriums Baden-Württemberg* (ed. Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft; Essen: Stiftungszentrum, 1991), 16–32; IDEM, "Abrahamische Ökumene zwischen Juden, Christen und Muslimen," *Iranzamin* 11 (1998): 29–40.

[9]Cf. KONRAD SCHMID, "Anfänge politikförmiger Religion. Die Theologisierung politisch-imperialer Begriffe in der Religionsgeschichte des antiken Israel als Grundlage autoritärer und toleranter Strukturmomente monotheistischer Religionen," in *Religion – Wirtschaft – Politik: Forschungszugänge zu einem aktuellen transdisziplinären Feld* (eds. ANTONIUS LIEDHEGENER ET AL.; Zürich: TVZ/Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2011), 161–177.

[10]JULIUS WELLHAUSEN, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (3rd ed.; Berlin: Reimer, 1886), 336 (translation mine).

[11]Ibid. (translation mine).

[12]See W. F. ALBRIGHT, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 5: "[A]s a whole, the picture in Genesis is historical, and there is no reason to doubt the general accuracy of the biographical details." See also HERMANN GUNKEL, *Genesis* (HKAT I/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 6th ed., 1964, 3rd ed., 1919), XL (translation mine): "The tales were, when recorded, already very ancient and had a long pre-history. This is only natural: The origin of the tale always escapes the scholar's perspective and dates back to pre-historical times."

[13]See ERHARD BLUM, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1984); MARK G. BRETT, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity*

are family figures only on the literary level of the book of Genesis, but they represent – and this was Blum's ground-breaking insight – political entities from the very beginning of their literary career. [14]

In this perspective, it is quite obvious that the figure of Abraham serves as an alternative founding figure of Israel in place of Moses. As suggested by Abraham's sparse attestation outside of the Pentateuch, the Abraham cycle is neither the oldest nor the most prominent part of Genesis that fulfills this function. That role is filled by the Jacob cycle. [15] But how did this picture of two origins of Israel come about in the Pentateuch: one in the book of Genesis, defining Israel basically as the offspring of the three patriarchs and their wives, and one in the book of Exodus, seeing Israel basically as God's chosen people, led out of Egypt by him and gifted with the Sinaitic law?

As is well known, scholarship on the Pentateuch is a battlefield [16] and even those involved in it for many years seem to lose oversight at times. In such a situation, it is necessary to start from the very basics of what is commonly acknowledged in research. For a historical approach to the Pentateuch, there are basically three uncontested tokens of scholarship that go so far undisputed. Firstly, the Pentateuch is a literary body that stems from the 1st millennium B.C.E. Secondly, the Penateuch grew over time. Thirdly, we can identify with a sufficient amount of certainty one specific literary strand in the Pentateuch, the so-called Priestly document ("P") that can be dated to the early Persian period.

For the discussion of the Abraham texts in the book of Genesis, [17] I

(London: Routledge, 2000); JAKOB WÖHRLE, *Fremdlinge im eigenen Land: Zur Entstehung und Intention der priesterlichen Passagen der Vätergeschichte* (FRLANT 246; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

[14] If one assumes oral pre-stages of the Patriarchal narratives – which is quite likely –, then the picture looks different: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob may once have been founding figures of the clans they represented. But it is impossible to bring these figures into any close contact with what is recounted about them in the literary narratives of Gen 12–36. They are unhistorical, see THOMAS L. THOMPSON, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (BZAW 133; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1974); JOHN VAN SETERS, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven / London: Yale University Press), 1975.

[15] ISRAEL FINKELSTEIN and THOMAS RÖMER, "Comments on the Historical Background of the Jacob Narrative in Genesis," *ZAW* 126 (2014): 317–338.

[16] See the recent overviews by THOMAS RÖMER, "Zwischen Urkunden, Fragmenten und Ergänzungen: Zum Stand der Pentateuchforschung," *ZAW* 125 (2013): 2–24; KONRAD SCHMID, "Der Pentateuch und seine Theologiegeschichte," *ZTK* 111 (2014): 239–271.

[17] See JEAN-LOUIS SKA, "Essai sur la nature et la signification du cycle d'Abraham (Gn 11,27–25,11)," in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History* (ed. ANDRÉ WÉNIN; BETL 155; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 153–177; THOMAS RÖMER, "Recherches

will structure my paper in three sections: 1. The Post-Priestly Abraham, 2. The Priestly Abraham, 3. The Pre-Priestly Abraham, thus progressing from later to earlier literary stages in the formation of the Abraham story.

From this premise it is immediately evident that I will not discuss the historicity of the figure of Abraham.[18] The first historical character in the Bible is probably Moses. Whether Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob are historical is nearly impossible to decide. They are covered by their later interpretations as founding figures of Israel and Judah, and it may well be that there once was, for example, a historical Abraham, Isaac or Jacob, but they did not visit Pharaoh in Egypt, they were not brought to be sacrificed on Moriah, and they did not wrestle with angels. They were *heroi eponymoi* or the fathers of Israel and Judah and, if they existed, it is best to imagine them as sheikhs in the Levant who were viewed as significant by their tribes.

2. The Post-Priestly Abraham: Abraham must sacrifice his son Isaac.

According to a meaningful methodological principle prominently introduced by Rudolf Smend in his 1978 "Entstehung des Alten Testaments,"[19] it is advisable to start with the youngest layers of a literary entity if one strives to reconstruct its literary history. Within the Abraham story, the most prominent late element is the *Aqedah* story in Gen 22.[20] In traditional exegesis, Gen 22 had often been identified as part of the "E" source, although on very shaky grounds, especially since the tetragrammaton is used in it prominently, with several instances. After the breakdown of the traditional "Documentary Hypothesis," such an assignment to "E" was no longer necessary or possible. It was especially a 1988 piece by Timo

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actuelles sur le cycle d'Abraham," in *Studies in the Book of Genesis*, 179–211; Israel Finkelstein and Thomas Römer, "Comments on the Historical Background of the Abraham Narrative. Between 'Realia' and 'Exegetica,'" *HeBAI* 3 (2014): 3–23.

[18]See n. 14 above and Manfred Görg, "Abraham – historische Perspektiven," *BN* 41 (1988): 11–14; P. Kyle McCarter, "The Historical Abraham," *Interp.* 42 (1988): 341–352.

[19]Rudolf Smend, *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments* (ThW 1; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1978), 9–13.

[20]Other post-Priestly elements in the Abraham story include e. g. Gen 14; Gen 15; Gen 20; Gen 26:3–5; cf. e. g. Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 158–171; Matthias Köckert, "Gen 20–22 als nach-priesterliche Erweiterung der Vätergeschichte," in *The Post-Priestly Pentateuch: New Perspectives on its Redactional Development and Theological Profiles* (eds. Federico Giuntoli and Konrad Schmid; FAT 101; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 157–176.

Veijola which secured the setting of the story in the Persian period, and elsewhere I have argued similarly. [21]

Gen 22 is sometimes addressed as "the sacrifice of Isaac" (*genetivus objectivus*) [22] which is not a helpful title, because the story is not really about Isaac, but rather about Abraham. Isaac is a mere object in the story, whereas Abraham is the person who is up front. Therefore, the story should more aptly be titled "the sacrifice of Abraham" (*genetivus subjectivus*), as it deals with the character of Abraham who is confronted with the impossible task of sacrificing his son.

As has often been noted, Gen 22 shares a lot of similarities with the preceding chapter, Genesis 21. [23] Before Abraham has to sacrifice Isaac,

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[21] Konrad Schmid, "Die Rückgabe der Verheißungsgabe. Der 'heilsgeschichtliche' Sinn von Genesis 22 im Horizont innerbiblischer Exegese," in *Gott und Mensch im Dialog, Festschrift Otto Kaiser* (ed. Markus Witte; BZAW 345/I; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 271–300.

[22] Cf. David Lerch, *Isaaks Opferung christlich gedeutet: Eine auslegungsgeschichtliche Studie* (BHTh 12; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968); R. M. Jensen, "The Offering of Isaac in Jewish and Christian Tradition. Image and Text," *BI* 2 (1994): 85–110; Frédéric Manns, ed., *The Sacrifice of Isaac in the Three Monotheistic Religions: Proceedings of a Symposium on the Interpretation of the Scriptures Held in Jerusalem, March 16–17, 1995*, (SBFA 41; Jerusalem: Franciscan Print Press, 1995); Lukas Kundert, *Die Opferung/Bindung Isaaks, Bd. 1: Gen 22,1–19 im Alten Testament, im Frühjudentum und im Neuen Testament* (WMANT 78; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1998); Idem, *Die Opferung/Bindung Isaaks, Bd. 2: Gen 22,1–19 in frühen rabbinischen Texten* (WMANT 79; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1998); *The Sacrifice of Isaac. The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and its Interpretations* (eds. Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar; Themes in Biblical Narrative: Jewish and Christian Traditions 4; Leiden: Brill, 2002).

[23] See e. g. Milton Schwantes, "'Lege deine Hände nicht an das Kind': Überlegungen zu Gen 21 und 22" in *Was ist der Mensch …? Beiträge zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments, FS Hans Walter Wolff* (eds. Frank Crüsemann et al.; München: Kaiser, 1992), 164–178; Blum, *Vätergeschichte*, 314f ("Gen 21,8ff ist offenbar nicht zuletzt auf Gen 22 hin erzählt. Die Vertreibung Ismaels wird zu einem Vorspiel, man möchte fast sagen, zu einer 'Generalprobe' für Gen 22"); Otto Kaiser, "Die Bindung Isaaks: Untersuchungen zur Eigenart und Bedeutung von Genesis 22," in Idem, *Zwischen Athen und Jerusalem: Studien zur griechischen und biblischen Theologie, ihrer Eigenart und ihrem Verhältnis* (BZAW 320; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 199–220, 209f; Yair Zakovitch, "Juxtaposition in the Abraham Cycle," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, an Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (eds. David P. Wright et al.; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 509–524, 519f; Gordon C. Wenham, "The Akedah: A Paradigm of Sacrifice," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells*, 93–102, 99f; Irmtraud Fischer, "Möglichkeiten und Grenzen historisch-kritischer Exegese: Die 'Opferung' der beiden Söhne Abrahams. Gen 21 und 22 im Kontext," in *Streit am Tisch des Wortes? Zur Deutung und Bedeutung des Alten Testaments und seiner Verwendung in der Liturgie* (ed. A. Franz; PiLi 8; St. Ottilien: EOS, 1997), 17–36; Heinz-Dieter Neef, *Die Prüfung Abrahams: Eine exegetisch-theologische Studie zu Gen 22,1–19* (AzTh 90; Calw: Calwer Verlag, 1998); Alfred Marx, "Sens et fonction de Gen. XXII 14," *VT* 51 (2001): 197–205; Jörg Jeremias, "Die 'Opferung' Isaaks (Gen 22)", in *Studien zur Theologie des Alten Testaments* (eds. Friedhelm Hartenstein and Jutta Krispenz; FAT 99; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 188–196, 192–194.

he already had "sacrificed" his first son Ishmael (Gen 21) who is the forefather of the Arabs, and whom he had with Hagar.[24] It is not only this thematic closeness that binds Gen 21 and 22 together, but the two chapters share some common wording and a similar structure.[25] Just to identify the most basic elements: both Ishmael and Isaac's lives are threatened and both are rescued by the intervention of an angel. Ishmael is then said to have settled in the wilderness (במדבר; Gen 21:20) in Paran (Gen 21:21), whereas Isaac grew up in Beer-Sheva (Gen 22:19) and then moved to Gerar (Gen 26:1).

It goes without saying that these relations between Gen 21 and 22 are of utmost importance for the topic of Abraham's family: Abraham's family is depicted in Gen 21 as being deprived first of Ishmael, and then nearly wiped out by the sacrifice of Isaac in Gen 22. Apparently, Gen 22 is about the survival of Abraham's promised offspring through the survival of Isaac.

This very basic interpretive perspective must be highlighted against the famous interpretation inaugurated by Hermann Gunkel in his 1901 commentary on Genesis:[26] Gunkel assumed a pre-Israelite etiology being behind the story that favored animal sacrifices over against human sacrifices. The origins of Gen 22 lie, according to Gunkel, in a former oral tale which explained why God does not want human sacrifice but animal sacrifice. A look at the religious historical background of Gen 22 – assumed by Gunkel – thus enabled the reader to turn the cruel story about God wanting Abraham to kill his son into a critical dismissal of human sacrifices. This interpretation which Gunkel himself *nota bene* explicitly only held to be true for the prehistory of Gen 22, not for the biblical text itself,[27] is still very widespread in theological and ecclesiastical contexts, now however being applied to the story itself. According to this approach, Gen 22 is actually a humane story and not an inhumane one. But as attractive as this interpretation seems to be, it is impossible in exegetical terms. Firstly, the story contains no critique whatsoever of Abraham's plan to sacrifice his son. To the contrary, Abraham is praised for being ready

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[24]Cf. Ernst Axel Knauf, *Ismael* (ADPV 7; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2nd ed. 1989); Ulrich Hübner, "Early Arabs in Pre-Hellenistic Palestine in the Context of the Old Testament," in *Nach Petra und ins Königreich der Nabatäer* (eds. Idem et al.; FS M. Lindner; BBB 118; Bodenheim: Athenäum, 1998), 34–48.

[25]See e.g. Fischer, "Möglichkeiten," 29; Kaiser, "Bindung," 209f, cf. 21:3/22:2; 21:14a/22:3a; 21:17a/22:11a; 21:17b/22:11b; 21:19/22:13; 21:21a/22:19b.

[26]Gunkel, *Genesis*, 233–240.

[27]Gunkel, *Genesis*, 237: According to Gunkel, the author "wants to portray a religious ideal through Abraham."

to do so. Secondly, it is quite clear that the story in Gen 22 itself, from the outset, has no doubts that sacrifices are *animal* sacrifices, since Isaac asked his father on the journey in v. 7, 'The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?', so even within the narrative it is clear that sacrifices require *animals*. And thirdly, archaeology has made quite clear that there were no human sacrifices in Israel,[28] and something that was never present cannot be abandoned.

Against Gunkel, Gen 22 must be interpreted as a piece in context. The necessity for a contextual understanding of Gen 22 is made abundantly clear by the first verse of the story which states: ויהי אחר הדברים האלה "and it happened after these things." Obviously, this is not the beginning of an independent narrative. In historical-critical terms, it is not possible to eliminate these opening words in 22:1 from the story by assigning them to a later textual layer, because then Gen 22 would begin with a *w – x – qatal* sentence in 22:1aß והאלהים נסה את־אברהם "and God tested Abraham." Syntactically, this is not a possible beginning of a story.[29]

A closer look into the specific formulations of the narrative itself can further corroborate this view. Gen 22 draws heavily on formulations from the preceding chapters of the Abraham story in Genesis. The command to go to the Land of Moriah in 22:2 is formulated exactly as the initial migration command to Abraham in Gen 12:1. One also can point to the command to Abraham to lift his eyes in 22:3 and 22:13, which seem to be reminiscent of the same wording in Gen 13:14. And as already mentioned, there are quite a few literary and thematic connections from Gen 22 back to Gen 21.

Accordingly, it is made clear not only by the opening verse in Gen 22:1 but also by the whole story itself that it connects closely to the preceding Abraham story, by alluding especially to Gen 12 and 21. So there is sufficient exegetical evidence for a contextual interpretation of Gen 22. This text deals with the problem of a fundamentally endangered promise. Can Israel survive as a people? The answer of Gen 22 is: Yes, although reality may have almost completely ruined God's promise to Abraham. If it is correct that Gen 22 presupposes and reflects the Abraham story in Genesis 12–21, and if it is correct that Gen 22 is reminiscent of the promise texts in Gen 12:1–3 and 13:14–17, then this corroborates Veijola's pro-

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[28]See Karen Engelken, "Menschenopfer im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament," in Horst Seebass, *Genesis II/1* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997), 205–207.

[29]Ina Willi-Plein, "Die Versuchung steht am Schluß," *TZ* 48 (1992): 100–108, 102; see also Timo Veijola, "Das Opfer des Abraham – Paradigma des Glaubens aus dem nachexilischen Zeitalter," *ZTK* 85 (1988): 129–164, 139.

posal of dating the text to the Persian period,[30] since these presupposed texts, particularly Gen 12:1–3 and 13:14–17, are dated no earlier than the Babylonian exile.[31]

In this period, the decline of Judah's population was a major issue, as Charles Carter's study has made clear. His estimation is that "the population of the province [sc. Yehud] in the Persian period was about one-third of that in the previous period."[32] So at that time, the Genesis tradition's promises of an increased population were indeed in a critical state and demanded theological reflection, which Genesis 22 provides: God's promise to Abraham that he would become a great people endures even its greatest challenges. The present challenge of God's people in the time of the authors and first readers of Gen 22 is foreshadowed by Abraham's experience in the mythic past.[33]

3. The Priestly Abraham: An Ecumenical Ancestor

If we move on to "P" (the "Priestly Code" or the "Priestly Document"), the most prominent text about Abraham is Gen 17 which is crucial in terms of Abraham's family as well. Gen 17 deals with God's covenant with Abraham *and his descendants*, that is Ishmael (whose birth had been recounted in Gen 16) and his sons and Isaac (who will be born in Gen 21) and his sons.

Of course, there is considerable debate over the possible date of "P." In my opinion, the basic arguments regarding the date of "P" put forward by Julius Wellhausen are still valid today: "P" presupposes the cult centraliza-

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[30]See Veijola, "Das Opfer des Abraham." See the similar proposals regarding dating by Georg Steins, *Die "Bindung Isaaks" im Kanon (Gen 22): Grundlagen und Programm einer kanonisch-intertextuellen Lektüre* (Herders Biblische Studien 20; Freiburg: Herder, 1999); Kaiser, "Bindung"; Schmid, "Rückgabe." For an overall assessment of the post-Priestly material in the Pentateuch see Federico Giutoli and Konrad Schmid (eds.), *The Post-Priestly Pentateuch: New Perspectives on its Redactional Development and Theological Profiles* (FAT 101; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

[31]See e. g. Matthias Köckert, *Vätergott und Väterverheißungen: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Albrecht Alt und seinen Erben* (FRLANT 142; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988).

[32]Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study* (JSOTSup 294; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 247.

[33]One might ask why the Persian period authors of Genesis 22 associated Abraham with this story, and not, for instance, Jacob. Apparently, Abraham was the recipient of God's promise *par excellence* (cf. Genesis 18), so he seemed to be the most apt candidate for the story.

tion of Deuteronomy, which can be dated to the Josianic period; and the classical prophets do not presuppose the legislation of "P."[34] "P" therefore cannot be dated to the monarchic period. Rather, it seems to respond to basic conceptions from the Persian worldview and political theology, chief among them being the peaceful, well-ordered organization of the world according to different nations, all of which dwell in their lands with their own language and culture. This is, for instance, reflected in "P's" share in the Table of Nations in Gen 10:[35]

Gen 10:2, 5: "The sons of Japheth […] in their lands, with their own language, by their families, by their nations."

Gen 10:20: "These are the sons of Ham, by their families, by their languages, in their lands, and by their nations."

Gen 10:31: "These are the sons of Shem, by their families, by their languages, in their lands, and by their nations."

It has long been recognized that one of the closest parallels to the basic idea of Gen 10 is found in Persian imperial ideology, as attested, e. g., in the Behistun inscription, which was disseminated widely throughout the Persian Empire. According to its political ideology, the Persian Empire was structured according to the different nations. The imperial inscriptions declare that every nation belongs to their specific region and has their specific cultural identities. This structure is the result of the will of the creator deity, as Klaus Koch has pointed out in his "Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich," where he identifies this structure as "Nationalitätenstaat als Schöpfungsgegebenheit."[36]

Despite the unambiguous wording of Gen 17, it has been disputed who is included in this group of Abraham's descendants that benefit from the promises made by God. Whereas traditional scholarship in the 20th century maintained that God's covenant with Abraham only pertains to the line of his descendants through Isaac, some recent contributions to Gen 17 have argued otherwise and see Ishmael included in this covenant.

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[34] WELLHAUSEN, *Prolegomena*, 385–445.

[35] See CHRISTOPHE NIHAN, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus* (FAT II/25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 383.

[36] PETER FREI and KLAUS KOCH, *Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich* (OBO 55; Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1996), 201.

Particularly Thomas Naumann,[37] Albert de Pury,[38] Ernst Axel Knauf,[39] Mark G. Brett,[40] and others have highlighted "P's" "ecumenical" characteristization of Abraham in different ways.[41] Thomas Naumann, who dealt with this theme in his yet unpublished *Habilitationsschrift*, maintains:

"The manner in which Ishmael is mentioned in Gen 17 does not support the traditional conclusion that Ishmael has been completely left out of the covenant with God […]. In vv.19–21 Ishmael and Isaac have been theologically ordered *next to* rather than opposed to one another. However, neither a perspective of equality nor one of exclusion and rejection of one [brother] in favor of the other wins out. Greater weight is placed on Isaac […]. In vv. 19–21 both brothers are bound by a theological importance that can only be understood in terms of an inclusive model containing the two unequal brothers, favoring the younger without either casting off the older or removing him from the care of God."[42]

De Pury even more decidedly states:

"The whole structure of this chapter [Gen 17] would be incomprehensible if the covenant and its benefits were limited only to Isaac. Why would there be such an elaborate 'first act' in the account of the covenant – with a threefold insistence on the 'multi-nation'-posterity of Abraham (Gen 17:4–6) – if that posterity was then to be excluded from the covenant?"[43]

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[37]Thomas Naumann, *Ismael: Studien zu einem biblischen Konzept der Selbstwahrnehmung Israels im Kreis der Völker aus der Nachkommenschaft Abrahams* (unpublished *Habilitationsschrift*; University of Bern 1996); Idem, "Ismael – Abrahams verlorener Sohn," in *Bekenntnis zu dem einen Gott? Christen und Muslime zwischen Mission und Dialog* (ed. Rudolf Weth; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2000), 70–89.

[38]De Pury, "Abraham"; cf. Idem, "L'émergence de la conscience 'interreligieuse' dans l'Ancien Testament," *Theological Review: Near East School of Theology* 22 (2001): 7–34.

[39]Ernst Axel Knauf, *Ismael: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Palästinas und Nordarabiens im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (ADPV; Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 1985); Idem, "Die Priesterschrift und die Geschichten der Deuteronomisten," in *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* (ed. Thomas Römer; BETL 147; Leuven, 2000), 101–18; Idem, "Grenzen der Toleranz in der Priesterschaft," *BiKi* 58 (2003): 224–27.

[40]Mark G. Brett, "Reading the Bible in the Context of Methodological Pluralism: The Undermining of Ethnic Exclusivism in Genesis," in *Rethinking Contexts, Rereading Texts. Contributions from the Social Sciences to Biblical Interpretation* (ed. M. Daniel Carroll R.; JSOTSup 299; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 48–74, esp. 72–3.

[41]For the following see also Konrad Schmid, "Judean Identity and Ecumenicity. The Political Theology of the Priestly Document," in *Judah and Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (eds. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 3–26.

[42]Naumann, *Ismael*, 151–52.

[43]De Pury, "Abraham," 170.

Despite Naumann's and de Pury's forceful and, to my mind,[44] convincing argumentation, the question of who belongs to the Abrahamic covenant is still contentious. The mainstream of German-speaking scholarship still opts for the idea that Ishmael is left out of the covenant.[45] The scholarly dissonance in this regard is best explained because Gen 17 seems to include a certain amount of ambiguity. In this situation, it might be helpful to re-read Gen 17 closely, paying special attention to its various and different covenantal statements. First, it is clear that the covenant of 17:2, 4 is only concluded with the individual Abraham and can pertain to him alone because only he will become "a father of many nations":[46]

"I will make a covenant between me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous […]. Look, this is my covenant with you, that you will become a father of many nations."

Neither Ishmael nor Isaac is included in this "covenant" of Gen 17:2, 4, which instead applies to Abraham alone. The situation is different in the subsequent appearances of the "covenant" in Gen 17:7–8, since this covenant makes explicit mention of "you and your offspring":

"I am establishing my covenant between me and you and your offspring from generation to generation as an eternal covenant, to be God for you and your offspring. And I am giving you and your offspring the land in which you sojourn as an alien, the whole land of Canaan, for an eternal holding, and I will be their God."

The covenant negotiated here (whether it is a second covenant or a further specification of the covenant from Gen 17:2, 4, is debatable,[47] but the first option is less probable since during the narration of Gen 17 "the content of ברית becomes progressively more"[48] precise) applies both to Abraham

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[44]See SCHMID, "Judean Identity and Ecumenicity."

[45]Cf. MATTHIAS KÖCKERT, "Gottes 'Bund' mit Abraham und die 'Erwählung' Israels in Genesis 17," in *Covenant and Election in Exilic and Post-exilic Judaism: Studies of the Sofja Kovalevskaja Research Group on Early Jewish Monotheism* (vol. 5; ed. N. MACDONALD; FAT II/79; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 1–28.

[46]The statement in v. 6b, that kings will come from Abraham, is difficult to interpret. It is usually understood as having already been historicized by the time of the author of "P"; however, for a different view see, i. e., BLUM, *Vätergeschichte*, 458; WALTER GROSS, "Israels Hoffnung auf die Erneuerung des Staates (1987)," in IDEM, *Studien zur Priesterschrift und zu alttestamentlichen Gottesbildern* (SBAB 30; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1999), 65–96, esp. 66–75.

[47]Cf. the discussion in BLUM, *Vätergeschichte*, 422 n. 13. In any case, the mention הקים ברית in v. 7 does not stand in the way of the interpretation of Gen 17:1–8 as *one* covenant, cf. W. RANDALL GARR, "The Grammar and Interpretation of Exodus 6:3," *JBL* 111 (1992): 385–408, esp. 403: "The idiom הקים ברית means not only 'make (establish) a promise (covenant)' but also 'keep (fulfill) a promise (covenant).'"

[48]BLUM, *Vätergeschichte*, 421.

and even to Ishmael as his first, and, at this point, only descendant. According to "P," there is no question that Ishmael qualifies as a legitimate son of Abraham (Gen 16:1a,3).[49] However, the formulation in Gen 17:7–8 is without a doubt just as clear that the *future* descendants of Abraham – namely Isaac, who first sees the light of day four chapters later – are also included in this covenant.

The substance of this second (aspect of the) covenant is now, in addition to numerous offspring (vv. 2, 4), the nearness of God to Abraham and his descendants.[50] Furthermore, this covenant also includes the promise of land holdings (אחוזה) in v. 8,[51] which is enclosed by the repeated affirmation "I will be their God" in vv. 7, 9. Is the traditional view justified that according to "P" the land of Canaan can only belong to Israel, and therefore the covenant of Gen 17:7–8 – although it goes against the explicit formulation – can only pertain to Isaac's lineage? Such an argument overlooks the fact that "P" speaks specifically of the *whole* land of Canaan (כל־ארץ כנען) only in 17:8, as de Pury has pointed out:[52] "With this term he ["P"] envisages a region encompassing not only today's geographical Palestine but nearly the whole of the Levant."[53]

The circumcision commandment of the next section, vv. 9–14, seems confusing to some exegetes, because the circumcision in vv. 23–27 is *also carried out on Ishmael and the slaves of the house*. They also carry the sign of the covenant. Are they therefore also a partner in the covenant? Blum offers the following explanation:

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[49]Cf. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (BK I/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981), 285–286; Irmtraud Fischer, Die *Erzeltern Israels: Feministisch-theologische Studien zu Gen 12–36* (BZAW 222; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2004), 97–101.

[50]This promise cites only the first half of the so-called "covenant formula" – the second half, in which Abraham's descendants will be the people of God is programmatically left out of the Priestly document – thereby stressing the theological character of the "covenant" as an essentially one-sided commitment.

[51]Cf. Michaela Bauks, "Die Begriffe מורשה und אחוזה in Pᵍ. Überlegungen zur Land-konzeption der Priestergrundschrift," *ZAW* 116 (2004): 171–88.

[52]This term is otherwise attested only in Josh 24:3, which looks back to Gen 17:8. The lxx might possibly preserve an older tradition in its reading of Josh 24:3 (ἐν πάσῃ τῇ γῇ). "P" never gives exact boundaries for the "land of Canaan," but it differs from the region of the upper Euphrates (Gen 12:5) as well as from "Paddan-Aram," which likely refers northern Syria (Gen 25:20, 31:18). Egypt (Gen 46:6–7), the Jordan valley, and the land east of the Jordan (Gen 13:12) are certainly excluded. Regarding locations in "Canaan," "P" only mentions Mamre and Qiryat Arba/Hebron (Gen 25:9, 35:27; cf. Gen 23:1,17,19).

[53]De Pury, "Abraham," 171.

"Ishmael must be circumcised because he belongs to Abraham's *house* (v. 12–13); Ishmael's circumcision has meaning only as a sign of the covenant with Abraham."[54]

But it is a shaky enterprise to answer the question of whether Ishmael belongs to the Abrahamic covenant solely on the basis of vv. 23–27. The section in vv. 15–22, where the relationship between Ishmael and Isaac is addressed, is much more decisive for this question. In response to the promise received by Sarah in vv. 15–17, Abraham petitions in v. 18b: "If only Ishmael might live before you!" This statement is often understood to mean: "If only Ishmael may be allowed to remain alive!"[55] However, the phrase חיה לפני יהוה implies more than simply physical survival. It instead has cultic connotations, which the following selection of Priestly citations for לפני יהוה demonstrates:[56]

Exod 27:21: "In the tent of meeting, outside the curtain that is before the covenant, Aaron and his sons shall keep it burning from evening till morning *before YHWH* (לפני יהוה) as a perpetual ordinance among the Israelites throughout their generations."

Exod 28:35: "And Aaron shall wear it when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he enters the holy place *before YHWH* (לפני יהוה) and when he leaves so that he will not die."

Exod 29:42: "It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout their generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting *before YHWH* (לפני יהוה), where I will meet with you in order to speak with you."

Exod 40:22–25: "Then he put the table in the tent of meeting, on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the curtain, and he set a row of bread *before YHWH* (לפני יהוה), just as YHWH had commanded Moses. And he put the lampstand in the tent of meeting, across from the table, on the south side of the tabernacle, and he set up the lamps *before YHWH* (לפני יהוה), just as YHWH had commanded him."

The expression לפני יהוה "before YHWH" implies cultic presence before YHWH in the context of the sanctuary (or, rarely, in direct conversation with YHWH, as in the case of Moses in Exod 6:12,30). In my view, de Pury is correct when he writes:

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[54]Blum, *Vätergeschichte*, 422. A similar position was reached earlier by Benno Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora* (Berlin: Schocken, 1934), 430–31.

[55]For example, Ephraim Avigdor Speiser, *Genesis* (AB 1; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 125: "*thrive*. Literally 'live,' with the force of 'stay well, prosper.'"; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 323: "Die Wunschbitte Abrahams für Ismael ist Ausdruck frommer Bescheidung mit dem einen Sohn der Nebenfrau, der ihm geschenkt ist."

[56]For לפני יהוה in "P" Ex 6:12, 30; 27:21; 28:12, 30, 35, 38; 29:42; 30:16; 40:23, 25, within Gen 17 see also v. 1.

"Whether the Priestly writer's Abraham is aware of it or not, what he asks is that Ishmael become YHWH's priest; and it is that request that is denied to Ishmael and offered instead to the yet to be born Isaac. In this whole exchange (vv. 18–21), the question therefore is not whether Ishmael will be allowed to live in the land of Canaan – the right of Ishmael to live in Canaan has been settled once and for all in v. 8 – but the question is only whether there is a need for a further son, i. e. for a further category among Abraham's multi-nation descendants. And the answer to that question is yes. Sarah's son Isaac will beget those descendants of Abraham who are destined to become YHWH's priestly nation."[57]

If the specific emphases of v. 18 are recognized, then some new light is shed on the subsequent passage in vv. 19–21:

"Then God said: אבל ("no?"/"rather?"), your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac, and I will establish my covenant (הקים ברית) with him as an eternal covenant for his descendants after him."

However, three translational difficulties remain. Firstly, how should one translate the particle אבל in v. 19? The ancient versions and modern translations disagree. The Vulgate and KJV leave אבל untranslated, while the RSV and NRSV translate with "No." Until 1912 the Luther Bible decided on "ja," but since 1984 on "nein." The Zürcher Bible changed its variant "vielmehr" from 1931 in the new translation of 2007 to "nein." The Septuagint offers ναί ἰδού.[58]

The uncertainty results from the unclear relationship between Abraham's question in v. 18 and God's answer in v. 19 on one hand, and on the other hand from the philologically broad field of meaning for the term אבל, which only appears eleven times in the Hebrew Bible. Its usage includes expressions of regret and complaint (2 Sam 14:5; 2 Kgs 4:14; Gen 42:21), an expression of regret along with a negative answer (1 Kgs 1:43), and the well-attested pure adversative usage (Ezra 10:13; 2 Chr 1:4, 19:3, 33:17; Dan 10:7,21).[59] When the cultic background of the expression חיה לפני יהוה in v. 18 is recognized and the literary historical setting of "P" taken into consideration, then a translation as "no" is more convincing than a positive ("yes") or neutral ("rather") rendering.

A second question is whether הקים ברית must necessarily mean "establish a covenant," or if it may also mean the reaffirmation of an already existing covenant. Especially relevant here is Exod 6:4, itself a Priestly text,

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[57] De Pury, "Abraham," 172. Cf. also Idem, "Absolute Beginning," 109. Differently Köckert, "Gottes 'Bund' mit Abraham und die 'Erwählung' Israels in Genesis 17," 21 f.

[58] Cf. Naumann, *Ismael*, 138 n. 34.

[59] Cf. Norbert Kilwing, "אבל 'ja, gewiss' – 'nein, vielmehr'?," *BN* 11 (1980): 23–28.

which shows that the latter is clearly possible as well.[60] The final difficulty with regards to translation is ואת־בריתי אקים את־יצחק in v. 21, which conspicuously brings the object ואת־בריתי forward. Is it better to follow the usual adversative rendering "but my covenant, …" or instead translate with "*and* my covenant …"? From a syntactical standpoint there is a strong inclusive connection with v. 19. As a result, the above translation has opted for the neutral translation "and my covenant."

As mentioned before, traditional exegesis of this section held that the Abrahamic covenant is only realized through the lineage of Isaac: The "covenant" terminology only appears in connection with Isaac in vv. 19, 21. Ishmael, on the other hand, only receives a blessing of fruitfulness (v. 20: "As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.")

Admittedly, the double use of the term "covenant," which is only applied to Isaac in vv. 19, 21, is conspicuous. However, this traditionally dominant interpretation encounters numerous problems. The gravest being that it cannot explain why "P" proceeds in Gen 17:7–8 to include *explicitly* all the descendants of Abraham in the covenant, only then to narrow the covenant back down to the lineage of Isaac.[61] Therefore, it is much more likely that the function of vv. 19–21 does not lie in the *exclusion of Ishmael*, rather in the *inclusion of Isaac* in the Abrahamic covenant.

The need for an explicit *inclusion of Isaac* in vv. 19, 21 is obvious from its position in the narrative, namely that at the time of Gen 17, *Isaac had not yet been born.* This makes the double appearance of "covenant"-terminology in vv. 19, 21 with reference to Isaac more than plausible: Extending the covenant to a person *who did not yet exist* is a bold enterprise, and therefore needs special terminological emphasis.

Nevertheless, the conclusion remains that Ishmael is *not the same type of partner* in the covenant of God as Isaac is. They are equal with regard to fertility and land holdings (in the sense of an אחוזה, Israel will then signify its land in Exod 6:8 as מורשה)[62] within the greater region of the "*whole* land of Canaan." But they are not equal with regard to the possibility of

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[60]See above n. 47.

[61]See above n. 44.

[62]For the assignment of Ex 6:8 to "P" see the discussion in Jan Christian Gertz, *Tradition und Redaktion in der Exoduserzählung* (FRLANT 189; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 245–48. The terminology מורשה could have been specifically influenced by Ezekiel. Cf. Bernard Gosse, "Exode 6,8 comme réponse à Ézéchiel 33,24," *RHPR* 74 (1994): 241–47.

cultic proximity ("living before God," Gen 17:18b). This proximity – as the narrative of "P" goes on to show – only belongs to Israel by means of the foundation of the sanctuary and is explicitly denied to Ishmael.[63]

In Gen 17 the Priestly document apparently attempts to balance the theological prerogative of Israel with the political reality of Persian period Judah – Judah lives in a modest province within "ecumenical" proximity to its neighbors. Perhaps the specific outline of Gen 17, the creation of an "Abrahamic ecumenicity," as Albert de Pury has put it, has to do with the fact that Abraham's tomb in Hebron, which was in all likelihood venerated by Judeans, Arabs, and Edomites, was probably not part of Achaemenid Judah, but of Idumea as Ernst Axel Knauf and Detlef Jericke have convincingly argued.[64] This means that "P" had to include Judeans, Arabs and Edomites in a privileged position and therefore developed the notion of an "Abrahamic" covenant of the peoples living in the "whole land of Canaan."

In conclusion, God's covenant with Abraham in Gen 17 is a covenant with all his descendants including Ishmael and *the yet unborn* Isaac, although Isaac has a somewhat privileged position in this covenant over against Ishmael. Isaac may live "before YHWH," a cultic nearness explicitly denied to Ishmael. Nevertheless, it is most remarkable that there is a specific "Abrahamic circle" in "P's" political and religious worldview which is narrower than the "world circle," but wider than the "Israel circle." "P" seems to argue for an "Abrahamic ecumenicity" among Judeans, Israelites, Edomites, and Arabs within the Persian Empire. All these peoples share the promise of progeny and land, meaning that the exclusive Judean privilege is not political but cultic – only they may "live before YHWH."

This concept is probably historically informed and influenced by the Persians' view on center and periphery within their empire (see Herodotus, *Histories* 1.134): "After their own nation they hold their nearest neighbors most in honor, then the nearest but one – and so on, their

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[63]Cf. KNAUF, "Grenzen," 224–227, 224: "Die Priesterschrift (P) in der Tora vertritt die persische Staatsideologie mit einer Deutlichkeit wie sonst nur noch die altpersischen Königsinschriften. Jedes Volk hat seinen Platz in der Welt (Gen 10), darin erfüllen sich Schöpfungsordnung und Schöpfungssegen. Nur Israel gehört als JHWH's priesterliches Volk in seinem Land, das im Grunde als heiliger Bezirk (Temenos) die Wohnung des Schöpfergottes auf Erden umgibt, nicht der Schöpfungs-, sondern der Heilsordnung an."

[64]KNAUF, "Grenzen," 226; DETLEF JERICKE, *Abraham in Mamre:. Historische und exegetische Studien zur Religion von Hebron und zu Genesis 11,27–19,38* (SCHANE 17; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 18–19, 32–33, 81–96; ALBERT DE PURY, "Le tombeau des Abrahamides d'Hébron et sa fonction au début de l'époque perse," *Transeu* 30 (2005): 183–184.

respect decreasing as the distance grows, and the most remote being the most despised. Themselves, they consider in every way superior to everyone else in the world, and allow other nations a share of good qualities decreasing according to distance, the furthest off being in their view the worst."[65]

4. The Pre-Priestly Abraham: Negotiating
the National Identity of Israel

There is finally a layer of pre-Priestly Abraham traditions in the book of Genesis (Gen 13; 18; 19; 21)[66] which seems to constitute a clear-cut narrative structured in two parallel strands, describing the political relation between the offspring of Abraham (Isaac) and the offspring of Lot (Moab and Ammon). Isaac is the son of a promise, Moab and Ammon are the sons resulting from an incestuous relationship of Lot's daughters with their father (Gen 19:37 f). Since Moab and Ammon emerged as states in the 9th and 8th century b.c.e.[67] and ceased to be so in the 6th century, a dating of this strand of the Abraham tradition to the pre-exilic period seems to be warranted.

But what does "Isaac" represent in this story? Within the overall narrative context of Genesis 12–36, the various geographical locations of the narrative suggest different points of origins of the tales of the three patriarchs and their wives. Jacob originally belonged to the central highlands (Bethel, Shechem, etc.), while Abraham (Hebron, Mamre, etc.) and Isaac (Beersheba, Gerar) seem to belong to southern Judah. The situation for Isaac is, however, unclear. There are two passages from the book of Amos indicating that in the monarchical period "house of Isaac" could be regarded as an eponym for the *northern* kingdom, as the parallelisms suggest:

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[65]Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 181.

[66]Cf. Römer and Finkelstein, "Comments."

[67]Cf. Stefan Timm, *Moab zwischen den Mächten* (ÄAT 17; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1989); Ulrich Hübner, *Die Ammoniter* (ADPV 16; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992); Nadav Na'aman, "King Mesha and the Foundation of the Moabite Monarchy," *IEJ* 47 (1997): 83–92; Brian Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age: Hegemony, Polity, Archaeology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); cf. Udo Worschech, *Die Beziehungen Moabs zu Israel und Ägypten in der Eisenzeit. Siedlungsarchäologische und siedlungshistorische Untersuchungen im Kernland Moabs (Ard el-Kerak)* (ÄAT 18; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1990).

"[…] the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." (Amos 7:9)

"Now therefore hear the word of YHWH. You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.'" (Amos 7:16)

The Abraham-Lot cycle seems to have originally established a foundational myth for the northern kingdom.[68] Against the historical realities, this narrative cycle interprets the north as the offspring of the south. In historical terms, the northern kingdom of Israel was originally more important and powerful than the south, and only after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.E., did Judah inherit the legacy of northern Israel.[69]

The literary kernel of the Abraham-Lot cycle can be found in Gen 18. This story, which derives from the *hieros logos* of the sanctuary in Mamre, reveals a classic motif from the saga genre, namely a visit from gods who are hospitably received and reward the host with a gift, in this case the promise of a son. Gen 18 is the only pre-Priestly text in the book of Genesis in which the promise forms an integral part of the narrative in which it is included.[70] The topic of the "promises" in Genesis 12–50 is thus anchored in the Abraham tradition and has been adapted from there also in the Isaac and particularly the Jacob texts (cf. e.g. Gen 12:1–3 and Gen 28:13–15).

The reason for Isaac's name ("he laughed") in Gen 18:10b–15 (Sarah "laughs") is inserted as a secondary climax in contrast to the original high point of the story, the promise of the son:

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[68]See Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel* (Atlanta: SBL, 2014).

[69]Cf. Reinhard G. Kratz, "The Two Houses of Israel," in *Let Us Go up to Zion* (eds. I. Provan and M. J. Boda; VT.S 153; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 167–179; Idem, "Israel in the Book of Isaiah," *JSOT* 31 (2006): 103–28; Idem, "Israel im Jesajabuch," in *Die unwiderstehliche Wahrheit: Studien zur alttestamentlichen Prophetie* (eds. R. Lux and E.-J. Waschke; ABG 23; Leipzig: EVA, 2006), 85–103; Idem, "Israel als Staat und als Volk," *ZTK* 97 (2000): 1–17; Nadav Na'aman, "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel,'" *ZAW* 121 (2009): 211–24; Daniel E. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Wolfgang Schütte, "Wie wurde Juda israelitisiert?" *ZAW* 124 (2012): 52–72. Differently Kristin Weingart, *Stämmevolk – Staatsvolk – Gottesvolk? Studien zur Verwendung des Israel-Namens im Alten Testament* (FAT II/68; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); see the review of Ina Willi-Plein, *TLZ* 141 (2016): 1076–1079.

[70]The other two texts are Gen 15 (post-P, see Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 158–171) and Gen 17 ("P"). The redactional nature of the promises in Gen 12–50 has been highlighted by Rolf Rendtorff, *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* (BZAW 147; Berlin, 1977) and Blum, *Vätergeschichte*, but refuted, in my mind unsuccessfully, by Joel Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

"And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?' YHWH said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too wonderful for YHWH? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.' But Sarah denied, saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. He said, 'Oh yes, you did laugh.'" (Gen 18:10b–15)

If 18:10b–15 is a secondary expansion, then we we can discover an Abraham narrative in Gen 18 that originally lacked any reference to Isaac. The Isaac and Abraham traditions were thus probably two sources alongside one another. The combination of Abraham and Isaac narratives as witnessed by 18:10–15 was probably completed during the monarchic period, as the political outlook of the cycle suggests, relating Israel to Moab and Ammon.[71]

5. Conclusions

Abraham's family in the book of Genesis is one that takes a long time to grow and that, once established, is immediately endangered. The motif that Abraham and Sarah must wait for their son is already extant in the allegedly earliest story dealing with a divine promise (Gen 18): Abraham is hosting three men representing God, and he is awarded by the promise of a son.

The Abraham-Lot cycle then puts Isaac, Moab and Ammon in a relation, where "Isaac" – according to Amos 7 – might even still be an eponym for the northern kingdom Israel, not the southern kingdom Judah. This narrative cycle draws a sharp line between Israel as the result of a divine promise, and Moab and Ammon as the results of a shameful, incestuous

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[71]Conspicuously, a monarchical figure is absent from the Abraham-Lot cycle. If these texts are to be dated within monarchical-era Judah then this finding might be connected to the handing on of this tradition in circles associated not with the royal court but with the Judahite landed gentry, who were an independent power factor in Judah. But as a literary entity it could also presume the first deportation under Jehoiachin in 597 B.C.E. and document the hegemonial claims of the Judahite elite who remained in the land and came to the fore after the Judahite royal court was transferred to Babylon. Ezek 33:24 suggests that the elite who had remained in the land referred to Abraham as their patron: "Mortal, the inhabitants of these waste places in the land of Israel keep saying, 'Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us to possess.'"

relationship of Lot's daughters with their father. Despite the absence of a monarchic figure in the Abraham-Lot cycle, the political outlook of the narrative reckoning with political entities such as Moab and Ammon suggests a pre-exilic setting of its composition. The absence of a king in the Abraham-Lot cycle fits well with a dating of the composition between 722 and 587 B.C.E., given that "Isaac" probably stands for the northern kingdom (cf. Amos 7:9, 16).

Abraham's career as the father of different nations that belong together and shall live peacefully in the Levant begins with his Priestly re-interpretation in Gen 17 ("P"). "P" reflects the political situation of the authors in the early Persian Period, a situation which they evaluate very positively. Abraham becomes the key figure of a common origin of different nations that are described as a family system, with stronger and looser ties to each other. Israel is one nation among and beside others, but it has the prerogative of the cult and thus may live "before YHWH."

In the later Persian period, particularly reflecting the poor economic status of Judah and Jerusalem and its very modest population, the topic of the endangered promise found its expression in the story of Abraham's sacrifice in Gen 22. It deals with the theological problem whether a promise can also be revoked. In the case of Gen 22, it is even the very fundamental promise of Abraham's son with Sarah: If Isaac were to be killed and sacrificed, then the promise of many offspring would be null and void.

The image of Abraham and Sarah's endangered family thus serves as a trajectory in order to cope with a counter-experience in the time of the authors of Gen 22, a time that seems hopeless but is eventually overcome by God's intervention to save Abraham and Sarah's offspring.

The Abraham Story in Genesis and the Reigns
of David and Solomon

Antti Laato

1. Introduction

This article is related to my recent research interests in the early monarchic period of Israel. I follow the main trend of research on the Hebrew Bible, according to which these scriptures are writings composed during the exilic and early postexilic period. I argue, however, that the right picture of the transmission process of these writings is possible when they are evaluated from the perspective of empirical models. The empirical model is based on "texts whose evolution can be documented by copies from several stages in the course of their development."[1] With the aid of empirical models it becomes possible to demonstrate what kinds of editing processes *de facto* have taken place in transmission.[2]

The perspective of the empirical models is not yet a methodology, only heuristic way to imagine what could have taken place in the transmission process. Briefly, the empirical models suggest that writers composed texts in three different ways: 1) Writers used older literary sources which they presumably updated linguistically and undertook some editorial work so that they were readable and contextually relevant in the exilic and postexilic period. This means that it is not always possible to construct

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[1] For this definition, see Jeffrey H. Tigay, ed., *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), xi.

[2] Concerning the term "empirical models," see Tigay, *Empirical Models*. See further two outer-biblical examples of the literary evolution of texts in Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982); Hans J. Tertel, *Text and Transmission: An Empirical Model for the Literary Development of Old Testament Narratives* (BZAW 221; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994); Raymond F. Person and Robert Rezetko, eds., *Empirical Models Challenging Biblical Criticism* (Ancient Israel and Its Literature; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016). See my earlier treatment of this approach in Antti Laato, *History and Ideology in the Old Testament Prophetic Literature: A Semiotic Approach to the Reconstruction of the Proclamation of Historical Prophets* (Coniectanea Biblica OTS 41; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1996), 62–147.

older literary layers verbatim.[3] 2) Writers made paraphrases of the older sources. This means that texts formulated later may be based on older traditions. 3) Writers formulated their own comments and theological remarks which were not attested in earlier sources available to them.

Using an empirical perspective implies distinguishing between three different concepts.[4] a) The *formation of an independent patriarchal story* first in the oral tradition and then in literary story may be lost to scholars forever. This could be compared to the wording of the integrated Akkadian Gilgamesh Epic which was based on independent Sumerian stories about Gilgamesh. In many cases scholars are able to conclude that older sources have been used[5], but are methodologically handicapped in constructing them. b) The old documentary hypothesis presupposes that some stories have already been integrated in their pre-Genesis form.[6] Self-evidently this is still a relevant option today, which means that there were *older integrated stories* about patriarchs before they were edited in Genesis. c) Finally, the only text version which *de facto* exists is *the Book of Genesis,* where the independent literary stories or integrated stories have been edited. It is possible that the oral tradition[7] plays a role in the edition process. From these starting-points it is clear that during the formation of the Abraham Story its content, themes and theological viewpoints have been 'cooked' in different ways before they found their way in the present literary context of Genesis.

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[3]This was noted already by WILLIAM F. ALBRIGHT in his *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957), 79–80.

[4]For this compare JEFFREY H. TIGAY, "The Evolution of the Pentateuchal Narratives in the Light of the Evolution of the *Gilgamesh Epic*," in TIGAY, *Empirical Models*, 21–52.

[5]See more closely TIGAY, *Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, 23–38. It is worth noting what Tigay writes on p. 37: "The empirical evidence of the Sumerian tales lends support to the concept that *The Gilgamesh Epic* is based on several independent sources, a concept which Jastrow developed on the basis of his theoretical approach." Here Tigay refers to Marcus Jastrow (1861–1922) who in 1898 (long before the outcome of the Sumerian tales) published an analysis on the entire Gilgamesh Epic based on the late version. See MARCUS JASTROW, *The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria* (Boston: Ginn, 1898).

[6]TIGAY (*Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, 214–240) argues that the flood story was not part of the Akkadian Epic in the Old Babylonian period. It was integrated only in the Late Babylonian version.

[7]For this see YAAKOV ELMAN, "Authoritative Oral Tradition in Neo-Assyrian Scribal Circles," *JANESCU* 7 (1975): 19–32. For the relevance of oral tradition in the formation of the Hebrew Bible see HELLMER RINGGREN, "Oral and Written Transmission in the Old Testament," *StTh* 3 (1949): 34–59; EDVARD NIELSEN, *Oral Tradition: A Modern Problem in Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1958); ROBERT D. MILLER, *Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel* (Eugene: Casade Books, 2011).

In my recently published study "The Origin of Israelite Zion Theology" I discuss how the united monarchy of David and Solomon should be understood.[8] The Deuteronomistic History describes David as the one who established the Great Empire of Israel by subjugating the peoples around Israel (2 Sam 8). However, this presentation is a Deuteronomistic fabrication from sources which were known at the time of the exile.[9] There is other textual material in the Books of Samuel which does not correspond to this Deuteronomistic representation. After having compared David's wars with the extrabiblical evidence, Na'aman concludes that "very little of this data may tentatively be assigned to the time of the historical David."[10] I evaluate the situation in a different way mainly on two points. *First*, I regard it as plausible that the History of David's Rise (HDR) and Succession Narrative (SN) were written at the time of the united monarchy (and then modified in the Deuteronomistic History).[11] I have elsewhere compared these stories with the Apology of Hattušiliš and concluded that their basic elements did not play any significant role in the exilic time. On the other hand, they were important in the reigns of David and Solomon.[12] *Second*, I emphasize internal tensions in the Books of Samuel which reveal the tendentious Deuteronomistic interpretations in 2 Sam 8. I shall present examples of this later in this article. Here I

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[8]Antti Laato, *The Origin of Israelite Zion Theology* (LHBOTS 661; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2018).

[9]For the historical problems in 2 Sam 8 see e. g. Othmar Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems und die Entstehung des Monotheismus Teil 1 & 2* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 178–181.

[10]Cf. Nadav Na'aman, "In Search of Reality behind the Account of David's Wars with Israel's Neighbours," *IEJ* 52 (2002): 200–224. The quotation is from p. 216.

[11]See the influential study of Leonhard Rost, *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids* (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 1926). See further the recent discussion in Walter Dietrich, "Das Ende der Thronfolgegeschichte," in *Die sogenannte Thronfolgegeschichte Davids: Neue Einsichten und Fragen* (ed. Albert de Pury and Thomas Römer; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 38–69; John van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009); Idem, "A Revival of the Succession Narrative and the Case against it," *JSOT* 39 (2014): 3–14; Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Another Contribution to the Succession Narrative Debate (2 Sam 11–20; 1 Kgs 1–2)," *JSOT* 38 (2013): 35–58.

[12]The English translation of Hattušiliš' apology is available in *The Context of Scripture, Volume 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr.; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 199–204. For the parallels between Hattušiliš' apology and David's history see further P. Kyle McCarter, "The Apology of David," *JBL* 99 (1984): 489–504; Antti Laato, *A Star Is Rising: The Historical Development of the Old Testament Royal Ideology and the Rise of the Jewish Messianic Expectations* (International Studies in Formative Christianity and Judaism; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 68–76; Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2001); Andrew Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).

only summarize my view of the historical nature of the united monarchy during the time of David and Solomon.[13]

With their clever diplomacy toward the Philistines, Moab, the Ammonites, Geshur and the Arameans, David and Solomon managed to create a prosperous kingdom, and this kingdom was established in co-operation with Egypt as indicated by Solomon's marriage to the daughter of the Pharaoh (1 Kgs 3:1; 9:16).[14] This means that during the reigns of David and Solomon it was important to establish traditions which justify such a new political scenario in Canaan. Instead of being in conflict with their neighbors, the Israelites have the possibility to see them as belonging to one great family whose paragon was Abraham. I shall argue that Abraham's story, among others, contains traces of such an old political ideology. Needless to say the Abraham story in the present form of Genesis is part of the exilic historical presentation of the pre-history of Israel.

There is reason to believe that many references to earlier sources in the Book of Kings (1 Kgs 11:41; 14:19, 29 etc.) actually refer to royal archives.[15] I have argued elsewhere that the synchronic chronology in the Books of Kings forms a skeleton which is based on reliable numbers and must have originated from royal archives.[16] This means that the writers

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[13]See also Antti Laato, "'When he comes to Shiloh' (Gen 49,8–12) – An Approach to the Books of Samuel," in *The Books of Samuel: Stories – History – Reception History* (ed. Walter Dietrich, Cynthia Edenburgh, and Philippe Hugo; BETL 284; Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 511–519.

[14]Concerning the discussion of Solomon's marriages, see Manfred Görg, *Die Beziehungen zwischen dem alten Israel und Ägypten: Von den Anfängen bis zum Exil* (EdF 290; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), 75–86; Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems Teil 1*, 241–244. The question whether or not the Egyptian Pharaoh Siamun invaded Gezer is discussed among scholars. For this, see Alberto R. Green, "Solomon and Siamun: A Synchronism between Early Dynastic Israel and the Twenty-First Dynasty of Egypt," *JBL* 97 (1978): 353–67; more critical treatments can be found in Paul S. Ash, *David, Solomon and Egypt: A Reassessment* (JSOTSS 297, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1999), 112–119; Bernd U. Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten in der Konigszeit: Die kulturellen Kontakte von Salomo bis zum Fall Jerusalems* (OBO 170; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1999), 19–35.

[15]Concerning the discussion of the royal "annals" in Jerusalem see recently Nadav Na'aman, "The Temple Library of Jerusalem and the Composition of the Book of Kings," in *Congress Volume Leiden 2004* (ed. André Lemaire; VTSup 109; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 129–152. It is important to note that in Jerusalem, one and the same dynasty ruled from the times of David and Solomon until the exile. There was certainly an interest in preserving older stories and documents which recorded the events of the dynasty. This explains why the Deuteronomist(s) had written records which made it possible for him/them to speak about events related to actual historical people and events, such as, for example, Shishak, Mesha, neo-Assyrian kings etc.

[16]Antti Laato, *Guide to Biblical Chronology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015).

of Enneateuch had direct or indirect (earlier literary sources based on royal archives) information which may go back to the beginning of the monarchic period.[17] Assuming that the Deuteronomistic program began already in the late monarchic period, in the reign of Josiah when it was easy to use royal archives, there is no need to speculate as to the ways in which the royal archives could have been preserved in the crisis of exile.

Methodologically I proceed as follows: My starting-point is to discuss in which way the figures in the Abraham story can be related to nations. I then connect the different elements in the stories to other available material (including Ancient Near Eastern texts and archaeology), and in particular to the texts in the Hebrew Bible, in order to determine some lines of development in traditions. Finally I relate the topics and themes in Abraham's story to the historical timeline.

2. Abraham and Lot: Moabites and Ammonites

The story of Abraham and Lot is often regarded as one of the earliest tradition complexes within Genesis.[18] In Genesis Lot is related to the peoples of Moab and Ammon, as becomes clear from the birth story of the forefathers of the Moabites and Ammonites in Gen 19:30–38.[19] This familiar relationship between Lot and the Moabites / Ammonites is also confirmed in Deut 2:9,19 (cf., also Ps 83:6–9 where Moab and Ammon are listed among nations who support the children of Lot). While in Deut 2:9,19 this family connection is presented in an appropriate way, Gen 19:30–38, on the other hand, must be regarded as strongly polemical towards Moab and Ammon: the intoxicated Lot had sexual relations with his two daughters and from this incestuous relationship Moab and Ammon were born. It

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[17]So, e. g., TRYGGVE N. D. METTINGER, *Solomonic State Officials: A Study of the Civil Government Officials of the Israelite Monarchy* (ConBOT 5; Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1971).

[18]See, e. g., ERHARD BLUM, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984) 273–289, 461–462; IDEM, "Abraham," *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft* (ed. HANS DIETER BETZ ET AL.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 1:70–74, esp. 71–72; IRMTRAUD FISCHER, *Die Erzeltern Israels: Feministisch-theologische Studien zu Genesis 12–36* (BZAW 222; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), 339–343; THOMAS RÖMER, "Recherches actuelles sur le cycle d'Abraham," in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History* (ed. A. WÉNIN; BETL 155; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 179–211; MANFRED KÖCKERT, "Die Geschichte der Abrahamüberlieferung," in *Congress Volume Leiden 2004*, 103–128; IDEM, "Wie wurden Abraham- und Jakobüberlieferung zu einer 'Vätergeschichte' verbunden?" *HeBAI* 3 (2014): 43–66.

[19]See the contribution of KONRAD SCHMID in this volume, p. 9–31.

is not easy to reconcile such an end to the positive attitude towards Lot preserved in Genesis 12–14 and 18–19. Abraham traveled together with Lot to the land of Canaan from Harran (Gen 12:4–5) and then again to Egypt where they lived during the famine (Gen 13:1). Abraham took care that his shepherds did not quarrel with Lot's because they belonged to the same family. The story continues by describing how the ways of Abraham and Lot became separated (Gen 13). Further, Abraham rescued his nephew when the latter was captured by enemies attacking Sodom (Gen 14). When Abraham was informed that God planned to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah he prayed to God to save righteous ones living inside the cities (Gen 18); the story implies that Abraham knew that his nephew was living in Sodom and even though God did not save the cities from destruction he nevertheless rescued Lot from there, apparently because of Abraham's request (Gen 19). It seems reasonable to assume that the tradition of Abraham and Lot originally emphasized the good relationship between Israel/Judah and Moab/Ammon, but that the story was completed later with a critical explanation on how the Moabites and Ammonites originated because of the incest between Lot and his daughters. It is this negative addition to the Abraham-Lot-cycle that parallels the Deuteronomic law prohibiting the Moabites and Ammonites from being members in the community (Deut 23:3–6).[20] In later reception history, Lot has been described as both righteous and wicked, indicating that through Gen 19:30–38 Lot has become an ambiguous figure.[21] Genesis 13 may have been interpreted as referring to the border disputes between Moab and Israel (attested both in Num 21 and in Jephthah's speech in Judg 11:14–27) by emphasizing that Lot was given the opportunity to choose first. He chose a "paradise" around Sodom but received a "hell" after God destroyed the cities there.

In order to understand this bipartite attitude toward Moab and Ammon in the present story of Genesis about Lot as well as in Deutero-

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[20]However, the Deuteronomic law does not contain any reference or allusion to the events in Gen 19:30–38. References are made to the wilderness tradition, mainly in Numbers 21–25. Note Gershon Hepner, "The Separation between Abram and Lot Reflects the Deuteronomic Law Prohibiting Ammonites and Moabites," *ZAW* 117 (2005): 36–52.

[21]Concerning these interpretations see James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 328–350. In the earliest Jewish interpretation of Lot the negative picture dominates even though Lot's relation to Abraham gives him positive credence. For this see Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, *Abraham in the Book of Jubilees: The Rewriting of Genesis 11:26–25:10 in the Book of Jubilees 11:14–23:8* (SupJSJ 161; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 176–185.

nomy (i. e. the positive Deut 2:9,19 contra negative Deut 23:3–6), a good
starting-point is to deal with corresponding positive and negative atti-
tudes preserved in the Books of Samuel and Kings.[22] 2 Sam 8 and later
2 Sam 10–12 indicate that David simply subjugated his enemies Moab and
Ammon under the feet of Israel. However, there are also other references
to Moab and Ammon in the Books of Samuel and Kings indicating that
seen historically David's and Solomon's relation to Moabites and Am-
monites was different.

To begin with David requested that his family would have the op-
portunity to stay with the king of Moab when he escaped from Saul
(1 Sam 22:3–4).[23] This request corroborates well with the tradition pre-
served in the Book of Ruth that David's ancestor married a Moabite
woman. A plausible interpretive model is that David managed to create
some sort of political or diplomatic agreement with the Moabites, and this
helped him in his rise to power. Later, a conflict between David and Moab
or rather some Moabites may have flared up and this led to severe penalty
actions from David's side (2 Sam 8:2).[24] According to 1 Kgs 11:7,33,
Solomon had married a Moabite woman, apparently for political reasons.
This indicates that David and Solomon had made a political agreement
with Moab. Assuming that 2 Sam 8:2 refers to a political problem in Moab
which aimed to call the political agreement between David and Moab
into question, the Deuteronomist has understood it as an overall military
action by Israel against Moab. In a similar way the Deuteronomist, who
knew a tradition about Solomon's political marriages, interpreted them
as an act of disloyalty against Yahweh (see also Deut 17:14–20). For the
Deuteronomist, therefore, Moab was Israel's enemy but David had a more
positive attitude to Moab.

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[22]Scholars have discussed from which period onwards one can speak about the territorial
polity in Moab. That "Moab" existed as political entity before the time of David and Solomon
has been proposed in ISRAEL FINKELSTEIN and ODED LIPSCHITS, "The Genesis of Moab: A
Proposal," *Levant* 43 (2011): 139–152.

[23]For ways in which it is possible to speak about the unified state or monarchy in Moab
at the time of David, see BRUCE ROUTLEDGE, *Moab in the Iron Age: Hegemony, Polity,
Archaeology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Cf. NADAV NA'AMAN,
"King Mesha and the Foundation of the Moabite Monarchy," *IEJ* 47 (1997): 83–92.

[24]Na'aman argues that 2 Sam 8:2 is a reference to the reign of Mesha, when he killed many
thousands of Israelites in Transjordan. NADAV NA'AMAN, "In Search of Reality behind the
Account of David's Wars with Israel's Neighbours," *IEJ* 52 (2002): 200–224. If Na'aman is
right, then 1 Sam 22:3–4 may indicate that David had good contacts with the Moabites –
and the Book of Ruth commemorates this historical fact by proposing that a Moabite woman
was David's foremother.

The situation of Ammon is not straightforward either, as accounted in 2 Sam 8:12 and in 2 Sam 10–12. The story about the wars against the Ammonites begins with an interesting reference to the late king Nahash being favorably inclined towards David, and therefore the latter wanted to show his benevolence to the new king Hanun (2 Sam 10:2). This led to a political conflict, the beginning of which was propagated in the Israelite version in such a way that the men of David were dishonored by the Ammonites (2 Sam 10:2b–4). On the other hand, the mother of Rehoboam was an Ammonite woman, Naamah (1 Kgs 14:21). This indicates that Solomon, and apparently already David (after the crisis of the Ammonite war), maintained good contacts with the Ammonites. It was David who arranged the marriage of Solomon to an Ammonite princess. [25] Therefore, the Ammonite war in 2 Sam 10–12 must be evaluated from the viewpoint that it may reflect only a military operation against some Ammonite groups which had attempted to destroy the diplomatic *status quo* policy of David. According to 2 Sam 17:27, Shobi son of Nahash (apparently a brother of Hanun) continued his father's friendly policy toward David. This being the case, there is reason to believe that the present form of 2 Sam 10–12 was developed as a long process and finally presented in the Deuteronomistic History as David subjugating the Ammonite rebellion. The historical circumstances may have been quite different. Perhaps there was an internal Ammonite crisis between Hanun and Shobi concerning the succession after Nahash. Hanun attempted to get support from Aramean troops (2 Sam 10:6) while Shobi wanted to continue the *status quo* policy with David. Seen historically, 2 Sam 10–12 was not directed against all Ammonites, but rather only against Hanun's party which attempted to eliminate the pro-David Shobi party.

To this evidence of stories preserved in the Books of Samuel one may even add the list of David's warriors, which include "Zelek the Ammonite" (2 Sam 23:37; 1 Chr 11:39) and "Ithmah the Moabite" (1 Chr 11:46). Why did these two men belong to David's close military group if the Moabites and Ammonites were his enemies as the Deuteronomist attempts to present it?

This survey in the history of David and Solomon indicates that the original positive attitude between David/Solomon and Moab/Ammon was later interpreted in the Deuteronomistic History as hostility between Israel and its enemy kingdoms. According to the Deuteronomistic presen-

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[25]Cf. Abraham Malamat, "Naamah, the Ammonite Princess, King Solomon's Wife," *RB* 106 (1999): 35–40.