

ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE “WOMEN TEXTS” IN THE ANCESTRAL NARRATIVES

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The first book of the Bible, Genesis, is to be understood from its narrative thread within the Pentateuch as “prehistory” of the history of the people of Israel, which is later presented by the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy as a “biography of Moses.” In Genesis, initial consideration is given in narrative form as to how the world came into being and what significance human beings have in it. Then the real living conditions are confronted with that ideal condition of the world created by God. The primeval history in Gen 1–11 is therefore largely to be read as a conglomerate of etiological narratives that attempts to explain in a variety of ways why the world is as it is, whereby three focal points are addressed: What is the relationship between God’s good creation and the evil in the world? Out of the unity of creation, how does such a variety of peoples with their various languages and settlement areas come into being? Where is Israel geographically and genealogically located within this creation?

Genesis 12–36 then tells of the theological location of Israel by presenting the development of the nation and of the surrounding nations as stories of *one* family over several generations, toward which God turns himself in an incomparable manner.¹ The Joseph story (Gen 37–50) continues the plot with the same characters. On the one hand, it creates the geographical connection

1. The theses that are summarized in this essay are presented in detail in several of my publications; therefore, no references will be given to individual research results in the following: Irmtraud Fischer, *Die Erzelter Israel: Feministisch-theologische Studien zu Genesis 12–36* (BZAW 222; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994); eadem, *Women Who Wrestled with God: Biblical Stories of Israel’s Beginnings* (trans. Linda M. Malony; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2005); eadem, “Gen 10–36,” in *Stuttgarter Altes Testament: Einheitsübersetzung mit Kommentar und Lexikon* (ed. Erich Zenger; 2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2004), 32–76. An abbreviated form is published in Italian: “Donne nel Antico Testamento,”

to the Exodus narratives beginning in Egypt; on the other, the development of the nation is presented genealogically by the fact that the twelve sons of Jacob become the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. In the following, the historical-critical research tradition that has been dominant in analyzing Genesis up until now will be initially examined with regard to its gender implications; in addition, the problems of historical conclusions drawn on the basis of the presentation of biblical history will be pointed out. In a second section, the linking elements in Genesis will be presented. The third part presents in narrative form the gender-relevant aspects of the individual texts and the female figures of Genesis² and at the same time understands Genesis as the historically grown narrative context that interprets the story of Israel's beginnings in the context of its neighbors.

1. ISRAEL WRITES THE HISTORY OF ITS ORIGINS AS FAMILY HISTORIES

In the Western tradition of history writing, the presentation of history for the longest time was concentrated on the national-political events and the great, mostly male, personalities who characterized them. Only in the last half century has the significance of social history become more and more recognized, which corrects and supplements the historical notion of important,

in *Donne e Bibbia: Storia ed esegesi* (ed. Adriana Valerio; La Bibbia nella Storia 21; Bologna: Dehoniane, 2006), 161–96.

2. Overviews on the “women texts” (= texts in which women are principle figures in the action) of Genesis with gender awareness are found in the historical *Women's Bible*: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Revising Committee, *The Women's Bible* (New York: European Publishing, 1897; repr.: Seattle: Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion, 1974), 14–67, as well as in the book commentaries in Sharon P. Jeanson, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); Susan Niditch, “Genesis,” in *The Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 10–25; Irmtraud Fischer, “Genesis 12–50: Die Ursprungsgeschichte Israels als Frauengeschichte,” in *Kompendium Feministische Bibleauslegung* (ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker; 3rd ed.; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 12–25, as well as Tamara C. Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss, eds., *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (New York: URJ, 2008). Essay collections on the subject include Isabel Gómez-Acebo et al., eds., *Relectura del Génesis* (En Clave de Mujer; 2nd ed.; Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 1999); Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (FCB 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); eadem, ed., *Genesis* (FCB 2.1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Alice Bach, ed., *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999). All the female names of people in Genesis are compiled in Carol L. Meyers, ed., *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

war-waging men through the portrayal of the living conditions at all levels of the population. Women's studies also brings in gender-specific issues and sets as its goal to no longer allow the history of just half of humanity to be deemed “official history.” It also does not want to portray the reconstructed history of women as a “compensating” history but rather to revise the entire portrayal of history, thus allowing it to become a history of *all* people.

For the longest time, the biblical presentation of the history of Israel's origins as stories of families had a very difficult time being accepted as a form of “historical writing” under these circumstances. In particular, the historical-critical research tradition of the last two centuries on the book of Genesis³ was strongly focused on the principles of an androcentric-hierarchical presentation of history, in which it saw the patriarchs as historical figures who represented their clans as tribal heads but at the same time assessed the corresponding women figures as “accessories.”⁴ The reconstruction of the beginnings of Israel occurred with a massive gender bias, meaning that the narrative figures were granted varying historical significance depending on their gender. The sole criterion for that type of discriminating assessment of literary characters was gender.

1.1. GENDER BIAS IN RESEARCH: FROM PATRIARCHS TO ANCESTORS

The family narratives of Gen 12–36 that span over three generations were described up into the 1990s as “patriarchal narratives,”⁵ even though nearly every second text introduces women as central figures of the plot. Solely the male narrative figures were made out to be addressee of the promise, even if the texts bear witness to the contrary and individual women figures such as Hagar (see Gen 16:10–12) are equally addressed for divine promises. The

3. A history of exegesis of the Pentateuch of the church fathers up into the 1960s is offered by Henri Cazelles and Jean-Paul Bouhot, *Il Pentateuco* (Biblioteca di Studi Biblici 4; Brescia: Paideia, 1968). A series of thematic collected volumes on the history of exegesis of individual texts of Genesis appeared in the series *Themes in Biblical Narrative: Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. Robert A. Kugler, Gerhard P. Luttikhuisen, and Loren T. Stuckenburck; Leiden: Brill, 1999–): 1. *Interpretations of the Flood* (1999); 2. *Paradise Interpreted* (1999); 3. *The Creation of Man and Woman* (2000); 4. *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (2002); 5. *Eve's Children* (2003); 6. *The Fall of the Angels* (2004); 7. *Sodom's Sin* (2004); 8. *The Creation of Heaven and Earth* (2004).

4. Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. Bernhard W. Anderson; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 149.

5. This tradition is virtually widespread: English-language research speaks of “patriarchal narratives,” the Spanish of “historia de los patriarcas,” the Italian of “storia di patriarchi,” and the German of “Patriarchen-Erzählungen.”

deity, who turns not only to the men but also to the women (think of Hagar in Gen 16:21 or Rebekah in 25:19–26), was called the “God of the fathers,” which according to the biblical evidence is to be documented at least through the label of “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” For the longest time, research therefore spoke of the *patriarchal* narratives, in which the God of the *fathers* gives the promises to the *fathers*.

In my postdoctoral thesis I pointed out that this terminology is not only not in accordance with the text but also brings with it a narrowing of the perspective in reference to the texts to be treated: because they are narratives of the *fathers*, no independent significance is granted to the female narrative characters and the texts in which they figure.⁶ I have therefore proposed “ancestral narratives” (*Erzeltern-Erzählungen*) as a more adequate term and encouraged references to be made to the “parents of Israel” when speaking of those individuals addressed by the promises. Those who plead that in Hebrew there are no gender-neutral relationship terms and therefore the plural of אָבֹת, “father,” אֲבוֹתָם, is to be literally translated with “fathers,” should take into account that Hebrew uses the masculine plural generically to indicate both male and female individuals. Since in generic languages a whole group of the female gender is presented grammatically as masculine due to a single male individual, translation into purely masculine forms in those languages in which there are also gender-neutral terms is incorrect. The term “fathers narratives” would therefore only be correct if in the texts only men were characters in the plot. The same translation strategy also applies to “brothers,” which frequently means “siblings,” or to “sons,” which in most cases refers to “children.”

1.2. GENDER AS A CATEGORY OF EXEGESIS

The perception that manifests itself in the terminology has repercussions on exegesis. While those texts that present men as the dominant figures of the plot are interpreted as an expression of political history writing, narratives about women are trivialized. Thus, for example, the texts about the dispute between the brothers Esau and Jacob are perceived as a manifestation of the conflict between the nations of Israel and Edom. If, however, a dispute takes place between women, the female figures are then stylized as quarrelsome, petty individuals whose only cares and aspirations concentrate on the struggle for their husbands and children.⁷ According to this, the constant quarrels of

the two men about the birthright, which, beginning with the birth itself, are expressed in three different narratives (Gen 25:24–26; 25:27–34; 27:1–41), are to be read as a literary reflection of the national-historical conflict over supremacy in the region. The dispute between sisters in Gen 29:31–30:24, however, is only occasionally interpreted as a foundational text of the egalitarianly conceived “twelve tribes nation,” which in the literary form of family narratives can come about only through twelve births in one generation.

While “men’s texts” are entitled to a “double bottom” in significance, in the texts where women play a central role only a one-dimensional surface is perceived. It is simply the nature of family narratives that they deal with everyday problems and take place in the small circle of close relatives. Both men and women prepare meals in Genesis (e.g., Abraham and Sarah in Gen 18; Rebekah and Esau in Gen 27), work with the herds (both Jacob and Rachel are shepherds of Laban’s cattle, according to Gen 29–30) and bemoan their childlessness (e.g., Abram⁸ in Gen 15; Sarai in Gen 16), but it is only with the women that exegesis sees the presence of a gender-specific desire for children.⁹ Thus it is seen that one’s own ideas of gender roles lead to a different exegesis of the texts. They induce exegetes to interpret the women’s texts “privately,” since one wants to find what appears to correspond to today’s female gender stereotypes. On the other hand, the narratives in question about men contradict the stated stereotypes, because neither the concern about children nor about daily meals is perceived as typically masculine. For these narratives, one therefore comes to the conclusion that there must be a deeper dimension that is “political,” otherwise they would have to be only trivial stories. The exegetical tradition that takes the women stories of the ancestral narratives literally and thus interprets them in a fundamentalist way, thereby trivializing them, yet investigates the men stories from a historical-critical perspective and interprets them as a highly theological history of the origin of Israel and its neighbors should be brought to an end. It takes the category of gender as the sole and highest criterion of exegesis and measures with two gauges for

Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1992), 74–75, which characterizes the birthing contest of the two women Leah and Rachel with keywords such as “feminine passion” and “feminine intrigues.”

8. Abram and Sarai are renamed Abraham and Sarah in Gen 17:5, 15; references beyond Genesis all speak of Abraham and Sarah. Accordingly, in this article reference is made to Sarai and Abram only where texts are introduced that use these names (Gen 11–17).

9. See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 314–15. For the significance of female sexuality and motherhood in Genesis, see Carmen Bernabé Ubieta, “El Génesis: Libro de orígenes y fundamentos,” in Gómez-Acebo et al., eds., *Relectura del Génesis*, 127–33.

6. Fischer, *Die Erzeltern Israels*, 1–4.

7. See Hans Jochen Boecker, 1. *Mose* 25,12–37,1: *Isaak und Jakob* (ZBKAT 1.3;

the genders.¹⁰ Either we are to read all the narratives in Gen 12–36 as trivial literature or *all* texts write a *political national history of Israel* and its neighbors in the form of *family narratives*, as was customary in the ancient Near East.

2. LINKING ELEMENTS BETWEEN NARRATIVES OF VARYING ORIGIN

The ancestral narratives offer divergent material both from a chronological and a geographical perspective that allows one to conclude differing dates of origins and derivations. The disparate texts are linked by several elements: (1) the chronological sequence is created through the genealogical linking of the characters; (2) the geographical sites are linked through itinerant notes, so-called itineraries; (3) the theological connection is made through the passing on of the divine promises from one generation to the next; and finally, (4) the common grave traditions hold the narratives together that link the four ancestral generations from Gen 12–50. I will now briefly deal with these literary hinges in the following.

2.1. GENEALOGIES

The detailed essay by Thomas Hieke in this volume is dedicated to the genealogies of the Pentateuch and their functions, such that only the essential aspects for the ancestral narratives will be briefly outlined here.

2.1.1. Linking Back to the Primeval History and Continuation in Exodus

The ancestors of Israel are linked through genealogies with both the primeval history and with the history of the people in Egypt: Abram's father Terah is the last member of the Semite family tree according to Gen 11:24–32. Through his father, Noah's firstborn son, Shem, links the story of the Israelite people not only with the flood narratives but also with the genealogical book of דָּוִד, of "humankind" per se, because the genealogy of Adam in Gen 5 ends with Noah and the prospects for his sons (5:28–32). The connection to the Exodus narratives that play in Egypt is, on the one hand, present through the account of the migration structured as the genealogy of the family of Jacob in Gen 46:8–27 and, on the other hand, in taking up this account by naming the tribal heads in Exod 1:1–5, as well as the note that Israel had become a great nation in

10. For more detail on this cf. 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. André Wénin; BETL 155; Leuven: University Press, 2001), 135–152; 147–150.

Egypt. In the texts of Genesis, genealogies thus have the main functions of linking generations and, in accordance with the double bottom of the texts, also peoples. They also have the narrative function of bridging long periods of time.

2.1.2. Genealogical Notes as an Indication of the Balance of Power of the Narrating Time

The genealogies of the Bible are not to be misinterpreted as family trees as we know them from European old and established families. Rather, they are indications of the shared social identities and balances of power of the time in which the texts originated, but not of that epoch of which they tell. This also explains the fact that the Bible itself at times offers several variations of one and the same family tree.¹¹ Since patriarchal cultures discriminate not only according to gender but also according to age and ethnicity, genealogies are to be read accordingly.

- ▶ The social group that stands behind the parents of a clan is more important than that which is represented in the generation of the children. What does it mean, therefore, when the Abraham anchored in Judah is more important than Jacob, the ancestral father of the northern kingdom?
- ▶ The merging of two ethnic groups into one is indicated through marriage (e.g., northern and southern kingdoms in the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah). The group that stands behind the mother is, as a rule, not the dominant one (the wives of Jacob-Israel coming from Aram).
- ▶ When social units are to be introduced as equals, this is expressed in the form of genealogical family stories as a sibling relationship (the egalitarianly conceived people of the twelve tribes is founded by twelve sons of one man with several wives).

Those hypotheses on the earliest history of the Pentateuch that counted on originally independently existing sources accepted the sequence of generations as the biblical historical outline presents them, mostly as the correlation already existing in the earliest texts.¹² More recent theses tend to propose a

11. A classic example for this is the family tree of Jesus in Matt 1 stylized according to the decimal system of the Genesis *toledot*, which freely deals with genealogical material but particularly through the stylization achieves the purpose of linking the youngest member back to the history of the nation.

12. For the distribution of women's texts over the Pentateuch sources, see Ubieta, "El Génesis," 114–18.

narrative cycle hypothesis in which the core of the Jacob cycle was passed down independently from the older texts of the Abraham-Sarah cycle.¹³ Abraham as the ancestral father of the nation—and not Jacob/Israel, who carries the name of the nation—must therefore not be an old tradition but rather suggests a time of origin in which the southern kingdom of Judah had taken over dominance in the region after the downfall of the northern kingdom of Israel. The interface forms the newly created Rebekah-Isaac cycle, which consists mostly of retellings of the Abraham-Sarah cycle.¹⁴ If, however, in this generation the mother is presented as more dominant than the father, this points to the ongoing importance continuing into the Persian period of that group that felt connected to the former “northern kingdom traditions.”¹⁵

2.2. ITINERARIES AND SETTLEMENT AREAS

In reference to geographical connections, itineraries serve a similar function as attributed to the genealogies in social and chronological matters. The travel routes of the primeval ancestors link the individual local traditions with one another.

Through the note on the travels of the Terah family, as it is placed before the ancestral narratives in Gen 11:31, the *origins of the nation* that are symbolized in the beginnings of its ancestors are placed *outside of the land*. Israel is not autochthonous in its land but rather came there through the challenge of God and the obedience of its ancestors (Gen 12:1, 4–5). When the family of Abram follows God’s command and passes on its journey such important locations in the north of Israel such as Shechem, Bethel, and Ai, they become linked from the outset with the ancestors of the nation; northern and southern kingdom traditions are introduced as a unit from the very beginning. When Abram builds altars at these places but does not offer up sacrifices on them, only prays, this suggests a narrative period in which the famous shrines of these cities are no longer functioning. It is thus unlikely that these connecting

13. Informative on the current status of research is Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson, eds., *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007).

14. Thus the endangering of the ancestral woman as the reception of the abandonment narratives of Gen 12; 20 as well as the well disputes with Abimelech in the context of descriptions of the wealth of the ancestors.

15. The text about the matchmaking of Rebekah, certainly to be dated to the Persian period, which is to be read as a vote on the postexilic mixed-marriage issue, shows Rebekah in the dominant role, while Isaac only appears at the end of the narratives in a few verses virtually as the recipient.

texts originated prior to the downfall of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C.E. However, through the building of altars, the entire land that Abram is crossing is symbolically taken into possession for YHWH. In this way, the claim is upheld to parts of land that were lost as settlement areas.

This path that Abraham follows from east to west is also traversed a generation later by Rebekah. She, too, is prepared to leave her land to marry the son of the line of promise (Gen 24:1–9, 58–61). In the next generation Jacob returns back on this path again to flee from Esau. On the one hand, he wants to find refuge with his mother’s brother (27:43–44) and, on the other, to take a wife from this family for the line that has moved into the promised land (28:1–7).¹⁶ After Jacob and his wives had become a large family in the east, God calls them back into the land (31:3). Thus, the geographical arc from the promised land into Mesopotamia has been traversed multiple times, the land west of the Jordan all the way into the Negev installed as the right place for the life of the nation. The right women, however, come from the part of the family living in the east—a situation that existed only in Israel’s history during the postexilic period, when the mixed-marriage problem also determined the identity of the nation.

But not only the *path into exile* and back finds its prefiguration in the ancestral narratives, but also the *exodus out of Egypt*. Abraham, after moving through the land, already immediately continues on to Egypt in order to avoid a famine (Gen 12:10–20) and there comes into conflict with the pharaoh. The Egyptian ruler is struck with plagues by YHWH (see 𐤃𐤍 in Gen 12:17; Exod 11:1) to release Sarah out of the harem and to enable the couple to return to the promised land. In a similar situation in the second generation, the migration to Egypt is explicitly forbidden (Gen 26:2). The path to Egypt, which ultimately makes the exodus necessary, is again traversed three times: Joseph must traverse it since he has been sold into slavery by his brothers (37:36), and his brothers traverse it twice under the constraint of famine (42–43). In the end, Jacob’s entire family as a nation is, as it were, invited to Egypt (45:9–28). When both Jacob and Joseph insist on being buried in the grave of their ancestors in the promised land, the latent longing for life in the land is codified for future generations (living in Diaspora) at least as an ideal.

The places visited by the ancestors on their travels thus represent in a nutshell all epochs and places of Israel’s narrative history. The fate of the people is already prefigured in the ancestors—or said another way: what concerns

16. The two justifications that complement one another in the final text surely belong to different literary levels. See, e.g., J. Alberto Soggin, *Das Buch Genesis: Kommentar* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), 357–60.

Israel as a whole is already told by the ancestors in the form of the national history as a family history. Even the exodus and exile are already sketched out in the ancestral narratives.

2.3. PROMISES

Another connecting line is produced by the promises,¹⁷ which in the present-day final text is transferred from generation to generation. If through the patrilineal succession policy the main line of the genealogy is always determined by the man's firstborn son, the transfer of promises runs contrary to this. In none of the generations created through the linking of the traditions of the northern and southern kingdoms does the promise line transfer to the patriarch's firstborn son.¹⁸ It is not Abraham's firstborn son Ishmael (Gen 16; 17; 21) who becomes the ancestral father of the nation of promise but rather Sarah's firstborn son, Isaac (21:12; 26:3–4). Isaac's favorite son Esau (25:28) does not have a very high regard for his birthright and sells it for some lentil stew (25:29–34). He is ultimately cheated out of his father's blessing, which passes on the legitimacy of the clan (27:30–40), but already the divine birth oracle knows of his secondary status (25:23–26). As if to emphasize the dominance of Jacob, the mother's second-born and favorite son (25:28), the transfer of the promises of the parents within the context of a divine appearance (28:12–15) is added in addition to these three etiological narratives of his superiority. Nearly all of the narratives about the return of Jacob's clan to the land link the narrative thread to the legitimization of the second born as the principal heir of the promise and of the blessing (31:3–4; 32:28–29 [Hebrew 32:29–30]; 33:16; 35:1–15).

In the fourth generation, through the birth of the twelve sons of Israel, the jump from the ancestors to the nation occurs. The legitimacy thus transfers from one main line to twelve egalitarian lines, the tribes. Nonetheless, even in this generation there is the formation of a main line: the elimination of the firstborn son Reuben is justified by his laying with his father's concubine

17. A compilation of all types of the promise is found in Claus Westermann, *Die Verheißungen an die Väter: Studien zur Vätergeschichte* (FRLANT 116; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976). Synopses of all formulations of promises in Genesis are found in Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch* (trans. John J. Scullion; JSOTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 55–74.

18. This fact is suggested by Savina J. Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis* (Athens: Swallow, 1984), as an indication of old writings that would have still testified to a matrilineal succession and that would have been eclipsed in the biblical texts through patriarchal redacting.

(Gen 35:22); the next-oldest brothers disqualify themselves through the escalation of vengeance against the Shechemites (34:30), to which Jacob refers in his tribal blessing. Thus, only Judah remains as a potential main line of the genealogy, whose founding is especially emphasized through its own narrative (Gen 38) and its dominance in the tribal blessing (49:8–12).

The updating of this narrative approach only occurs, of course, outside the Pentateuch through the continuation of the Judah line as that group from which the royal dynasty will come forth (Ruth 4:18–22; 1 Sam 16:1–13), which again is given a promise (2 Sam 7:8–16). A second main line is shaped through the Joseph story, which with the adoption and blessing of the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, ends with Jacob (Gen 48). The "house of Joseph," which—in the narrated time, centuries later—characterizes the northern kingdom of Israel, thus has a significant position. However, in the overall biblical context, the Judean line is perceived as the dominant line of promise.

The promises to the ancestors, in particular the promise of land, are already taken up narratively in the Pentateuch. The clan, which had become a great nation in Egypt (Exod 1:7), is promised freedom from the house of slavery and the gift of land by reverting to the divine affirmations of Genesis (3:13–17). The biblical narrative context of the Pentateuch thus presents the forthcoming entry into the promised land in Deut 34 as the fulfillment of the promise of land to the ancestors. Nevertheless, research is currently intensively discussing whether the ancestors of Genesis were originally meant with אֲבוֹת, the parents of the book of Deuteronomy.¹⁹

2.4. BURIAL NOTES AND GRAVE TRADITIONS

If grave traditions were frequently viewed in historical-critical research as time-honored, current Genesis research now assumes more of a late origination period for them. The ancestral narratives are also held together by the burial place in the Cave of Machpelah near Hebron.²⁰ Since specific datings and information about life spans are associated with the burial notes, they are attributed to the Priestly texts of Genesis. The burial place is purchased by

19. See, for instance, Thomas Römer, *Israels Väter: Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im Deuteronomium und in der deuteronomistischen Tradition* (OBO 99; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1990); Konrad Schmid, *Erzväter und Exodus: Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments* (WMANT 81; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1999).

20. See Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1984), 441–46.

Abraham for his deceased wife Sarah according to all the rules of Middle Eastern trade policy (Gen 23). Abraham (25:7–10), Isaac (35:27–29), and Jacob (49:29–33) are then buried in it. According to Jacob's statements, both Leah and Rebekah also rest in this family grave (49:31), in which he would like to be buried as well. This grave tradition links the generations of the ancestors through a common place and thus forms another building block for a consistent, ongoing family history over several generations. The gravesite of Machpelah, which is presented very prominently in Genesis and in which all members of the first three generations of the line of promise are buried (except for Rachel, who died and was buried "on the way"), never comes up again in the Bible. This suggests the suspicion that the entire tradition about a common ancestral family grave is not a time-honored written tradition but rather serves as a literary link to the quite disparate individual narratives with regard to geography.

2.5. WHAT SETTLEMENT AREAS DISCLOSE ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF THE TEXTS

Abraham's settlement area is stated as being in the south of Judah through the towns of Hebron (Gen 13:18; 23:2, 19), Mamre (13:18; 18:1) and Beersheba (21:25–34) as well as through the regions of the Negev (12:9; 13:1; 20:1) and the southern end of the Dead Sea (13:10–12; 18:16–19, 29). He is thus clearly the patriarch of the south.

However, the *places connected with Jacob* are all located in the area of the northern kingdom. In Bethel, within the context of the vision of the stairway to heaven, he is promised a return home, and after half a lifetime in a foreign land he does return there (Gen 28:10–22; 35:1–15). His first settlement attempt in the land is localized in Shechem (Gen 34). The east Jordan land situated to the north and partially in the northern kingdom's sphere of influence is crossed by Jacob starting from Gilead (31:21–54) via Mahanaim (32:1 [Hebrew 32:3]), Peniel (32:23–32 [33]), and Succoth (33:17). Only Rachel's tomb and the return to the starting point of his wanderings link Jacob with towns in the Judean region.

Isaac as the representative of the linking generation between the founding families of the south and the north has, in accord with his literary function, *no typical link to a place*. He awaits his wife, who is coming from Mesopotamia, in Beer-lahai-roi (24:62), that place whose founding legend in 16:13–14 is tied to Hagar's liberation. Otherwise, like his father before him, he is situated in Beersheba (26:23–33; 28:10) and then—according to the complications surrounding the death blessing (Gen 27) narratively much too late—linked with the young grave tradition in Hebron/Mamre (35:27).

3. THE HISTORY OF A FAMILY IN FOUR GENERATIONS

While the primeval history in Gen 1–11 condenses the time and covers whole epochs through large genealogies, time in the narratives of the remaining part of Genesis²¹ is stretched over four generations, with an outlook to the fifth. In geographical terms, Israel traverses the entire path of its future history, from Mesopotamia to Egypt, multiple times and marks the Syro-Palestinian land bridge in the middle as land promised by God under oath.

3.1. ABRAHAM-SARAH CYCLE

The narrative cycle about the first generation²² of the ancestors grows seamlessly from the end of the Semite family tree, from the notes about Terah's family and their travels. Narrative approaches for several build-ups of tension in the following "family saga" are embedded in the introduction of the Terah clan in Gen 11:27–32:

- ▶ Sarai, Abram's wife, is introduced as being infertile (11:30). All texts that discuss the topic of the ancestral couple's childlessness pick up this thread. These are de facto the biggest parts of Gen 12–21. In addition to the Hagar narratives (Gen 16; 21:8–21), this also includes Abram's complaints of not being able to see any realization of the promises without children (Gen 15, 17). Even for the abandonment narratives of Gen 12:10–20 and 20, the childlessness of the married couple is a prerequisite.
- ▶ Milcah, who is introduced with the genealogy of her father (Gen 11:29), and Nahor form the pivotal point of those narratives that play in the east, since the part of the family constituted by this couple does not move into the land. The sons of the line of promise get their wives from this clan. In this way, endogamy—marriage within the large

21. The Torah is divided into twelve sections in the synagogue reading, and there are also women's commentaries that follow suit, such as Yvonne Domhardt, Esther Orlow, and Eva Pruschy, eds., *Kol Ischa: Jüdische Frauen lesen die Tora* (2nd ed.; Zürich: Chronos, 2007); Elyse Goldstein, ed., *The Women's Torah Commentary: New Insights from Women Rabbis on the 54 Weekly Torah Portions* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2008).

22. An easy-to-read overview on the texts about Sarah is given by Tammi J. Schneider, *Sarah: Mother of Nations* (New York: Continuum, 2004). Basic questions are compiled by Jean Louis Ska, "Essai sur la nature et la signification du cycle d'Abraham," in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History* (ed. André Wénin; BETL 155; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 153–77.

family consisting of several generations—is already set as a standard among the ancestors of Israel.

- The note that Abram's nephew Lot also moves into the land ultimately forms the starting point for the Lot narratives of Gen 13 and 19.

The narrative cycle begins when God calls Abram to leave his native land and to move to an unknown land on the basis of a promise (Gen 12:1). As a reward for obeying the command, Abram is promised he will receive the land and become a great nation there (12:2). This exodus of the family is given relevance for international law, because a blessing or curse for all on earth is decided by the position of Abram—and, as will be shown, of his family. While moving into the land, which does not come to a stop until the extreme-most south, in the Negev, the patriarch symbolically takes possession of the land for YHWH by building altars at central locations of the later northern kingdom. God then affirms the gift of this land for his descendants (12:7).

3.1.1. The Abandonment of the Ancestral Woman as the Abandonment of the Promises

When initial but grave difficulties crop up in this promised land, Abram leaves the Land to head toward Egypt. Genesis will also tell of avoiding famine in the Syro-Palestinian land bridge by heading to Egypt in the Joseph story (see Gen 42:5; 43:1), because the fertility of this land is not determined by rain but by the flooding of the Nile. Since the deity is not consulted when leaving the land, shortly before crossing the border Abram begins to fear that his beautiful wife could be desired and that attempts might be made to get rid of him. Abram's speech to his wife Sarai begins with a compliment (12:11b) in order to paint the blackest picture of the risk that she represents for him as his wife. Her survival is chiastically offset with his death:

And they will kill me, but you they will allow to live! (Gen 12:12)

The narrative does not allow Sarai to answer, thus implying her victim status.²³ When the clan comes to Egypt, Sarai's extraordinary beauty is indeed affirmed. None of the Egyptians dares to touch the couple; instead, the woman is praised to the pharaoh, who then takes her into his house after paying a

23. J. Cheryl Exum ("Who's Afraid of 'The Endangered Ancestress'?" in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* [ed. J. Cheryl Exum and David J. A. Clines; JSOTSup 143; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 107–8) emphasizes the masculine perspective of the story.

princely bride-price. The Egyptian ruler does good things for Abram (12:16)—not a trace of unbridled desire, as Abram had feared in Egypt!

There is only one who is not in agreement with the integration of the ancestral woman into a foreign genealogical line: YHWH afflicts the pharaoh with great plagues because of Sarai, the wife of Abram (12:17). The deity of Israel intercedes not to get the patriarch back his wife but rather to save the woman under the promise. The foreign ruler then demands accountability from Abram as to why he made him risk adultery, a severe sin in the ancient Near East (12:18). It then becomes clear that the patriarch's strategy of passing his wife off as his sister is what caused the awkward situation. The fact that the pharaoh quotes *Abram's statement*, "She is my sister!"—and not that of Sarai, as Abram wanted to place in her mouth (12:13)—proves Sarai's innocence in the dilemma. However, the pharaoh is noble enough not to hurt a hair on the head of the man who had lied and cheated him. He gives him back his wife and arranges for them to be deported over the border under armed escort (12:19–20).

When they arrive in the land, there are conflicts between Lot and Abram due to the abundance of herds—apparently acquired through the bride-price paid for Sarai (12:16). Genesis 13 is the first of several narratives about disputes due to pastureland and wells, which all presume the stable wealth of the ancestral parents (21:22–34; 26:12–33). From the context, both the narrative about the abandonment of Sarai as well as that about the separation of Lot can be read as narratives about the abandonment of the promises: if Abram with Sarai abandons the divine promise of becoming a great nation, he is also disregarding the promise of the land by allowing Lot to select the region where he would like to live in the future. It is thus not surprising that YHWH has to renew the land promise with Abram after Lot chose the paradise-like Jordan Valley as his future dwelling area (13:14–18).

Since the promises to the ancestral parents have always been directed to the *fathers*, the narrative about the abandonment of the ancestral woman proves for the first time that not merely the patriarchs are addressed by the divine promises but rather the ancestral *parents*. Sarah is freed from a foreign harem as a bearer of the promise with whom the patriarch will fulfill the promise to become a great nation. But the narrative context presents a very similar story once again in Gen 20. From the narrated course of her life story, Sarah is no longer young and beautiful. She is an old woman who has just been promised the birth of a child in the next year, and it is in this year of pregnancy that her husband again abandons her while he is staying in Gerar as a stranger. Genesis 20 sets the accents of the narrative material somewhat differently than 12:10–20: Sarah becomes the "accessory," since the lie about the sibling relationship is also put into her mouth (20:5), and the lie becomes

a half-truth since the two become half-siblings (20:12).²⁴ In addition, every suspicion that Sarah might have become the wife of the foreign ruler in his harem is removed because God himself prevents him from touching her (20:6). During the time while Sarah is in the harem, it is emphasized that God had struck Abimelech's household with infertility (20:18). In this way, any doubt about the paternity of Isaac, whose birth is told in the next section (21:1–7), is excluded.

Again this story tells of the abandonment of the ancestral woman, even if the risk of being integrated into a foreign genealogy no longer really exists here. In the third narrative that deals with this material, Isaac and Rebekah are the protagonists, Abimelech again the foreign ruler (Gen 26:1–11). In the story, the threat to the ancestral woman takes place more theoretically, since the foreign ruler already discovers before any contemplation of taking the woman into his household that the ancestral couple is not linked by the bonds of siblinghood but by the bonds of marriage. The crime of adultery is discussed more as a horrific possibility (26:10). To prevent this, the king places the couple under his personal protection by forbidding them from being touched (26:11).

Why is the same story told three times within fifteen chapters?²⁵ Traditional historical-critical research has explained this in terms of the composition of pentateuchal sources and the law of the passing down of saga, that the more unknown figure (Isaac) was the original²⁶ and the more famous (Abraham) appeals to all stories. Nonetheless, even with this explanation it begs the question of why this story in particular was considered so important that three versions have been preserved, while for others there are only one or two versions. Independent of the history of the origin of the three texts, which is not likely to be explained through source-like material, there must be a justification for this type of emphasis on a story that at first glance is not so important theologically, and one can in fact find it by taking an overall picture of the entire narrative cycle.

24. These interventions to alleviate the scandal presumably go back to a later redaction that sought to dress up the image of the ancestral parents. For more detail on Gen 20, see Fischer, *Die Erzeln Israel*, 137–74.

25. On the problem of the double written traditions and their assessment for the history of the origin of the Pentateuch, see Aulikki Nahkola, *Double Narratives in the Old Testament: The Foundations of Method in Biblical Criticism* (BZAW 290; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001).

26. See, e.g., Klaus Koch, *Was ist Formgeschichte? Methoden der Biblexegese* (4th ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981), 154.

3.1.2. The Hagar Narratives

The two narratives about Hagar, Gen 16 and 21:8–21,²⁷ are inseparably linked with the motif of the ancestral woman's childlessness. According to 16:1–4, the infertile Sarai gives her husband her Egyptian slave for the purpose of surrogate motherhood. This legal arrangement of surrogate motherhood,²⁸ widely attested to in the ancient Near East, is not to be found anywhere in the legal texts of the Old Testament, yet it is found twice in the ancestral narratives: Rachel and Leah also made use of this option of coming to even more children, the only means by which the people of the twelve tribes can originate. What has to be seen from our perspective today as the exploitation of the female sexuality of enslaved women was a legitimate option in the ancient Near East of achieving legally recognized descendants without adoption. The success of the legal construction can then likely be spoken of when the surrogate mother is integrated into the family. This is the case with Bilhah and Zilpah, who in reference to their mistresses always remain in the status of the “slave” (עַבְדָּה), while their legal position within the family, however, becomes that of מַלְאָכָה, the “maidservant.”²⁹ However, for Hagar the integration into the family does not succeed: when Hagar notices that she is pregnant from the husband of her mistress, she becomes contemptible in Hagar's eyes. Hagar is thus not prepared to leave untouched the social gaps between slave and mistress.

27. The Hagar narratives have already been thoroughly examined at the final-text level by Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (OBT 13; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). A reception history on the Hagar narratives up to the Reformation has been offered by John L. Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs: Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation* (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 17–99.

28. Savina J. Teubal, *Hagar the Egyptian: The Lost Tradition of the Matriarchs* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), interprets the figures of Sarah and Hagar due to the widely attested legal arrangement in Mesopotamian legal texts (Code of Hammurabi 144–147) that highly ranked *naditu* priestesses apparently had to remain childless and therefore could place their female slaves at the disposal of their husbands for surrogacy, as indications of matriarchal traditions of desert nomads that had been revised androcentrically in the legal texts. He understands both figures to be priestly, with the prerequisite for this of course being the assumption of very old written traditions that stretch far back into the second century B.C.E.

29. On this thesis, see Fischer, *Die Erzeln Israel*, 91–97, as well as on the female slave texts of Genesis: Elisa Estévez López, “Las grandes ausentes: La memoria de las esclavas en los orígenes de Israel,” in Gómez-Acebo et al., *Relectura del Génesis*, 221–67.

According to Exod 21:7–11, a female (Israelite) indebted slave with whom a free man of the slave-holding family had sexual contact could not be resold but instead had to be bought back. If the marital goods of food, clothing, and sexual intercourse were no longer granted to the slave, she had the right to go free without making payment. If one takes this arrangement into consideration, the appraisal of her mistress from Hagar's perspective certainly conforms to the written law: whoever has sexually recognized a slave woman can no longer treat her like a normal work slave. But this is precisely what Sarai and Abram do. The husband, who responds to his wife's command without question and whose child the slave woman is carrying, is not prepared to concede her the status of אִמָּה but instead gives her back into the hand of her mistress without support. Sarai then oppresses Hagar so harshly that the slave woman runs away. The human attempt to assist in the fulfillment of the promise of a son has thus gone totally awry.

The death penalty is consistently applied in the legal policies of the ancient Near East for escape from slavery: whoever runs away is subject to death, as are those who do not bring the escaped slaves back to their masters.³⁰ Even if no such laws are found in the Old Testament, they are nonetheless to be assumed implicitly, since it is unlikely that slavery could have been maintained in the long term if an organized deprivation of liberty could have existed without force.

This legal historical background is to be borne in mind when the messenger of YHWH meets Hagar at a spring of water on the way from the Negev to her native land of Egypt and speaks to her (16:7–8). The fact that the angel addresses her with "Hagar, servant of Sarai," makes it clear that he knows about her escape. Nonetheless, he is the first to take her seriously as a person, since he calls her by her name and does not address her solely by her social status. On the one hand, he asks her about her origin, which Hagar answers truthfully by confessing her flight, and, on the other, about her future, to which the slave gives no answer. In the original narrative, which was likely redacted twice,³¹ in response to Hagar's reply comes the affirmation, which was formulated anew with a second introduction to the speech in 16:11, that

30. A solid overview of the biblical legal provisions on slavery is offered by Innocenzo Cardellini, *Die biblischen "Sklaven"-Gesetze im Lichte des keilschriftlichen Sklavenrechts: Ein Beitrag zur Tradition, Überlieferung und Redaktion der alttestamentlichen Rechtstexte* (BBB 55; Königstein: Hanstein, 1981).

31. The speech introduction repeated three times does not conceal the redactions. See Mieke Bal, Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes, and Grietje van Ginneken, *Und Sara lachte...: Patriarchat und Widerstand in biblischen Geschichten* (Münster: Morgana Frauenbuchverlag, 1988), 29–50, which therefore speak of the "stammering messenger of God."

Hagar will bear a son. She is to give the child a memorial name, Ishmael, "God hears," to memorialize her deliverance from oppression. Verse 12 then introduces the fate of the freely born son who also lives in freedom in the image of the wild donkey. A double etiology forms the conclusion of the basic narrative, through which both the delivering deity as well as the place of the divine appearance conveyed by an angel is named. Both places, El-roi and Beer-lahai-roi, are brought in connection with "seeing," רָאָה, while the name of her son is linked to the deity with "hearing," שָׁמַע. All three etiologies are linked with El, while the remaining narrative uses the name YHWH for the deity. Whether it can be concluded from this that the etiologies are of an older origin and perhaps even stem from oral traditions is dubious. It could be that they all explain already-existing names that were acculturated into the Israelite religion with this story, similar to the case of Bethel in Gen 28:10–19.

Belonging to the redactional layer of this original deliverance narrative is the angel's command to return in 16:9, which conforms to the slave laws of the ancient Near East. In order to be able to tell the story a second time with different accents in Gen 21:8–21, Hagar's return to the house of slavery is an absolute prerequisite. The question of whether the promise speech of 16:10 inserted with another speech introduction also belongs to this layer must be answered in the negative. This verse fits better in the context of the redactional layer that idealizes the image of the ancestral parents in the advanced postexilic period and is visible both in Gen 20 and in 21:11–13.

The Priestly layer of the narrative is found in Gen 16:3, 15–16. It allows Hagar to become a social climber by Sarai giving her to her husband as a *wife*. The Priestly writing thus presumes the freeing of the slave, who then—without entanglements of social ranking—becomes pregnant and bears her husband his firstborn son. In this layer, which presumably originated independently from the other texts in Gen 16, the father names the son (16:15), since any etiology that could refer to deliverance must be lacking. The merging of the texts into the present-day Hagar narrative will have been done by the redactor who integrated the pre-Priestly material into the Priestly writing. The present-day final text has both a carrot and stick message for the oppressed slave: if she goes back and allows herself to be oppressed again, she gets a promise as has never before been granted to one of the ancestral women of the line of promise. However, the basic narrative has a universalistic approach to the deity of Israel's bequest of salvation: as Marie-Theres Wacker accurately ascertained, YHWH is also present in providing help to an Egyptian slave when leaving Israel—not just during Israel's exodus from Egypt.³²

32. See Marie-Theres Wacker, "1. Mose 16 und 21: Hagar—die Befreite," in 32 *aus-*

The second narrative of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, who is now already a child, is told directly after the note on the weaning of the promised son Isaac. Sarah becomes aware that her son is not the firstborn son and therefore will not be the principal heir (21:9–10). In a twisting of the legal facts that the firstborn son of Abraham, Ishmael, would co-inherit with her son, she insists on the expulsion of Hagar, now called a maidservant. Abraham obeys, as previously in Gen 16:1–4, his wife's every word and expels his son and his son's mother the next morning. Hagar receives no settlement payment, only a ration of water and bread (21:14). If according to Gen 16:7 she was goal-directed and found the well on her own, according to 21:14 she wanders with her child dying of thirst lost in the desert, which is named after a well, Beer-sheba, but which she cannot seem to see. When the water in the skin runs out and the boy is about to die of thirst, Hagar raises up her voice in loud weeping (21:16). Virtually at the last moment, God saves the child by allowing an angel to come down from heaven to his aid, who then shows the mother the rescuing well. In the context of the salvation oracle of 21:17–18, she also receives the promise that her son will become a great nation. Ishmael pursues his further path through life as a free man, marries an Egyptian, and settles in the desert (21:20–21).

3.1.3. Sacrifice of Isaac versus Testing of the Abandoning Father

A twin text,³³ the narrative of the binding of Isaac, follows up this narrative of deliverance from the greatest need. If Abraham easily expels the one son hard-heartedly, he must now, with a heavy heart, sacrifice the other, the only remaining one after the expulsion of Ishmael: Isaac, his favorite son and the bearer of the promise (22:2). In both stories "Abraham rises in the morning" (וַיִּשָּׁבֶם אַבְרָהָם בִּבְקֶרֶת, 21:14; 22:3) and "takes" (וַיִּקַּח) one of his sons to send him out of the house never to be seen again. Both times only one parent is alone on the road with the son, and both times the child is saved from death at the last moment because an angel speaks to the parent from heaven (וַיִּקְרָא יְיָ אֶל-מֶלֶךְ אֱמֶת, 21:17; 22:11). The angel then gives the par-

gewählte Bibeltexte für Gruppen, Gemeinden und Gottesdienste (vol. 1 of *Feministisch gelesen*; ed. Eva Renate Schmidt, Mieke Korenhof, and Renate Jost; 2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1989), 28.

33. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte*, already discovered this. He labels Gen 21 the "dress rehearsal" for Gen 22, which in my estimation reduces the significance of the Hagar narrative. See the synopsis of both texts in Fischer, *Women Who Wrestled*, 40–43. The twin texts have a multitude of semantic commonalities as well as a similar structure; therefore, there must be references made between the two in their interpretation.

ents the instruction to save the boys with their own "hand" (דָּ, 21:18; 22:12). Both parents ultimately receive a divine promise (21:18; 22:17–18). The story ends both times with information about the area where they will later live (21:20–21; 22:19).

The story of "the binding of Isaac," as Judaism calls it, or "the sacrifice of Isaac," as Christianity has called it through its typological-christological tradition of exegesis, is one of the most important texts in the reception history of the Hebrew Bible.³⁴ Time and again it has invited the identification of the elect people whose existence was threatened by pogroms and yet was rescued just in time. Time and again, particularly in the period after the Enlightenment, it has been denounced as a scandalous text³⁵ that reveals the supposedly cruel biblical image of God. If one reads the text as it stands in the Bible, the story does not deal with Isaac being threatened but rather with the father being tested (22:1). If he refuses to obey the command, nothing at all will happen to the son. This is because the deity does not want to sacrifice Isaac but to test whether Abraham is prepared to do to himself what he has already done to others. He has abandoned all the people around him: Sarah twice, by declaring her his sister and thus subjecting her to the risk of being integrated into a foreign genealogical line, and Hagar twice, since he was not man enough to stand by the woman carrying his child. With her he has abandoned his firstborn son twice and ultimately sends them away. Now God tests Abraham, who as an old man no longer has any realistic chance of having any more children, to see whether he is prepared to abandon his own future with his only son. The deity forces the patriarch to reconcile his social life, which looks more like a failure than a success, with his life of faith, in which despite all adversities he always believed anew in his God. Abraham passes the test by being prepared to follow this instruction directed against all earlier promises. If Sarah is absent in this story,³⁶ the reason for this is that she, who had been the driving force behind

34. The literature is compiled at Georg Steins, *Die "Bindung Isaaks" im Kanon (Gen 22): Grundlagen und Programm einer kanonisch-intertextuellen Lektüre: Mit einer Spezialbibliographie zu Gen 22* (Herders Biblische Studien 20; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1999).

35. The history of exegesis of the text is broadly documented; in the German-speaking area alone, see, e.g., David Lerch, *Isaaks Opferung christlich gedeutet: Eine auslegungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (BHT 12; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1950); Lukas Kundert, *Die Opferung/Bindung Isaaks* (2 vols.; WMANT 78–79; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1998); Marion Keuchen, *Die "Opferung Isaaks" im 20. Jahrhundert auf der Theaterbühne: Auslegungsimpulse im Blick auf "Abrahams Zelt" (Theater Musentümpel-Andersonn) und "Gottesvergiftung" (Choralgraphisches Theater Heidelber—Grasmück)* (Altes Testament und Moderne 19; Münster: LIT, 2004).

36. Sebastian Brock, "Reading between the Lines: Sarah and the Sacrifice of Isaac

the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, had already been tested through being abandoned twice.

3.1.4. Birth Announcements (Gen 17 and 18:1–15)

In the Bible, birth announcements have an established form and are, with very few exceptions, always issued to the mother. They are usually imparted by God himself or one of his angels. They begin either with the announcement or discovery of the pregnancy, including a confirmation that a son will be born. His “expressive name” has usually already been determined by God and points to the fate of the mother, less often that of the father. The fact that the birth of a daughter is never promised can be explained, on the one hand, by the concentration on the patrilineality in a patriarchal society. On the other hand, the high regard given to sons results from the practice of patrilocal marriages whereby the daughters leave the home and are lost for the purpose of caring for their own parents in their old age. However, a marginalization of the female gender overall is revealed as the social impact.

In the Abraham-Sarah cycle a birth announcement for Ishmael is first given to Hagar in Gen 16:11–12. The older birth announcement for Isaac can be found in Gen 18:1–15. This story of the three men who visit Abraham and Sarah, which is very famous particularly in the reception of the Eastern churches due to the Trinitarian interpretation, combines a story of hospitality with an announcement of a birth. It begins with a dialogue between the men and Abraham (18:3–9) and ends as a dialogue between one of the men and Sarah (18:10–15). As Erhard Blum so aptly pointed out, a promise of such importance cannot be announced in the “‘small talk’ of anonymous ‘men’”³⁷ but only in the speech of the one who makes it clear that he is God. If in the history of exegesis primarily Sarah has been repeatedly interpreted as an embarrassing figure,³⁸ the point of the narrative has been completely missed. She is not improperly eavesdropping on the men’s conversations, but instead the interest of the men is focused on her, which is improper in a patriarchal society. She laughs because of the realistic estimation of her age and not because sexuality in old age was taboo or because she was laughing at God. The moment she realizes who the announcer is (“Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?” 18:14) her laughter gives way to faith, and she denies her

(Genesis, Chapter 22),” in *Women in Ancient Societies* (ed. Léonie J. Archer; London: Mac-Millan, 1994), 169–80.

37. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte*, 278.

38. See, e.g., Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (8th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), 197–98.

laughter, which ultimately gives Isaac his name (יִצְחָק-צַחֲקָה). The fact that the deity insists on Sarah’s laughter thus does not represent a severe reprimand but in fact the preparation of an etiology of the name Isaac determined by folk etymology.

In the present-day final text this birth announcement to the mother is preceded by the announcement to the father. Genesis 17, a text clearly characterized by Priestly influences, alienates the woman’s experience in its position before Gen 18 by linking the birth announcement for the following year and laughter to explain the name Isaac to the father. If one considers that the Priestly writing (P) in the Abraham cycle consisted nearly entirely of genealogical notes and that Gen 17 was the only longer coherent text, a concentration on the father who names both sons can be seen overall in P, but this does not lessen the significance of Sarah. Like her husband, she is also given a new name (Gen 17:5, 15); *her* firstborn son is the promised son, not Abraham’s firstborn son (16:3, 15–16; 17:18–21). If circumcision as a sign of the covenant is only personally borne by men, one can be glad of this in today’s world, where there is broad awareness of the catastrophic consequences of female circumcision. However, the selection of a sign of the covenant³⁹ that is only visible on the male body is in fact an expression of a patriarchal culture in which the masculine represents the general state of things.

3.1.5. Lot’s Rescued Daughters: Pure Blood or Abysmal Disgrace?

The Lot narratives (Gen 13–14; 18:16–19, 38) belong to those separation stories through which branch lines are eliminated from the direct line of promise. Lot chooses the paradise-like land in the Jordan Plain whose inhabitants, however, turn out to have deeply corrupt morals (Gen 19). The men who were so kindly received by Abraham and Sarah are threatened with rape in Sodom (19:5). Lot’s offer to hand over his two virgin daughters for collective rape instead of his visitors demonstrates that this was not a case of homosexual men, but instead the custom of using sexuality for terrorizing purposes⁴⁰ (19:8). The integrity of the daughters is thus of less value than hospitality.

39. On this problem, see Judith Plaskow, *Standing again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 82–83.

40. On this, see Ilse Müllner, “Tödliche Differenzen: Sexuelle Gewalt als Gewalt gegen Andere in Ri 19,” in *Von der Wurzel getragen: Christlich-feministische Exegese in Auseinandersetzung mit Antijudaismus* (ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker; Biblical Interpretation Series 17; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 89. On the motif of sexual violence against outsiders, see Weston W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative* (JSOTSup 231; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 116–33.

Lot's two daughters are spared from the fate brought on them by their own father only because the divine visitors strike the men of Sodom with blindness (19:10–11).⁴¹ However, with this episode that initially ends as a story of deliverance, the fate of Sodom is sealed. Only Lot is able to bring his family into safety prior to the destruction of the city. His wife, in fact, dares to look back, thus turning into a pillar of salt so characteristic for the region in the southern part of the Dead Sea (19:17–26).

The following scene, in which the father is alone with his two daughters (19:30–38), presupposes the absence of the mother. Exegesis does not agree on the interpretation of the double incest. While older research partially speaks of the “purity of the blood” or the courage of the daughters,⁴² Elke Seifert suggests reading the story as a classic story of repression by an incestuous father.⁴³ Considering present-day court transcripts, she sees the same defense structure on the part of the perpetrators: alcohol was involved, the daughters wanted intercourse or even provoked it, and the mothers are not available to call upon for help. Even the story surrounding Lot's daughters can only partially cover up evidence of the crime. The incestuous names of the children Ammon (“of my people”) and Moab (“from my father”) speak volumes. Since these two nations were not exactly the most well-liked neighbors (see Deut 23:4) at the time of the final redaction of the Pentateuch, when decisions were also made on what to do with older stories, it can be assumed that the story is to be viewed critically even if explicit criticism of the incestuous creation of these nations is never expressed.⁴⁴ There is, however, one thing that the biblical text does not do, namely, “blame the victim,” which absolutely cannot be said of the history of exegesis: Lot's daughters are never chastised for bearing the children.

41. On the problematic relationship between Lot and his daughters, see Mercedes Navarro Puerto, “Las extrañas del Génesis, tan parecidas y tan diferentes...,” in Gómez-Acebo et al., *Relectura del Génesis*, 165–68.

42. See the compilation in James Alfred Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities: Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament, Early Jewish and Christian Traditions* (CBET 1; Kampen: Kok, 1990), 45–46.

43. See Elke Seifert, *Tochter und Vater im Alten Testament: Eine ideologiekritische Untersuchung zur Verfügungsgewalt von Vätern über ihre Töchter* (Neukirchener Theologische Dissertationen und Habilitationen 9; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997), 82–86.

44. A location of the Lot stories in the era of Ezra and Nehemiah is attempted by R. Christopher Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12–36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-exilic Judah* (SemeiaSt 39; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 172–74, whose book is devoted to the branch lines of the ancestral narratives.

3.2. REBEKAH-ISAAC CYCLE

Research focusing on the history of passed-down written tradition, which considered Genesis to be a collection of legends, suspected it had found the original root of the double written traditions of abandoning the ancestral woman and the conflicts concerning wells in the “Isaac cycle,” which are additionally found in the Abraham-Sarah cycle. However, increasing skepticism concerning an oral tradition that stayed constant over a long period of time has severely afflicted this thesis. Presumably the narrative cycle of the second-generation ancestors has been supplemented with a bridge function between the Abraham-Sarah cycle and the Jacob written tradition, which aims at the creation of the twelve tribes nation.

3.2.1. Rebekah as a Successor of Abraham (Gen 24)

Although in patrilineal societies genealogies are normally androcentric and in the ancestral narratives the line of promise is additionally presented in male succession, the genealogy of Milcah and Nahor points to Rebekah. The family tree is introduced as news brought to Abraham, whereby Rebekah and the ancestral father are linked from the very beginning.

According to this genealogical introduction, Rebekah is brought into the family at the initiative of Abraham. He sends a servant in search of a wife for his son, a woman who fulfills the same criteria as himself: she must be willing to leave her land to “go” (הלך) to the promised land as he did (cf. Gen 12:1; 24:7 with Rebekah's fulfillment in 24:58). The right marriage for Isaac would in fact be endogamous; that is, a wife from the same kin would have been ideal, but Abraham is willing to make trade-offs to the extent that life in the promised land is defined as a more important criterion. He makes Eliezer swear not to bring Isaac back to his own native land.

This exposition (24:1–9) already reveals that Gen 24, the so-called match-making narrative, represents a vote on the issue of mixed marriages, which was so important in the postexilic period. For this narrative the origin of the Diaspora defined as the true Israel is not decisive but rather the desire to move to the promised land to live there. It is thus only a conditional plea against mixed marriages and in this regard a middle position on this issue compared to the completely open position in the book of Ruth and the position strictly advocating ethnic purity in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The matchmaking story is structured in a long-winded manner with a broadly sweeping style and large sections of repetition.⁴⁵ In addition to the

45. For a more extensive analysis of the text, see Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, “וְהָיָה”

criteria defined by Abraham, the servant—the only figure present in all scenes from beginning to end—adds an ethical criterion for the future wife of his master's son: she must be willing to give more than is demanded of her (24:14). Since the servant, typical of matchmaking narratives, sat down at the gender-specific meeting point in the city where Milcah and Nahor lived, at the well, he expects that the future bride will not only give him something to drink but all of his proverbial thirsty camels as well. In Rebekah, whose trek to the well is presented as an appearance (וַיֵּרָא רַבְקָה, 24:15: “behold, Rebekah...”), he not only finds a beautiful, untouched girl from the proper family (24:16) but also a hospitable woman who is willing to work and prepared to move to the promised land.

The certainly accurate social-historical details concerning the fact that a woman cannot bring a man home with her but that the guest must first be invited by a male member of the family are interesting in this context. A similar story is told in the next generation with Jacob and Rachel (cf. 24:28–31; 29:12–14). However, the family alone does not make the decision regarding the marriage. Instead, the bride is explicitly asked for her consent to leave her native land (24:50–58). The blessing that Rebekah as the bride receives from her family (24:60) has nearly the exact wording as the second affirmation by the angel in Gen 22:17. She is thus initially promised that which her father-in-law only received after he was gravely tested and passed, whereby Rebekah in turn is positioned as a successor of Abraham—and not his son Isaac.

The meeting of the engaged couple is told at a peculiar distance: Rebekah covers herself when she sees the lone man Isaac and descends from her camel.⁴⁶ Yet Isaac takes her into the tent of his mother, where his bride consoles him through his mother's death. The first story in this narrative cycle already proves that Rebekah is the strong woman on the side of a colorless man.

3.2.2. The Political Relevance of Pregnancy Complications

The imbalance of the characters also becomes clear in the story of the birth of the twins. The infertility of the ancestral woman seems to be a topos in the ancestral narratives (11:30; 25:21; 29:31) that belongs to the birth of the son to whom the promises will be passed on. In the case of Rebekah, no narrative is tied to this, just the note that Isaac prays for her (25:21) and that YHWH

רבקה יצאת: Eine textlinguistische Untersuchung zu Gen 24” (Ph.D. diss., Universität Innsbruck, 1994).

46. For this section, see Magdalene L. Frettlöh, “Isaak und seine Mütter: Beobachtungen zur exegetischen Verdrängung von Frauen am Beispiel von Gen 24,62–67,” *EvT* 54 (1994): 427–52.

hears his prayers; the motif here is thus certainly not original. When Rebekah has complications with her pregnancy, she goes—apparently without her husband—to a sanctuary to inquire of YHWH. The note presupposes a working cult in a decentralized location. It is thoroughly possible that it suggests a tradition originally from the northern kingdom, for in the older narratives of the Jacob cycle Rebekah is depicted as the mother of Jacob and thus of Israel.

The oracle that Rebekah receives points to the national-political significance of her pregnancy: with her twins she is carrying two nations in her womb that are already fighting for supremacy over the other prior to birth. The younger brother will dominate over the older brother. The rivalry then continues in the birth scene. The younger brother, Jacob, is etymologically introduced as the “heel-holder”⁴⁷ for grabbing his brother's heel during birth. In terms of appearance and behavior, the two sons are as different as night and day. The rugged, natural boy Esau is accordingly referred to as his father's favorite son, while civilized Jacob is referred to as his mother's favorite son (25:27–28). Whether this corresponds to gender stereotypes is not to be answered here: Rebekah is aware of the dominance of the younger brother and purposefully supports him.

3.2.3. Rebekah's Abandonment: Isaac as a Successor of Abraham (Gen 26)

Two narratives are added between the texts about the struggle for the birth-right and the paternal blessing, which are already familiar from the Abraham-Sarah cycle: the endangerment of the ancestral woman and the subsequent well conflicts. In this version of the abandonment narrative, the sister declaration does not pose a real threat but rather only a potential one to Rebekah (26:10–11). She already has children, whereby, on the one hand, the course of the narrative appears to be inhomogeneous. On the other hand, the dimension of abandoning the woman with whom the promised son must first be begotten is lost. Apparently chapter 26 in its entirety has the intention of positioning Rebekah and Isaac as successors of Abraham and Sarah. However, the couple is under the explicit protection and blessing of YHWH from the very beginning (26:2–5, 12, 22).

3.2.4. The Mother's Favorite Son Becomes the Patriarch (Gen 27)

As already seen in the first generation, the husband's firstborn son, who is normally the principal heir, does not enter into the line of promise, but

47. The proper name יַעֲקֹב, “Jacob,” is associated with the root עָקַב, “hold by the heel.”

instead the firstborn son of the female bearer of the promise. Rebekah enables her favorite son to receive his father's dying blessing through a deliberately planned, unscrupulous betrayal of her husband, who in this story is exclusively seen as the father of both sons. She risks the possibility of being cursed by the blind patriarch (27:12–13) and disguises Jacob as Esau (27:15–17). Her favorite son is to go to his father dressed up as Esau and give him his favorite meal of hunted game in order to then receive the blessing that passes on the legitimacy of the clan and the role of the patriarch. The blind father is suspicious since he hears Jacob's voice. Jacob must then repeat his false declaration multiple times until the father ultimately blesses him as his son Esau.

The blessing that Isaac ultimately bestows is involuntarily full of irony (27:28–29): he makes the “sons of his mother” subordinate to his supposed favorite son and does not know that he is blessing Rebekah's favorite son. She, who as a woman in a patriarchal society cannot pass down the legitimacy of the clan, has managed to ensure that her favorite son, to whom this was promised even before his birth, was blessed all the same.

Rebekah, however, pays a high price for this coup. She never sees her favorite son again, since he must flee from his cheated, vengeful brother. In the present-day final text Rebekah pleads in favor of an endogamous marriage as a pretext (27:46). This part of the chapter is apparently to be read as a vote on the issue of mixed marriages: the bearer of the promise must marry a woman from his own family. However, Isaac and Rebekah do not send Jacob to the brother of his grandfather Abraham, as one might expect in patrilineal societies, but instead to the brother of his mother Rebekah. The cross-cousin is thus presented as the ideal bride,⁴⁸ on the one hand, while, on the other hand, Rebekah is presented as the central figure whose genealogy is just as important as that of Abraham and Sarah.

3.3. JACOB AND HIS WIVES

The core of the narratives surrounding Jacob takes place either in the territory of the northern kingdom (Bethel, Shechem, Mahanaim, Peniel) or in Mesopotamia, where his mother's family remained. Jacob is originally the ancestral father of the northern kingdom, there is no doubt about that. Through his sons, however, Jacob becomes the ancestral father of the entire nation. The

48. On the legal implications of marriage in ancient Israel, see Angelo Tosato, *Il matrimonio israelitico: Una teoria generale, nuova prefazione, presentazione e bibliografia* (AnBib 100; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2001); and Gordon Paul Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage Developed from the Perspective of Malachi* (VTSup 52; Leiden: Brill, 1994).

texts that particularly embed Judah into the Jacob narratives probably originated after 701 B.C.E., when, as a result of the catastrophe of the downfall of the northern kingdom and the preservation of Jerusalem from the siege by the Assyrians, religious traditions were reexamined and reconceived and those of the southern and northern kingdom were merged.

3.3.1. Rachel the Shepherdess and Chosen Bride

As Jacob is fleeing from his cheated brother, God appears to him in a dream at Bethel in which he receives the confirmation that the promises of the ancestors have been bestowed upon him (28:10–22). When Jacob arrives at the place where his mother's brother resides, his route—as in the case of the servant in Gen 24—first takes him to the well. In fact, as if directed by divine guidance, he also meets the woman from the right family, who is to become his wife, at the well. However, Rachel is not engaged in the typical female activity of fetching water but instead is working as an unmarried woman as a shepherdess, a profession that her husband will assume after they are married. From Jacob's perspective, the narrator presents the encounter as love at first sight (Gen 29:11, 18, 20). Rachel subsequently grants him access to her father's house. Since the fugitive, unlike the servant in Gen 24, is unable to offer an adequate bride-price, Jacob offers to work as a shepherd for Laban's herds for seven years (Gen 29:15–19). The fact that these seven years seem like only a few days to Jacob (29:20) is meant to emphasize the intensity of his desire.

3.3.2. Leah's Marriage to Jacob: The Betrayer Is Betrayed at the Expense of the Wife

Jacob's desire, however, is satisfied in a completely inappropriate manner. In a motif reversal, as it were, the father of the bride betrays the betrayer who betrayed his father. Jacob, who pretended to be the older son, is now betrayed by Laban, who gives him the older daughter to be his wife before the desired younger daughter. The narrative further intensifies this by allowing Jacob to spend the wedding night with the wrong woman and thus making the outcry of the betrayed—similar to Esau's disappointment in Gen 27:33–36—seem all the more intense (29:25). Jacob is essentially repaid for his betrayal,⁴⁹ as it

49. On betrayal as a leitmotif, see Renate Andrea Klein, *Leseprozess als Bedeutungswandel: Eine Rezeptionsästhetische Erzähltextanalyse der Jakobserzählungen der Genesis* (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 11; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2002), 182–83. This work is an example of the consistent application of the method of narrative analysis; however, she goes into only a few of the “women texts” in detail.

were, in the sense of cause and effect. The reader is not informed about how Leah or Rachel feels about their father's deception, thus pushing the two sisters into the role of victims. For the time being, the conflict is resolved when Jacob, who is supposed to be the lord over his relatives (Gen 27:29), agrees to work another seven years as a servant to pay the bride-price for Rachel, even though the two are married immediately.

In the constellation of the people in this story, which tells how Laban goes from a host to a betrayer as well as a retaliator for the injustice done to Isaac, it is striking that Laban's wife, the mother of Leah and Rachel, is absent. In contrast to the story about the matchmaking of Rebekah, in which the mother is the reference point of the household (cf. 24:28: "mother's house"), this woman does not appear in any of the long stories in Gen 29–31. It is uncertain as to whether her death should be silently presupposed or if it concerns a topos in which the mother is not present—or is even powerless—in stories in which the father wrongs the daughters (cf. Gen 19).

3.3.3. A Birthing Contest as a Struggle for the Promise to Become a Great Nation (Gen 29–30)

In many ways, the conflict that emerges from the bridal betrayal determines the first two decades of the new family. Jacob cannot come to terms with Leah as his involuntarily wedded wife and hates her because of her father's betrayal (29:31). To compensate for that, YHWH opens her womb, while Jacob's beloved Rachel is and remains barren. Here God is seen as the giver of fertility. If his gift fails to present itself, that person is infertile.

Leah's first four births are told in all of four verses. The unloved wife bears her husband one son after the other. When this series of births is concluded with the note that she stopped having children, this is not to be understood as temporary infertility but rather points to the fact that, after fulfilling his marital duty, which resulted in four sons, Jacob stops going to Leah (see 30:15–16 on this).

Leah names each of her four sons by pointing to her own fate with the children's names. Reuben (29:32) is essentially a cry of joy ("behold, a son!") confirming that YHWH has seen her affliction. To him she attaches her hope for Jacob's love. With the second son Simeon, the compensation for her lack of affection focuses on God having heard that she is not loved (29:33). With Levi, the naming is neutrally formulated ("he was named Levi"); however, with this name Leah once again points to her unreciprocated desire for Jacob. Of all namings, there is no reference to YHWH in the name of the ancestor of the priestly dynasty (29:34). The name of the fourth son has a conciliatory

justification that exclusively expresses her gratitude to YHWH, as if Leah has finally come to terms, as it were, with the circumstances in her life (29:35).

After this peace, the next verse, Gen 30:1, brings action into the family constellation with a new narrative beginning. Rachel is dissatisfied with her situation as the beloved yet barren wife. She demands children from Jacob, which he repudiates by referring to the giver of fertility and the fact that he has fulfilled his own marital duties to the best of his ability: it is not he who is denying her children but YHWH. As a solution to this humiliating situation of childlessness in patriarchal societies, Rachel chooses the same strategy as Sarah. She gives Jacob her slave Bilhah as a surrogate mother and soon has two sons whose names express her own fate, not that of their biological mother. With the first son she feels justified by God; with the second son she feels victorious over her sister, who has many children. What is expressed in the name Naphtali in Gen 30:8 is not a quarrel between sisters but the founding of Israel. This becomes clear from the parallel verse in Gen 32:28 (Hebrew 32:29), in which Jacob is inaugurated as a "wrestler with God".⁵⁰

Gen 30:8	Gen 32:28
Then Rachel said: Wrestlings with God (נִפְתָּלִי אֱלֹהִים) have I wrestled (נִפְתַּלְתִּי עִם) with my sister, yet I have prevailed (יִכְלָתִי)! And she called his name (שָׁמוֹ) fighter, Naphtali (נִפְתָּלִי).	Then he said to Jacob: Your name (שְׁמֶךָ) will no longer be Jacob, but Israel (יִשְׂרָאֵל), for you have fought with (שָׁרִיתָ עִם) God (אֱלֹהִים) and with men and have prevailed (וַתִּגְבַּל).

Like their husband, the two women wrestle with God. In Peniel, Jacob fights to cross over into the promised land, while Leah and Rachel fight for the founding of the house of Israel, for according to Ruth 4:11 it is the two women who built up the house of Israel. What is told in Gen 29–30 is not proof that the Bible saw women as "childbearing machines"; rather, the text is the founding legend of the egalitarianly organized people of the twelve tribes.

Twelve children are born to the family in the parental household of the women. In addition to Leah's four sons and Rachel's two juridical sons previously discussed, the two sons Gad and Asher are from Leah's maidservant Zilpah, as well as Issachar, with whom Leah became pregnant after selling the

50. For more detail on this, see Irmtraud Fischer, "Der erkämpfte Segen (Gen 32,23–33)," *BK* 58 (2003): 106.

mandrakes to Rachel (30:14–18). With this plant, which was regarded as a homeopathic aphrodisiac, Leah purchases one single night with her husband and immediately becomes pregnant again. After that another son, Zebulun, is born, whose name once again (cf. 29:34; 30:20) indicates her hopes for her husband to remain with her. Apparently this also occurs, for Leah becomes pregnant yet again. With her seventh and final child, Leah gives birth to a girl. Leah names her Dinah, but there is no justification for the name, which puts the only daughter at a disadvantage compared to the sons.⁵¹ Perhaps one can conclude that the note about Dinah was added later in order to be able to tell the story in Gen 34, in which Dinah plays a central role.

In the last of the births outside of the promised land, Joseph, Rachel's long-hoped-for first son, is born. The name that she gives the child is nearly disappointing, for she is impatiently waiting for the next child to follow: "May YHWH add to me yet another son" (30:24). In fact, Rachel, who believed that she would die without children (30:1), dies during the birth of her second child. Benjamin is born in the land. On the way back to the ancestral homeland, Rachel's labor pains begin. She puts all of her strength into the birth of her son, whom she then names Ben-Oni, "son of my vitality."⁵² She dies after childbirth near Bethlehem and is buried there as well. Rachel's tomb is the only ancestral burial site that is also mentioned outside of Genesis, whereby special historical significance is attributed to this tradition (1 Sam 10:2; cf. Jer 31:15).⁵³

3.3.4. The Break with the Branch of the Family in the East: Another Female Narrative

What began as a contest between two main wives for the affection of the same husband develops with each child into more of a wrestling with God for descendants. After the episode about purchasing the mandrakes, no more is said of a conflict between the sisters. On the contrary, Rachel and Leah work together in the following story about the family's return to the promised land

(Gen 31). They agree on their assessment of their father: he is exploiting both his son-in-law as well as his own daughters. He constantly changed the working conditions for Jacob, and he used up the bride-price, which was apparently intended to serve as emergency provisions for the daughters in the event of being widowed or divorced (31:7–16).⁵⁴

Leah and Rachel even consider themselves to be legitimate heirs to the wealth that has been transferred from Laban to Jacob (31:16) as a result of the successful breeding of the flocks (Gen 30:31–43). On the one hand, the text emphasizes how competent Jacob is at his work and that the prosperity of the young family is the result of hard work and God's blessing. On the other hand, it allows the self-confidence of the women to become apparent: in their original household in which the marriage is lived out irregularly in opposition to patrilocal customs, they and their children are entitled to the goods derived from the father (31:16). The fact that the two sisters claim the legitimacy of the succession in the family for themselves is also proven by the story about Rachel stealing the teraphim, which also tells of the daughters' ultimate separation from their father's household (31:19–55 [Hebrew 31:19–32:1]).

When the decision is made to emigrate and return⁵⁵ to the promised land, Rachel steals *אֶת־תְּרָפִים אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיהָ*, "her father's teraphim" (Gen 31:19). What is meant by teraphim is not completely clear. From the episode in 1 Sam 19:13–16 it can be concluded that Michal places the teraphim in David's bed to hide his absence from his pursuers. This means that they can probably be imagined as larger, human-like figurines. Whether these idols represented deified ancestors cannot be determined with the necessary accuracy.⁵⁶ Laban at least calls them "my *elohim*," "my gods" (31:30). Apparently the teraphim are, however, in the possession of the respective main line of the genealogy. When Rachel steals her father's teraphim, she thus robs him—and thus his sons, who are her brothers—of the legitimacy of the clan. Ktziah Spanier pointed to the fact that the teraphim are found only in the narrative context of the northern kingdom, in the region of those tribes that trace back

51. For this contrast, see Navarro Puerto, "Las extrañas del Génesis," 169–72.

52. For this, see Stefanie Schäfer-Bossert, "Den Männern die Macht und der Frau die Trauer? Ein kritischer Blick auf die Deutung von וְיָסָא—oder: Wie nennt Rahel ihren Sohn?" in *Feministische Hermeneutik und Erstes Testament: Analysen und Interpretationen* (ed. Hedwig Jahnow et al.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994), 106–25.

53. On the great significance of Rachel in the Bible and Jewish reception history, see Samuel H. Dresner, *Rachel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994). For Rachel's tomb, see Susan Starr Sered, "Rachel's Tomb and the Milk Grotto of the Virgin Mary: Two Women's Shrines in Bethlehem," *JFSR* 2 (1986): 7–22.

54. Thus also Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (NAC 1B; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 516, who points out that, in any case, the part of the inheritance that the women are speaking about is entitled only to male descendants.

55. In Gen 31:22–23, 25, leaving the land is presented as Jacob's flight and pursuit by Laban. The similarities that echo in Exod 14:5–9 were demonstrated by David W. Cotter *Genesis* (Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003), 236.

56. According to Niditch, "Genesis," 21.

to Rachel.⁵⁷ This episode at least (still?) sees the main line of the primeval ancestors in the northern kingdom.

It is not surprising that Laban is hurt by the loss. He and his sons immediately set out to pursue the family that has disappeared under the cover of night and to hold them accountable (31:22–30). Jacob apparently knows nothing about the theft of the teraphim, since he certainly would not have endangered his favorite wife through his declaration that the thief deserves to die (31:32). Rachel manages to use a trick to evade Laban's search. But the episode in which the woman sits on the household gods hidden under her camel's saddle and claims to be menstruating also has polemic traits (31:34–35): if the teraphim had any type of value or impact, they are in any case unclean as a result of this action and thus ineffective for cult rituals.

The question of whether Jacob's command in Gen 35:2 to remove the "foreign gods" (אֱתֵּי־אֱלֹהֵי הַנֶּכֶדֶר) before the vow of Bethel can be fulfilled has a literary connection to the story of the household idols is difficult to answer. The final text always connects the two episodes, since the legitimacy of the clan is not guaranteed through the possession of household gods in the promised land but rather through the transfer of the promises from the father to the son determined by God for this purpose.

The transfer of clan legitimacy into the promised land by taking along the household idols apparently has the effect that none of the sons will ever again go to one of his mother's brothers to get a wife. With this episode, the narrator severs the connection to the branch of the family remaining in the east. In the interwoven section about the separation from his daughters' kin, Laban becomes the "Aramean," the founding father of a nation with which Israel is related but with which there were many conflicts in the history of the northern kingdom.

The section on the final separation between Aram and Israel is structured not merely as a story about a covenant but instead as a story about women. The marriage contract with the daughters is seen as being equivalent with the establishment of the regional borders between the two peoples (31:44–55 [Hebrew 31:44–32:1]), now sealed with a covenant meal. The text even makes the part of the contract concerning the women the top priority. Since Jacob lived his married life in the household of his wives up until this point, the conclusion of the marriage contract at this point in time is not unusual. Of all people, the betraying father, whom Jacob can thank for his polygamy, insists when he is separated from his daughters that Jacob neither

57. See Ktziah Spanier, "Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim: Her Struggle for Family Primacy," *VT* 42 (1992): 404–12.

mistreat either of the wives nor take any other wives (31:50). The story ends with Laban's blessing over his daughters and grandchildren (31:55 [Hebrew 32:1]), whereby in this branch of the family the daughters are again emphasized before the sons, since there is never mention of a corresponding blessing over the male descendants.

3.4. THE FOURTH GENERATION: THE FATE OF THE TWELVE TRIBES NATION IS DECIDED BY WOMEN

After the separation from the genealogical branch of Milcah and Nahor, the move to the promised land that is accompanied by wrestling with God takes place (Gen 32:22–32 [Hebrew 32:23–33]), which causes Jacob to become Israel. The reunion with his cheated brother, which Jacob feared and for which he took all precautions to ensure that his beloved Rachel would be best protected (33:1–7), takes place—after successfully wrestling with God—without any complications (Gen 33). The old conflicts have been resolved; the return to the place of departure at Bethel (35:1–15) and to his father and his burial (35:27–29) are possible, since Esau will settle outside of the promised land, in his wives' native land.

The suspense is built up in the stories of Gen 34–50 through the fate of the next generation, Jacob's children. Since Jacob's twelve sons make up the egalitarianly organized twelve tribes nation, no further main lines of the genealogy must be created from this generation. Nevertheless, stories are told that emphasize the dominance of individual "tribes,"⁵⁸ thus giving an account of historical dominations in the narrative.

3.4.1. Dinah and Her Brothers Simeon and Levi (Gen 34)

The first narrative that justifies Simeon and Levi being eliminated from the genealogical dominance begins as a story about the rape of Jacob's only daughter Dinah.⁵⁹ She went out to see (ראה) the *daughters* of the land, when

58. If older research was convinced of the historical existence of a twelve-tribe alliance (amphictyony; for this, see Martin Noth, *Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966]), modern research is significantly more critical of this.

59. On this chapter, see the dissertation by Susanne Scholz, *Rape Plots: A Feminist Cultural Study of Genesis 34* (Studies in Biblical Literature 13; New York: Lang, 2000), which sees Dinah as the "key figure" (167) of the text. She reads the story of the act of violence committed against Jacob's daughter within the context of the case law on rape in Germany in the nineteenth century.

Shechem, the prince of the land, sees (רָאָה) her, takes her, lays with her, and violates her (34:1–2). This sequence of four narratives in 34:2 makes the rape seem like an imprudent and rash act. When it then says that he likes her, that he loves the young woman, that he speaks tenderly to her (34:3), and is then willing to pay any bride-price for her (34:11–12), the act of violence and its consequences are thus presented from the view of the perpetrator. The victim's perspective is never given a voice in the entire story; Dinah never has a chance to speak before her brothers, her father, Shechem, or his father. She is presented as a victim, and the act of violence committed against her becomes a matter of “honor” for the men.

Old Testament law has two different solutions for the criminal act of rape against an unmarried woman.⁶⁰ In the Book of the Covenant (Exod 22:15–16), where the word choice also could include the seduction of an inexperienced girl, the man is sentenced to pay the standard bride-price and must marry the woman unless her father refuses to permit it. In this way the young woman at least has the opportunity to vote against a marriage with a rapist, while this is not provided for according to Deut 22:28–29. In this legal policy the violently forced sexual relations automatically become a marriage, including all corresponding payments. The rapist must marry his victim and may never divorce her. Even though this guarantees a lifelong obligation to care for the woman, the woman at the same time loses any opportunity to free herself from the hands of her rapist.

In accordance with these policies,⁶¹ the story of Dinah being raped is continued with negotiations on the bride-price. Dinah's father and brothers, who indeed consider this to be a violation of the family's honor, falsely enter into the negotiations and demand circumcision. The original text presumably demanded only that the groom be circumcised. A redactional layer⁶² extended the circumcision demand and the intermarriage offer (34:9, 15–17) to all members of both groups, such that in the final text version of the story all of Shechem's men were circumcised and not only Shechem was condemned to the brothers' vengeance but all Shechemite men who were fevered and in pain following the procedure. The story about Dinah's rape and how it is avenged tells of a massacre against an entire ethnic group of which one member was guilty of attacking Jacob's family. In the narrative, Jacob's position is also criti-

60. For more detail on this, see the essay by Karin Finsterbusch in this volume.

61. Tikva Frymer-Kensky (“Virginity in the Bible,” in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* [ed. Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky; JSOTSup 262; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998], 86–96) has already read these three texts in conjunction with one another.

62. See the delineation in Fischer, *Women Who Wrestled*, 97–98.

cally opposed to the escalation of vengeance by the brothers. He urges them to restrain themselves, while mainly Simeon and Levi, Jacob's second- and third-born sons, invoke the argument of disgraced honor in their defense (34:7, 30–31). This opposition is also addressed in Jacob's tribal blessing in Gen 49:5–7, in which he condemns the act and even curses the two tribes, which are threatened with being scattered and dispersed among the other tribes.

The formulation בָּנוֹת הָאֲרֶץ, “daughters of the land,” in 34:1 could also, of course, indicate the undesirability of mixing with the local population (cf. Gen 27:46); however, this is by no means a technical term to refer to foreign women in the matter of mixed marriages. The history of exegesis has read Gen 34 as a plea for endogamous marriages. Levi, the founder of the priestly dynasty, is seen as a pioneer, just as his descendant Phinehas is cited as an authority by opponents of exogamous marriages.⁶³ In the book of Judith, Simeon is also declared a hero for avenging his sister's rape. In Judith's speech, Dinah stands for the sanctuary that is in danger of being violated, which the descendant of Simeon actually prevents by killing the general (Jdt 9:1–14, esp. 9:8).

3.4.2. Bilhah and Reuben (Gen 35:21–22)

While Jacob's second and third sons disqualify themselves for the leading role through the Dinah story, the firstborn son disqualifies himself through a short note about incest.

After the death of her mistress Rachel, Jacob apparently made Bilhah his “concubine” (פִּילְגֶּנֶשׁ). Only here is Bilhah seen as a concubine. While Rachel was alive, she was Rachel's “slave” (שִׁפְחָה) and in her position within the family a “maidservant” (אֲמָהָ) since she was brought into Jacob and Rachel's marriage as a surrogate mother. Sexual relations with concubines—in contrast to those with slaves and maidservants—are considered marriages, even if of a lesser legal status.⁶⁴ It can be assumed that they come about without paying a bride-price.

Reuben sleeps with this woman. There is nothing said of any consent on the part of Bilhah, so this incestuous act is not only a severe violation of the father's sphere but also a potential act of violence against his concubine. The only reaction reported is that Jacob heard of the act; the old patriarch remains

63. See Num 25; Ezra, the opponent of mixed marriages, traces his ancestry back to Phinehas; see Ezra 7:1–5.

64. On concubines, see Karen Engelken, *Frauen im Alten Israel: Eine begriffsgeschichtliche und sozialrechtliche Studie zur Stellung der Frau im Alten Testament* (BWANT 130; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990), 74–126.

strangely idle, similarly to how he acted after Dinah was raped. However, Jacob's judgment of the act becomes clear in the tribal blessing over Reuben: the firstfruits of his vigor rose up against his father with exuberant vitality (Gen 49:3–4). With this act and its valuation by the ancestral father, Reuben is explicitly disqualified for a leading role within the family, which he would have been entitled to as the firstborn son.

3.4.3. Tamar and Judah

In contrast to Jacob's first three sons with Leah, whose actions are also rebuked in the tribal blessings of Gen 49, two sons—Leah's fourth-born and Rachel's firstborn—are highlighted in longer stories. Rachel's son is presented as the one who will rescue Israel in the Joseph story. Judah is given a leading role both when Joseph is sold into slavery (Gen 37:26–27) as well as in the episode surrounding Rachel's second-born son Benjamin (43:1–10; 44:14–34). Something of a founding legend of the house of Judah is incorporated into the Joseph story in two attempts (Gen 38).⁶⁵

Judah's first wife is introduced as the daughter of the Canaanite Shua (Gen 38:1–2). In Chezib, the “city of deception,” she gives birth to three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah (38:3–5). Judah arranges a marriage for his firstborn son to a woman without any genealogy but who instead is mentioned by the name of Tamar. Through this, Tamar and Judah are narratively linked to one another from the very beginning (38:6). Since the firstborn son Er dies prematurely,⁶⁶ Judah places his second-born son under the levirate obligation. According to Deut 25:5–10, this provides that, in the event of a still-undivided inheritance, a brother must beget a son with the widow of a brother who has died without children, so that the name of the late brother will be carried on. However, Onan, “the vital one,” denies Tamar offspring, since this would catapult him from the position of the principal heir if he were to beget a son. The injustice that ultimately also leads to the death of this man who carries vitality in his name lies in the fact that, although he sleeps with Tamar, he practices coitus interruptus to deny her the entire reason why he is supposed to have sexual relations with her in the first place (Gen 38:8–9; Deut 25:5–6). YHWH also causes the death of this son of Judah (Gen 38:10). Since Judah's only remain-

65. Eva Salm, *Juda und Tamar: Eine exegetische Studie zu Gen 38* (FB 76; Würzburg: Echter, 1996), devoted her dissertation to the text. Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 202–8, addresses the aspect of prostitution in Gen 38.

66. In Gen 38:7, his name is to be understood as a play on words using the two consonants ע and ר: ער is evil, רע.

ing son is not grown up yet and he assumes that Tamar is guilty of the deaths of both of his sons, he sends his daughter-in-law back to her father's house (38:11). With this action, Judah commits an injustice, since according to levirate law he can either release Tamar from the levirate obligation so that she is free to marry another man and start a family (see Deut 25:7–10), or he must care for the woman in his own household, if the demand of the levirate obligation is to be upheld. Yet even once his son Shelah is grown up, Judah still does not give him to Tamar (Gen 38:14).

Genesis 38:12–30 tells how Tamar personally gets from Judah what he denied her with the upheld levirate obligation: descendants. Almost as an excuse for Judah's behavior of going to a(n) (alleged) prostitute, an initial note is made informing the reader that his wife had died (38:12). Here he again meets the man who was mentioned in the context of meeting his wife (38:1, 12). Tamar is told that Judah is leaving the place where she and he are both known in order to go to shear the sheep (38:13). Starting in 38:14, readers are taken into a scene whose background remains unknown to Judah as a narrative figure. Tamar takes off her widow's clothes, veils herself so as not to be recognized, and sits down at the gate of Enaim (“dual fountain”). There she wants to appear to her father-in-law as a prostitute and seduce him. Research has pondered how Judah was able to identify the woman as a prostitute. It was certainly not the veil, which would only conceal what a prostitute wants to offer,⁶⁷ but instead the place where the woman is sitting alone: the gate is the men's gathering place; a single woman there is apparently identified by men as being available in exchange for money.

Tamar has assessed her father-in-law in a dramatically realistic way: he falls for the woman offering herself and immediately begins negotiations for the prostitute's wages (38:15–18). Since he apparently does not have the desired wage of the young goat with him, Tamar demands a triple pledge that will be able to clearly identify him. Judah does not recognize his daughter-in-law's masquerade and cluelessly leaves her with the most personal things that he has with him—comparable today to a credit card, mobile phone, and keychain. Even though he is aware of the risk of falling into disrepute, he does not resist the offer. He thus does not personally go to bring the wage and pick up the material signs of his identity but instead sends a friend. However, this friend must then find out that there was never a prostitute in Enaim and must return to Judah without achieving anything (38:20–23).

67. As already pointed out in Benno Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken, 1934), 715.

Tamar, apparently because what she did was justice for injustice (38:26), immediately becomes pregnant and continues to live as a decent widow in her parental house until her pregnancy becomes public and is reported to Judah. The two narrative figures who are directly linked to one another at the beginning of the story (38:6–11) apparently only interact via third parties any longer (38:13, 24), which is why Tamar also cunningly forces contact with Judah. Without finding out information about the more detailed living conditions of the daughter-in-law whom he damned to be a childless widow for life, Judah imposes the harshest possible sentence on her.

Tamar's wisdom is now proven yet again. She does not send Judah the pledge in order to resolve the issue within the family, but instead allows herself to be brought out for the death penalty to be performed so that she can then publicly⁶⁸ present the seal, staff, and cord belonging to the man by whom she is pregnant. In this way Judah cannot deny the paternity and must publicly reconcile with Tamar—which he also does (38:25–26).

Tamar used deception to obtain the goods of the levirate law, although the law does not entitle women to enforceable rights. She gives birth to twins, with the notes on the birth being structured similarly to those for Rebekah: Tamar's twins were also already fighting for the birthright while still in the womb. However, the midwife marks the firstborn son, who, as in the case of Esau and Jacob, later still will not be able to create the main line: in Ruth 4:18–22, the succession of generations of Judah is structured as the *toledot* of Perez, Tamar's second-born son, with David listed as the last member. With this narrative, the founding of the house of Judah is presented as the result of the will of a woman insistent upon justice. Even the names of Tamar's children point to the events during the birth, from which men in the ancient Near East were excluded. Ruth 4:12 also traces the founding of the “house of Perez” back to Tamar giving birth for Judah. The royal line thus thanks its existence to an unconventional woman who would not allow herself to be removed from the generational line.

3.4.4. Joseph, Potiphar's Wife, and Aseneth

As the story in Gen 38 serves to emphasize Judah as the line of promise, the Joseph story underscores the emphasis on the “house of Joseph,” of “Ephraim and Manasseh,” both designations that are used for the territory of the northern kingdom of Israel (see, e.g., Josh 17:17; Amos 5:6; Zech 10:6).

68. This is pointed out by Helen Schüngel-Straumann, “Tamar,” *BK* 39 (1984): 154.

From the very beginning, Joseph is painted in a special light in the so-called Joseph story (Gen 37–50). Initially envied by his brothers for being the father's favorite son and ultimately sold into slavery, he becomes the one to rescue all of Israel by making the necessary provisions in Egypt to save Jacob's clan from starvation. Within the Joseph story there are three texts that are relevant for our question at hand: the story about Potiphar's wife; the marriage note regarding Joseph and Aseneth; and the account of the migration to Egypt.

In a reversal of the gender of the characters, Gen 39 tells of the abandonment of a member of the ancestral family (cf. the ancestral women in Gen 12:10–20; 20; 26:1–11), who is thus put into danger of being integrated into a foreign genealogical line. In Egypt, Joseph has the status of a purchased slave and is thus also bound to the orders of his master, including in sexual matters. His master could give him to a female slave, and as a slave he would be unable to have a choice in the matter. While Potiphar's wife, who is significantly not mentioned by name, is able to give the slave orders, according to ancient Near East marital law she is, however, not authorized to have sexual contact outside of her own marriage. The offense of adultery carries the risk of death, even more so if it is committed by someone who has no personal rights. In the story, Potiphar's wife is presented as the prototypic “strange woman” in the colors of an adulteress, as is also found, for instance, in Prov 1–9.⁶⁹ In the Joseph story, the seductive woman who desires the young foreigner and is not ashamed to betray her husband does not have her own role. As the antihero, she contrasts with the young and handsome yet at the same time loyal and God-fearing hero (39:2–6). Her external appearance is not mentioned; the narrator leaves it up to the reader to decide if she is beautiful or older than Joseph. The focus is only on her desire for him day after day, to which the unwavering man does not give in. Joseph attempts to argue as a wise man on ethical grounds, while the strange woman is guided only by her passion (39:7–12). When she does not get what she wants, her desire turns into hatred (39:13–20), and she attempts to destroy Joseph. In 2 Sam 13 a very similar abrupt change of unjust desire is told of Amnon, who wants to sleep with his

69. This correlation was already established by Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Biblical Seminar 2; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 111–12. Alice Bach (*Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 57) criticizes the exegesis that has stylized the woman as the “prototypic strange woman.” Bach, who devotes herself to the narrative in detail (34–61), examines, among other things, the key words of the narrative and shows that the story works with a reversal of gender stereotypes: Joseph's body and the sexual desire of the woman are perceived.

half-sister Tamar and also does so against her will. There, too, the victim of a sexual attack argues using the ethics of Israel. However, as a woman she is unable to escape the rape (2 Sam 13:11–18).

Within the Joseph story, the story about Potiphar's wife acts as proof of the divine support for the wrongfully humiliated brother (Gen 37) and slave (Gen 39). It also demonstrates this man's wisdom, which truly unfolds in the provisions he takes against the long famine.

The account of the migration of Jacob's clan is structured as the genealogy of a nation in a nutshell in Gen 46:5–27. The members of the individual tribes are introduced as the "names of the children of Jacob who went to Egypt" in 46:8, but then—in accordance with the polygynous marriage of the ancestral father—structured according to his wives (46:15, 19, 22), whereby the list of Rachel's sons is framed by references to her (46:19, 22). The two maidservants Zilpah and Bilhah are each introduced in dependency to their mistresses (46:18, 25). The list also contains the names of exemplary women such as the daughter Dinah (46:15), the granddaughter Serah from the tribe of Asher (46:17), as well as a daughter-in-law who came along to Egypt from the tribe of Simeon (46:10) and Aseneth, the daughter-in-law from Egypt (46:20). The listing of these exemplary women emphasizes that an entire nation moved to Egypt and that only Joseph, who was already residing in Egypt, married an Egyptian woman. Israel's ethnic integrity is thus still constituted in the promised land as the introduction to the list insists through its emphasis on daughters and wives (46:5–7). However, in Egypt this group grows into a *great* nation (Exod 1:7–9).

Joseph's marriage to Aseneth is initiated by the pharaoh (41:45). She is introduced as the daughter of Potiphera, the priest of On. In the seven prosperous years Joseph begat two sons with her, Ephraim and Manasseh. According to the narrative perspective, the father and not the mother names the children, using their names to point to his own fate (41:50–52).

4. WHY IS SUCH A LEAD-IN WRITTEN ON THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL?

The texts of the ancestral narratives are most certainly not all from a single source. How and when the individual texts were created, composed, and redacted is hotly disputed in present-day research on the Pentateuch. The old explanations of sources independent of one another, for which the abbreviations J, E, P, and D (Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly source, Deuteronomist) stand and that extend back to the early royal era, are outdated. They have become obsolete due to newer research on the historical circumstances in the early

royal era.⁷⁰ It can thus be carefully formulated that the texts were worked on with certainty until far into the Persian era, the end point can be said to be before 400 B.C.E., and the latest start of the creation of the individual narratives can be said to be the time shortly before the downfall of the northern kingdom, since there were apparently independent traditions in the northern kingdom. Dealing with the catastrophe in the southern kingdom makes it necessary to synthesize the ancestral parents of the north (Jacob and Joseph traditions) with those of the south.

The genealogical construction of the dominance of the parents of the southern kingdom is possible after 722 B.C.E. at the earliest; it was probably first construed after 701 B.C.E., when Judah prevailed through the Assyrian crises. A considerable part of the narratives presupposes the processing of Israel's second major catastrophe, exile and the loss of people and land, as well as the destruction of Jerusalem. Within the Pentateuch, the lead-in of the ancestral narratives expresses hope that Israel will be able to preserve its land not because it observes the Torah but because the land is given to Israel exclusively as a promise from God. Despite all of the confusion and turmoil of history, which can also mean temporarily leaving or even losing the land, Israel as a nation is entitled to the land with the same name due to a sworn covenant (Gen 15). With these narratives that emerge from a general history of humankind (Gen 1–11), Israel's life in the promised land is written as firmly anchored in the primordial world order.⁷¹ At the same time, the development of the nation is told in the form of family narratives as begetting and giving birth; the great importance of women is thus quite obvious. But the women are also bearers of the promise, and they also determine the inheritance succession of their sons. In this regard, the ancestral narratives can only be compared with the narratives about the beginnings of the kingdom.

70. On this see, for example, the best-selling monograph by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Ancient Texts* (New York: Touchstone, 2001).

71. For more detail, see Irmtraud Fischer, "Israels Landbesitz als Verwirklichung der primordialen Weltordnung: Die Bedeutung des Landes in den Erzelternerzählungen," *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 23 (2008): 3–24.