Jacob as Father of the Twelve Tribes

Literary and Historical Considerations

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The present article explores three areas of interest that prove themselves to be closely intertwined: the origin of the inclusive concept of twelve tribes of Israel, the Jacob-Esau rivalry, and the southward expansion of Judah in the 8th century BCE. I begin by addressing a few questions regarding the conception of "Israel" in the Jacob cycle, particularly on the North/South issue. While this includes some suggestions on the origin of the concept of Israel, it brings me to a brief discussion on the setting and purpose of the Jacob-Esau tradition, which ultimately leads to a proposal to read the Jacob-Laban-Esau composition as a document from the South. Among the range of possible contexts for the struggle between the two brothers as reflecting the origin of Yahwism is either antecedent of the state,[1] the late pre-exilic[2] or exilic periods,[3] or even later.[4] I will argue in this article in favor of a middle position in the 8th/7th centuries. I begin by briefly introducing the problem.

1. Introduction: When Did the Twelve-Tribe System Come into Being?

The twelve tribes play a major role in the Hexateuch: Jacob begets twelve sons from his two wives, Rachel and Leah, and their handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah; beginning with this birth narrative in Gen 29–30, the biblical narrative appears to assume that "the sons of Jacob were twelve" (Gen 35:22). Genesis 49:28 transforms them explicitly into the twelve *tribes* (כל-אלה שבטי ישׂראל שנים עשׂר), accentuating the common descent of Israel. The exodus narrative then opens with names of the twelve sons, and their resultant tribes seem to be the natural background of a people whose number has increased dramatically and who now

[1] Finkelstein and Römer, "Comments."
[2] Wöhrle, "Koexistenz," 323–325.
[3] Na'aman, "Jacob Story [2014]," 95.
[4] Liverani, *History*, 264.

pose a threat to Pharaoh (Exod 1:7, 9). Although neither the tribes nor the twelve sons play a further role in the exodus story, they seem to form its background. This becomes clear with Moses erecting twelve pillars to mark the covenant in Exod 24:4, and with the twelve stones representing the twelve tribes mounted on the ephod of Aaron, the high priest (Exod 28:21; 39:14). The book of Numbers strengthens the impression that Israel had *always* consisted of twelve tribes, with its organization appearing via a fixed order of tribes that repeatedly forms the background of the book (Num 1–4; 7; 13–14; 17). This conception of twelve tribes even seems to be deeply anchored within the following narratives – especially with the use of twelve representatives in the spy narratives (Deut 1:23; Josh 3:12) – ending with the allocation of the land to the twelve tribes (Johs 13–21) assembling at Shechem at the end of the Hexateuchal exodus-conquest narrative (Josh 24). On the narrative level, the twelve-tribe "system" is a textual *means of unification* that forms Israel as a people. The genealogical continuity is not only part of Israel's self-understanding;[5] it also forms a symbolic expression of simultaneous diversity and unification, dispersion and centralization, etc. Yet from a literary-historical perspective, the situation is not so straightforward. Removing later priestly texts from the bulk of the material, the impression that the twelve-tribe system is present in only a few crucial passages is inescapable, particularly in the birth narrative when combined with the identification of Jacob with "Israel." While the tribal system's impact is enormous, the textual presence of such a *genealogical eponymic system* with twelve ancestors is absolutely meagre in the non-priestly traditions beyond the Joseph novella. Although the promise to Ishmael that he will become twelve nations (Gen 17:20, cf. 25:16) seems to presuppose the twelve-tribe system, it plays no role in the priestly narrative. This raises the crucial question: When did the twelve-tribe system come into being? The issue has both historical and literary-historical aspects that are not completely congruent with one another. Already in 1930, Martin Noth presented a complicated combination of tradition history and literary history in his famous essay "Das System der Zwölf Stämme Israels." On the one hand, it was trailblazing in its acknowledgment that the twelve-tribe system was no historical reality, but rather a sociological construct. He even employed the term "fiction" several times, though he was cautious enough not to apply this category in a way that would have rendered the biblical tradition obviously unhistorical. On the other hand, Noth retained the idea that the twelve-tribe system reflected a historical background rooted in the amphictyonic system, thus writing in this context:

"Rather, it must be emphasized that the emergence of the twelve-tribe system – the merely traditional survival of the completed system is of course another matter – can only be

[5] Weingart, "Jakob," 54.

understood as from a time when the tribes could still concern themselves with forming the individual historical components of the Israelite people."[6]

The resulting discussions in the field have proven this assumption wrong. Noth was clearly mistaken in assuming a real historical background in Israel's early history and in his acceptance of the amphictyonic organization of the tribal system. Yet such critical evaluations of his tradition history generally shared the supposition that the roots of the system were to be found in the early pre-monarchic history of Israel. These roots developed in later periods into various lines of tradition with different emphases and directions, based either on the settlement process, on the unifying dominion of the Davidic monarchy,[7] or the reorganization of "Israel" after the fall of Samaria.[8] Only Christoph Levin had rendered the twelve-tribe system as a complete literary fiction with origins in postexilic or even Chronistic times.[9]

Since the breakdown of Martin Noth's amphictyony hypothesis, it is surprising that recent historical research has only rarely discussed the question of the origins of the "twelve tribes." As already indicated, four historical models can be identified: 1. The narrative mirrors a historical origin, with the twelve-tribe system serving as a reflection of the pre-monarchic period and with such genealogical coherence preceding the formation of the state; 2. the formerly-existent (more than twelve) tribes were united under the dominion of the Davidic monarchy, with the twelve-tribe system symbolically representing the "Israel" united by David; 3. the twelve-tribe system was an idea that emerged after the fall of Samaria by taking up tribal traditions from the North and combining them with a Southern perspective to form a unifying perspective of the two Yahwisms; 4. the idea of Israel consisting of twelve tribes is at least exilic, or even post-exilic, and developed after the breakdown of the former unifying institutions; it presents the genealogical origins as an ideological replacement of outer means of unification represented by the monarchy, the temple, and the land. The first two models have been disproven by more recent discussion of the history of Israel,[10] which cannot be discussed here but essentially includes the following results: The emergence of "Israel" does not constitute the prerequisite for the shift from the Late Bronze to the Iron Age I across the multifaceted process of settlement and subsequent urbanization, but is its (albeit not immediate) consequence.

[6] Own translation of: "Es muß vielmehr mit allem Nachdruck betont werden, daß die Entstehung des Zwölfstämmesystems – das lediglich traditionelle Weiterleben des einmal fertigen Systems ist natürlich eine andere Sache – recht nur verstanden werden kann aus einer Zeit, in der die Stämme noch ein Interesse für sich in Anspruch nehmen konnten, indem sie die historisch gegebenen Einzelglieder des israelitischen Volkes bildeten." Noth, *System*, 30–31.

[7] Weippert, "System," 88.

[8] Schorn, *Ruben*, 282.

[9] Levin, "System," 123.

[10] Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 67–200; Frevel, "State."

Israel emerges in Canaan, from Canaan. Kristin Weingart is correct in connecting the emergence of identity concepts with the period of state formation,[11] but the biblical portrayal of the birth of a Davidic state is not identical with the historical process.[12] There is no indication of an "Israel" in a genealogical union based on kinship, or even formed from an association of tribes in the 12th–10th centuries BCE. There was no such thing as a united monarchy formed from an antecedent tribal reality into a communal identity called "Israel" including Judah, Ephraim, and Manasseh, much less the Negev and the Galilee. Once this is accepted in general, there is further no historical (or especially biological) reality of a common ancestry of Israel and Judah, and certainly no fraternal union based on kinship of the people.

In consequence, the twelve-tribe concept is an ideological construct of identification that creates a sense of belonging among its constituents. Generally speaking, there are several historical settings in which such a concept that creates a common ancestry of Israel *and* Judah may be situated. I limit myself to mention four: a) the phase in the 9th and 8th centuries BCE in which Judah developed into a monarchy subordinate to Israel (or a form of secundogeniture) and an inclusive collective identity developed within Israel that included Judah; b) the phase after the decline of the Northern state in 722 BCE, when Northern traditions entered into the heritage of Judah in order to enable continuity and belonging for the Northern elites and the people who were brought into the Judean state; c) obviously the ideological environment of the 4th century BCE, in which the Chronicler clearly developed a concept of "all Israel;" and finally d) accompanying the expansion of the Hasmonean state in the 2nd century BCE, when Israel's territorial extent encompassed the Galilee as well as the Negev, and when an inclusive identity model was needed. Surprisingly, the exilic or early-postexilic period are not natural candidates for the development of such an inclusive concept when evaluated from a historical standpoint, at least not with respect to territorial extent. But the need to include perspectives of the diaspora and various Judaism(s) into a common understanding of Yahwism in the 5th/4th centuries – the "birth of religion," so to speak – may form a considerable background for the encompassing, inclusive concept of Israel. I have argued elsewhere that Numbers mirrors this strategy of inclusion.[13]

The puzzling uncertainty in locating the emergence of a concept of identity on the basis of common ancestry is the starting point for the following discussion, beginning with reflections on the use of "Israel" as a designation for a political unit and its use regarding Judah.

[11] Weingart, "Tribes," 30.
[12] Frevel, "State."
[13] Frevel, *Transformations*.

2. The Formation of "Israel" – Which Israel?

What exactly does the term "Israel" denote? The person Jacob; the people consisting of twelve tribes; the kingdom of Saul, David, and Solomon; the Northern state from Jeroboam to Hoshea; Judah; the Hasmonean state; etc.? There is no single meaning of "Israel," and thus this puzzling question can be answered only by delving deep into various contexts. Yet, an understanding of the denotatum of the term "Israel" is crucial for understanding the collective identity of Israel, Judah, Yehud, Judea, etc. This question can be answered with the extrabiblical evidence only to a certain extent. First, the most recent discussions of the history of Israel have led to new challenges regarding the emergence and development of the concept of "Israel" in the biblical texts. The sparse data from extant sources can be enumerated in four points:

1. The earliest attestation of the lexeme *Israel* in Egyptian texts of the 13th century BCE, whether the Merenptah Stele or Berlin AÄM 21687, is completely unrelated to the later history of Israel. There is not a single hint that the Merenptah reference to a group of people named "Israel" relates to the state institutionally constituted in the Iron IIA, or any sort of predecessor.[14]
2. The first attestation of the name "Israel" designating a state is the Mesha Stele (KAI 181, COS 2.23), clearly in reference to the Omride dynasty. Although a *bytdwd* is mentioned in the Tel Dan stele of the mid-9th century BCE (KAI 310, COS 2.39), the name "Israel" is also clearly and solely attributed to the Northern state and its representative king, Jehoram. This is corroborated by the extrabiblical attestation of the name "Israel" related to King Ahab in the Assyrian Kurkh Monolith of Shalmaneser III in 853 BCE (COS 2.113A). In contrast, there is not a single piece of *extrabiblical* evidence in which the designation "Israel" was used in or for Judah, whether as a self-ascription or as a name imposed by others to Judah or Judeans. Thus, it is clear that the designation "Israel" was attributed to Judah only secondarily.
3. Outside of the Bible, there is no extrabiblical evidence for the name "Israel" denoting the southern state of Judah after 722 BCE, even in postexilic extrabiblical sources.[15] Following Yohanan Aharoni, ארץ ישׂראל is sometimes reconstructed in the Arad Ostracon 88:1, which is dated in the very end of the 7th century BCE, but this reconstruction of the text (which is perhaps a practice copy of a royal inscription) remains doubtful.[16] Not a single Hebrew or Aramaic inscription mentions the name "Israel" after the end of the 8th century BCE.[17] Two inscriptions from Delos (late 3rd/early 2nd century

[14] Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 54–56.
[15] Diebner, "Juda und Israel"; idem, "Jenes Israel."
[16] Yadin, "Significance," 11 reconstructing *Carchemish* instead of *Israel*.
[17] Schwiderski, *et al.*, *Inschriften*.

BCE) employ the term "Israelites" to refer to people who make offerings at the temple on Mount Gerizim.[18] This demonstrates that the term "Israel/Israelites" was most probably still used as a designation for the "Northerners," or bette, "Samarians" (the inscriptions honor the otherwise unknown Menippos of Herakion and Serapion of Knossos). But as Benedikt Hensel has emphasized, there is no epigraphic evidence of the Jerusalemites referring to themselves in contrast as "Israelites, who bring levies to Mt. Zion."[19] Finally, the evidence in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew inscriptions documented in the CIIP[20] is even more meager. We can reject the reading שלום על ישראל in the Tomb of the Prophets inscription in Jerusalem (CIIP 954); even if it were from the Roman period, the reading is quite doubtful (cf. CIIP 1147, 1549, 1602, 2231). The same is true for the attestation of ישראל in the tomb inscription of Shmuel HaNavi Street from the 1st century BCE or 1st century CE (CIIP 42). The only remarkable exception for "Israel" is during the first and second Jewish revolts, when "Israel" is first used in silver shekel coin inscriptions such as "Year One of the Redemption of Israel" or "Simeon, the *na'śî'* of Israel."[21] While "Israel" is first used as a label with religious connotations, it is clearly the name of the "state" in the second Jewish revolt.[22] In sum, the transition of the designation "Israel" from the Northern state to Judah/*Yehûd* cannot be traced in the extrabiblical record. Yet, there are at least two clues: on the one hand, the term "Israel" was understood theologically as denoting the elected people that constitute the twelve-tribe Israel. On the other hand, Israel seems to remain a designation for the Northerners until the 2nd century BCE.

4. In contrast to the extrabiblical account, it is quite clear that Judah was included in the term "Israel" after 722 BCE in two ways: sometimes within a relatively exclusive conception in which "Israel" was detached from the territorial understanding of the Northern state and denoted only the remnant Judah;[23] but more often in a rather inclusive conception of Israel that encompassed additional territory by including at least Samaria and the Judean hill country, but also, in its widest extension, the territory "from Dan to Beersheba." The Chronicler denotes the latter as "greater Israel," "all Israel," "pan-Israel," "integral Israel," or "inclusive Israel."[24] This inclusive concept had a long history and a literary development that is difficult to trace, though it possibly originated as early as the Northern self-understanding encompassing Judah

[18] Knoppers, *Jews*, 171.
[19] Hensel, *Juda*, 161.
[20] Ameling, *et al.*, *CIIP*.
[21] Goodblatt, "Judeans," 10–11, 23, 28–31; for the earlier inscriptions of the Hasmonean period, see Rappaport, "Inscriptions."
[22] Goodblatt, "Judeans," 33.
[23] Weingart, *Stämmevolk*, 288.
[24] See the overview in Hensel, *Juda*, 349.

as part of Israel[25] under the Omrides and Nimshides.[26] It goes much too far to deny that there was any "Israelitization" of Judah and to postulate instead that the concept of "Israel" was part of Israel's *and* Judah's self-understanding from the beginning, as Kristin Weingart suggests.[27] It was rather a multistage process of blending triggered by both historical developments as well as the emergence of mono-Yahwistic theological concepts, with the appropriation of "Israel" (or Israel's) traditions in the South also playing a major role in this process. Yet, a genealogical conception and common understanding of "Israel" being the origin that gave birth to all later understandings is disputable both from the perspective of attested historical developments as well as the literary-historical viewpoint, which are both closely interlinked. What did the term and concept "Israel" comprise during each historical time period and stage of literary growth? The early phases of the inclusive concept of Israel, its historical background, its religious-historical and theological dimensions, and particularly its literary history seem to be some of the most crucial points of discussion and are in need of much more research. However, the development of this understanding is undeniably linked to the twelve-tribe concept of Israel.

3. When Did the Twelve-Tribe Conception Emerge as a Unifying Concept?

Looking at the birth narrative in the Jacob story in light of the systematic progression of the priestly twelve-tribe system in Gen 46:8–27; 49:3–28; Exod 1:2–5 and in the book of Numbers (Num 1:5–47; 7:1–88; 13:4–16; 17:17–18; 26:1–51 etc.), questions arise concerning the literary placement of the birth narrative in Gen 29:31–30:24. While there are certain merits to the suggestion that the Jacob-Laban cycle has its origins as a Northern tradition,[28] it cannot be applied so easily to a birth narrative that includes the Judean tribes. The problem of "Israel" comprising twelve tribes starting with the Judean tribes in Gen 29 on the one hand, and its supposed unity[29] and attribution to a Northern origin at the same time on the other hand, has rightly been challenged by Nadav Na'aman.[30]

Setting aside the birth narrative for a moment, the number "twelve" for the sons of Jacob is surprisingly rare. While it is explicitly given only in Gen 35:22

[25] Weingart, *Stämmevolk*, 359.

[26] For a portrayal of the historical situation, see Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 221–265.

[27] "Eine 'Israelitisierung' Judas, in dem Sinne, dass der Name 'Israel' zunächst nichts mit Juda zu tun hatte und erst nach 720 v. Chr. für Juda frei geworden und auf es übertragen worden sei, hat es wohl nicht gegeben." Weingart, "Juda," 440.

[28] See, e. g., Blum, "Jacob," 207–208.

[29] Blum, "Jacob," 205–211; Weingart, "Tribes," 29.

[30] Na'aman, "Jacob Story [2014]," 99, 108–109.

(ויהיו בני־יעקב שנים עשר "And the sons of Jacob were twelve"), the background of the priestly tradition in Gen 17:20; 25:16 seems to already presume the number of twelve sons of Jacob when it attributes twelve princes (שנים־עשר נשיאם) to Ishmael. This makes perfect sense if it is understood as compositionally related to the twelve sons of Jacob,[31] but its attribution to the priestly narrative strand (P^g) is debatable (see below). Thus, the earliest reported mentions of the "twelve brothers" are in the Joseph story in Gen 42:13, 32. However, it can be easily demonstrated that the "twelve" number may be secondary to its present context (note the doubling with אחים אנחנו).[32] Besides explicit mentions of the number "twelve," only Gen 49 exhibits close links to both the birth narrative and the number itself. Yet apart from the framework of the chapter and the notice in v. 33b, the bulk of Gen 49 is often assumed to be post-priestly rather than part of the original Joseph story.[33] If this is the case, only a few Pentateuchal references to the "twelve" remain. The most intriguing is Exod 24:4b, where Moses erects twelve stones, which traditional source criticism attributes to a pre-priestly strand.[34] However, it has often been acknowledged that the erection of the twelve stones links to Josh 4 and is not deeply anchored into the story of Exod 24. To reckon the stones as the objects of the verb בנה[35] is more provisional and less standing to reason. The text functions well if only an altar is built in Exod 24:4a, and thus the implicit reference to the twelve tribes may instead be a later addition.[36] If this is conceded, the remaining passages to examine are from deuteronomistic traditions.

First and foremost, there is an explicit reference to the twelve tribes in the number of the spies sent out by Moses in Deut 1:23: "And I took from you twelve men, one of each tribe" (ואקח מכם שנים עשר אנשים איש אחד לשבט). There can be little doubt that this passage belongs to the *Grundschicht* of the deuteronomistic spy narrative. While the pre-priestly version in Num 13–14 does not mention a specific number of spies, this version explicitly names twelve. The representative nature is taken up in the priestly version in Num 13:2 and the list of names inserted in Num 13:4–16. Strikingly, there has not been very much discussion on this section despite it being one of the more crucial references for tracing the number of tribes in the biblical tradition. If it is not drawn from the priestly account, the deuteronomistic tradition must have had a certain sense of the tribes being twelve in number. "The fact that Moses selects just twelve men, one from each tribe (v. 23), and thus has the whole of Israel in mind, is a detail which in the parallel narrative is only known to the post-deuteronomistic editors (Num

[31] Naumann, *Ismael*, 238.
[32] Ede, *Josefsgeschichte* 169.
[33] Ede, *Josefsgeschichte* 442–469.
[34] Zenger, *Sinaitheophanie*, 216.
[35] Dohmen, *Exodus*, 202, with reference to Ibn Ezra.
[36] Graupner, *Elohist*, 132.

13:2b–16) and was obviously created by DtrH for this purpose."[37] However, this detail does not play a major role in the deuteronomistic spy narrative, and even less in the earlier layers of Deuteronomy.[38] This chapter lacks the space to delve into the complex discussion of Moses blessing in Deut 33, but although it was reckoned in earlier research as fundamental to the history of Israel and having its origins in the pre-state period, such an early date of the text is considered less feasible in more recent research.[39] The same holds true for the blessing and curse scene in Deut 27, in which the integration of the twelve tribes and particularly the link to the twelve stones in Josh 4 are attributed to a postexilic *Fortschreibung*.[40] The remaining text in Josh 4 is again quite complex and has been much discussed in current research. Does Josh 4 reflect a pre-priestly perspective when it mentions the twelve tribes? Apart from v. 9, which had often been attributed to a later addition,[41] "there are several indications that the most basic version of the episode of the twelve stones is a post-priestly text."[42] Ernst Axel Knauf has likewise considered a perspective of the Jerusalemite postexilic community standing in the background of Josh 4.[43] Conversely, the analysis of Joachim Krause sees a basic deuteronomistic text referring back to the deuteronomistic spy narrative that specifically employs the number twelve for the representatives.[44] Nevertheless, Krause rightly emphasizes: "The representation of the full number of the tribes of Israel by the number of twelve stones does not necessarily require the fully developed tribal system."[45]

In sum, the preceding paragraph does not seek to prove that all references to the twelve tribes are secondary additions. A specific assessment of such would require a greater degree of analysis. However, it should become clear that the twelve-tribe system cannot easily be taken for granted across the biblical traditions. Looking at the bulk of the evidence, there can be no doubt that the twelve-tribe system is most prominent in late post-priestly texts. At the same time, it must be admitted that not all indications can be attributed to post-priestly textual layers. The references to the twelve representatives, particularly in Deut 1:23 and perhaps Josh 4:2, cannot simply be dated as post-priestly. However,

[37] Own translation of: "Dass Mose gerade zwölf Männer, einen von jedem Stamm, auswählt (V. 23) und damit das gesamte Israel im Auge hat, ist eine Einzelheit, die in der Parallelerzählung erst die nachdeuteronomistische Redaktion kennt (Num 13,2b–16) und offenbar von DtrH für diesen Zweck geschaffen wurde." Veijola, *Deuteronomium*, 35.

[38] Perlitt, *Deuteronomium*, 98.

[39] Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 2225–2238.

[40] See the overview in Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 1925–1935.

[41] Germany, *Conquest*, 325.

[42] Germany, *Conquest*, 330, cf. 49.

[43] Knauf, *Josua*, 59–60.

[44] Krause, *Exodus*, 259.

[45] Own translation of: "Dabei muss die Repräsentation der Vollzahl der Stamme Israels durch die Zwölfzahl der Steine nicht notwendig das voll ausgebaute Stämmesystem voraussetzen." Krause, *Exodus*, 220.

the possibility that even these passages should locate the origin of the number "twelve" in the Persian period is open for debate. We may emphasize that the mere indication of twelve tribes does not necessarily presuppose the post-priestly system developed in Numbers. The number "twelve" indicates completeness, and this is enough for the first stage; it does not necessarily have to shape Israel's traditions from its earliest beginnings as Gerhard von Rad was willing to accept in following Noth's amphictyony hypothesis.[46] While such a far-reaching history of tradition rooted in the oral tradition of a historical fact is excluded from the present state of the history of Israel, it is worthwhile to examine evidence for tribal alliances in the Aegean world. There is ample evidence for concepts of covenants in archaic Greece in the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, even up to 500 BCE.[47] In light of the evidence from Anthela, Onchestos, Kalaureia, and other places, it is not compelling to situate all of the evidence for the twelve tribes within the 5th century BCE. If the analogy to Greek covenantal conceptions holds any water, the conception of the "completeness" of the twelve by the Deuteronomists may have been borrowed from or coined in analogy to the Greek evidence. This analogy also demonstrates that a common ancestry or genealogy is not typically built upon biological realities, but rather reflects a collective conception of identity. The earliest reference to such a conception up to this point would then indeed be Deut 1:23. This suggestion must be tested against the background of the birth narrative and the historical situation reflected in the Jacob story.

4. The Twelve Sons of Jacob in Gen 29:31–30:24

There is no doubt that the present birth narrative produces the twelve sons of Jacob from four mothers: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah from Leah; Dan and Naphtali from Rachel's handmaid, Bilhah; Gad and Asher from Leah's handmaid, Zilpah; Issachar and Zebulun from Leah herself, as well as the only daughter, Dinah. After the ten sons, Rachel gives birth to Joseph and the youngest son, Benjamin, who is mentioned in the Jacob cycle outside the birth narrative only in Gen 35:18. Previous research had considered the story to be the oldest twelve-tribe genealogy[48] and thus as a uniform tradition "part and parcel of the Jacob narrative."[49] But does "even the earliest version [of the birth narrative] … present what could be considered a full set of tribal sons?"[50] Yes and no, says Daniel Fleming, who argues that the tribal perspective is original to the story but with only *eight* sons listed: Reuben, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar,

[46] Rad, *Genesis*, 296.
[47] Tausend, *Amphiktyonie,* 57–64; cf. also Tobolowsky, *Sons*, 101–103.
[48] See Tobolowsky, *Sons*, 93–96.
[49] Weingart, "Tribes," 28.
[50] Fleming, *Legacy*, 78.

Zebulun, and Joseph. It thus comprised the "entire political heartland of the Israelite kingdom … no earlier than the eighth century."[51] The three tribes of Judah (Simeon, Levi, and Judah) were not part of the original composition. Yet, historical considerations may be influencing such an identification as a "Northern" tradition of the tribes in Gen 29–30, rather than textual observations. Although it is true that "no narrative ingredient is lost,"[52] it is by no means clear that Gen 29:33–35a should be excised from the original composition. The only textual clue may be Gen 30:17, "and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son" (ותהר ותלד ליעקב בן חמישי), which can be understood as Issachar being the fifth son *of Jacob* after Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher instead of Issachar being the fifth son *of Leah* after Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Fleming has to assume that the geographical attribution of the tribes to the land was already fixed; this is possible, but not necessarily clear.[53] The omission of Simeon from the list as a Southern tribe is particularly problematic if evaluated from a narrative standpoint; for instance, Thomas Nauerth's reconstruction of the *Grundtext* includes Simeon: Gen 29:31, 32abα, 33; 30:14–16, 17b*, 18aαb, 22, 23.[54] For Reinhard Gregor Kratz, in contrast, only Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Joseph, and Benjamin are pre-priestly, while all the Northern tribes are post-priestly. "All other births in Gen. 29–30 which everyone will feel not to be a unity and which are therefore usually divided between the different sources, are post-Yahwistic (and post-Priestly) supplements in order to arrive at twelve tribes for Israel."[55]

Let us return to the question of the geographic division of the tribal list, which has not played an important role in traditional literary criticism. From a literary perspective, the geographic "system" in Joshua is post-priestly. The most recent analysis by Erasmus Gaß suggests seven tribes (Judah, Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, and Naphtali) in a "priestly" *Grundschicht* characterized by the exclusion of Manasseh (Samarian territory), in which the other tribes were successively added.[56] Even if the geographic system in Josh 13–19 did not unfold before post-deuteronomistic times, there are certain *traditional* geographic locations of the tribes. *Cum grano salis* (and apart from the special location of Dan) the attribution of the tribes to the South and the North is traditional in nature. It may thus be tempting to follow Fleming in attributing the original composition without the tribes of Judah to the original lore of the Northern state, but as we have seen, the literary reasons for doing so are not totally convincing,[57] with particular regard to the exclusion of all sons/tribes related geographically to

[51] Fleming, *Legacy*, 79.
[52] Fleming, *Legacy*, 81.
[53] For generally reliable historical speculations on the tribes and their origins, see Knauf and Guillaume, *History*, 42–48.
[54] Nauerth, *Untersuchungen*, 183.
[55] Kratz, *Composition*, 266.
[56] Gaß, *Landverteilung*, 371–378.
[57] See also Tobolowsky, *Sons*, 101.

the South. But the question behind such analysis is worthwhile to consider: when were the Southern and Northern tribes combined? It is all the more tempting to join Fleming's view that the idea of a common origin of all (twelve) tribes arose *in Judah*. The background of this suggestion deserves further consideration.

My point of departure is the growing consensus that the older Jacob cycle does *not* mirror exilic[58] or even early-postexilic[59] realities, but rather has links to the monarchic period.[60] However, the combination of the Jacob-Laban cycle and the Jacob-Esau cycle was done not at the earliest level, but also should not be dated to exilic or postexilic times. Since the narratives promote Northern locations such as Bethel, Shechem, Penuel, and the Gilead, the older share of Jacob-Laban traditions may have had some connections to the North, as Erhard Blum,[61] Thomas Römer, Israel Finkelstein,[62] and many others have convincingly suggested. Together with the exodus story, the Jacob stories may have been employed as a charter myth of the Northern state of the Nimshides or partly even the Omrides. The kingdom of Jeroboam II was introduced later as the hub in which a coalescence of literary traditions took place.[63] This may be too much emphasis on the early 8th century BCE, but the tendency toward the North is clear. I agree with Finkelstein and Römer that some of "the earliest Jacob traditions were local to the Israelite territory in the Gilead, possibly, to the early core area of the territory named Gilead – in the Jabbok and south of it"[64] and that this does not fit any situation after the 8th century BCE. Thus, although I also see Jacob as paradigmatic for the exilic community in later stages, the literary core of the Jacob-Laban story cannot be exilic in its entirety. Most recently, Omer Sergi has strengthened the view that the Jacob-Laban cycle mirrors the relationship between Aram and Israel in the 9th/8th centuries BCE, and that as a charter myth it is related to the state formation of Israel.[65] He even argues that Jacob's route "from the Gilead hill country, through the Jabbok River, to the Jordan Valley – provides textual corroboration for the existence of the region's corridor of seasonal nomadic migration."[66] Thus, the story "reflects the social-economic interaction between sedentary, mobile and tribal groups in Cis- and Transjordan, and in so doing creates the notion of Israelite collective identity."[67] This traces back to an earlier version of the Jacob narrative that "identified the origin of Is-

[58] Na'aman, "Jacob Story [2014]," 103–110; Na'aman, "Jacob Story [2019]," 137.
[59] Becker, "Jakob."
[60] de Pury, "Cycle"; idem, "Jacob," 59–72; Blum, "Jacob"; Sergi, "Jacob"; Frevel, "Esau."
[61] Blum, "Jacob," 210.
[62] Finkelstein and Römer, "Comments."
[63] Finkelstein, "Corpus."
[64] Finkelstein and Römer, "Comments," 325.
[65] Sergi, "Jacob," 285–289.
[66] Sergi, "Jacob," 293.
[67] Sergi, "Jacob," 293.

rael among the mobile pastoralist tribes."[68] Although this fits particularly well to Jacob's pastoral image, I would instead strengthen the point of a collective identity linking the Gilead with the areas west of the Jordan and thus attempting to constitute "Israel" after the Omride expansion by taking as paradigmatic the social and economic interactions between these zones and groups on both sides of the Jordan.

The decisive point in the present discussion is that the Jacob-Laban tradition and the Jacob-Esau tradition are so nicely intertwined in Gen 31–33 that even the earliest narrative composition of the Jacob cycle must have included both. Does this Jacob cycle really have its origins in the North, as, for instance, Blum is ready to assume?[69] Such a Northern origin has often been criticized for causing problems in the Jacob-Esau traditions, because "at no moment in history could Edom have posed a threat to Israel."[70] In contrast to the Jacob-Laban narratives, the Jacob-Esau account points in my view to a *Southern origin*. This is indicated not only by the initial localization of the Isaac story in the Negev (Gen 25:11 in Beer-lahai-roi and Gen 26:23–33 in Beersheba, see also Gen 28:10 "and Jacob left Beersheba …"), but also by the "game hunt" setting of Gen 27. While these may be secondary localizations, the implicit reference to Seir and Edom in the Jacob narrative is conclusive.

5. The Location of the Jacob Narrative and Its Orientation Towards the Southern Fringes of Judah

According to Finkelstein and Römer,

> "[a]n unresolved problem in the reconstruction of the formation of the Jacob Cycle is the relation between Jacob and Esau/Edom. If Esau was from the beginning a personification of Edom/Seir, which is a plausible assumption, then we have three possibilities to connect Edom and Jacob."[71]

1. The first possibility is that Judah had already become Israel, and the Jacob/Esau stories were added to the Jacob narrative in the late 7th century at the earliest. The second and third possibilities are very similar, but differ in their historical setting: 2. The second assumes that the animosity between the two brothers has its roots in the early worship of YHWH as a Southern (or even Edomite) god by the clan of Jacob, explaining why Esau and Jacob are brothers competing against each other. 3. The history of Yahwism also stands in the background of the third suggestion: "The story of the reconciliation and separation between

[68] Sergi, "Jacob," 294.
[69] Blum, "Jacob," 209.
[70] Na'aman, "Jacob Story [2014]," 98, cf. 103.
[71] Finkelstein and Römer, "Comments," 331.

Jacob and Esau/Edom could reflect the 'transfer' of Yhwh from Edom to 'Israel',"[72] which is – following the two authors – still reflected in the 8th century BCE *Kuntillet ʿAjrud* inscriptions. 4. A fourth possibility has been brought up recently by Israel Knohl, who explicitly refers to Finkelstein's and Römer's "unresolved problem."[73] He observes that "there is no clear historical context for (difficult) relations between Israel and Edomites in the time of the Northern Kingdom,"[74] and suggests solving this problem by deriving the early kinship of Jacob and Esau from the Egyptian lists mentioning *Yaʿqub'ilu* alongside "Qos"-composite names.[75] "In light of our findings we might suggest that the background of the tradition about the brotherhood and animosity of Jacob and Esau goes back to the proximity and neighborhood of Jacob-el and Edomite clans in Mount Seir in the 13th century BC."[76]

Let me briefly comment on the four suggestions:

1. Although I concur with Albert de Pury and many others that at least parts of the Jacob cycle were written down as a continuous narrative in the 8th century BCE,[77] I do not share the confidence that the Jacob narrative has preserved traditions from the second millennium BCE. The alternative put forward by Nadav Na'aman, namely, to link the written Jacob cycle to the exilic period,[78] is tempting only in regard to Jacob's sojourn in Mesopotamia. However, in my view, there are no compelling reasons to locate the Jacob-Laban story within the exilic period. Na'aman argues that the Jacob/Esau enmity and the friendly ties between Jacob and Laban do not fit the history of the pre-exilic situation, but rather the exilic situation. He sees Gen 28 in particular as related to the Babylonian period, which has presuppositions that cannot be discussed here. Let it suffice to say that it is difficult to put too much emphasis on the scarce archaeological evidence of Bethel in the Babylonian period.[79]
2. I will discuss the early history of YHWH below in greater detail, but regarding the second possibility from Finkelstein and Römer, it should be said that there is *no* evidence for YHWH originally being an Edomite deity. This was already stated clearly by Eduard König in his history of Israelite religion: "Daß 'Jahwe ein edomitischer Gott' gewesen sei, der ursprünglich ʾEsaw geheißen habe, hat keinen Anhalt in den Quellen."[80] In terms of the data, nothing crucial

[72] Finkelstein and Römer, "Comments," 331.
[73] Knohl, "Jacob-el," 483.
[74] Finkelstein and Römer, "Comments," 331.
[75] Knohl, "Jacob-el," 482.
[76] Knohl, "Jacob-el," 483–4.
[77] de Pury, "Cycle"; idem, "Jacob," 59–72.
[78] Na'aman, "Jacob Story [2014]"; Na'aman, "Jacob Story [2019]."
[79] Koenen, "Art. Bethel [Ort]," 4.4.
[80] König, *Geschichte*, 211.

has changed since König's assessment.[81] It is difficult to ignore that the biblical evidence of YHWH coming from the South in Deut 33:2 and Hab 3:3 cannot bear the southern origins of YHWH since those passages are post-exilic. Even if the remaining two theophany passages in Judg 5:5 and Ps 68:9 relating YHWH to the Sinai are acknowledged as "early" (though there are many arguments to be made against this), the southern *origins* of YHWH cannot be substantiated by the biblical record in any convincing manner. The only way to do this is with the *šꜣśw-yhw* in the Soleb and Karnak evidence from Thutmose III in combination with the so-called Midianite hypothesis.[82] But even if this is accepted, the link between the *šꜣśw-yhw* and the Midianites remains unclear. For Mark Smith, the weakness of this hypothesis "suggests a secondary mediation of YHWH cult to Midianites or Kenites, perhaps via the Shasu of Seir or perhaps Edom. Accordingly, it may be preferable to posit a Shasu of Seir-Edom/Midian-Kenite hypothesis."[83] But the link between the *šꜣśw-yhw* and the *šꜣśw-śʿrr* is likewise uncertain. The evidence from Egypt does not make YHWH an Edomite god! To be clear: The *šꜣśw-yhw* cannot and should not be related to "the Edomites" (whoever that may have been) of the first millennium. Even if we see the *šꜣśw-yhw* linked to the *šꜣśw-śʿrr*, there is not enough convincing evidence that YHWH was ever an *Edomite* god. This is too straightforward for Edom, as well as for YHWH. Thus, the conflicts and reconciliation between Jacob and Esau do not reflect the adoption of an Edomite god by the clan of Jacob, and so the second possibility can be ruled out.

3. Although the importance of the 8th century BCE finds from Kuntillet ʿAjrud cannot be overestimated, their contribution to reconstructing the roots of early Israelite religion is, in my understanding, rather limited. Yet time and again, the mention of Teman is stressed to establish a link to Edom. A careful evaluation of the inscriptions from Kuntillet ʿAğrūd does not simply reveal four instances of a plain reading of "Teman," but rather the determined form *yhwh htmn* in inscription 3.9 as a *possible* reading, and the others as more or less reliable complementation or even epigraphic guesswork.[84] This is important, because there is a significant difference between *tmn* and *htmn*. While the first may be a place, the second is rather a region. Teman is usually understood as a geographic region, denoting the area of YHWH's origins in either Edom or even North Arabia. In their edition of the inscriptions, Shmuel Ahituv, Esther Eshel, and Ze'ev Meshel write in commenting on inscription 3.6 that "Têmān was an important city in Edom."[85] To locate the city "in the

[81] Frevel, "Israel."
[82] Leuenberger, "Süden"; Frevel, "Gott."
[83] Smith, "Character," 29.
[84] Frevel, "Emergence."
[85] Meshel, *Kuntillet ʿAjrud*, 96.

vicinity of Petra," they take a clue from Eusebius' onomasticon, though admitting that "the details are not precise."[86] Following this line and according to the parallelism of Amos 1:11–12 (בתימן *bětêmān*), Teman is often identified with Bozrha.[87] The problem is that evidence for the existence of a city *Teman* in Edom remains rather scarce. Ernst Axel Knauf declares in his most distinctive way, without the slightest doubt, that "there is nothing to suggest that there was a place called Teman."[88] In his understanding, Teman denotes, if anything, a region derived from a southern tribe, and only the biblical *htmny* refers to the inhabitants of the oasis of Tayma or its larger region.[89] In contrast to a particular place or location, the lexeme *tmn* can simply mean "south," just as with "Negev."[90] תימן is derived from the root ימן and means first and foremost "south" as a direction or the landscape in the southern fringes, beyond the Negev.[91] Juan Manuel Tebes has recently emphasized that "there is no compelling reason for seeing a direct link between K[untillet ʿ]A[jrud] and Edom."[92] He considers Teman to be referring to Edomites or Edomite-related groups settling in the Negev rather than to a region in Transjordan (i. e,. Midian, South Arabia, etc.).[93] However, if Teman primarily denotes "south" and if the Kuntillet ʿAjrud inscription is written from a "Northern perspective," then there is nothing to force a connection between Teman and the Edomites. This holds all the more true if the only sure reading is *htmn* "the South." In contrast, YHWH of Teman may allude to "Samarian import" into Jerusalem and Judah.[94] The inscription from Khirbet Beit Lei, which identifies the Jerusalemite El with YHWH, gives evidence for the process in which YHWH became worshiped as far south as Judah. He is the god of Jerusalem and the "whole land" (not "the "whole earth").[95] *Yhwh htmn* is a regional manifestation of YHWH in the South. Within the geographic range of meanings for this phrase, the epigraphic evidence must be understood not as YHWH of Teman, but rather as "Yhwh of the southern arid zones."[96] Which "South"? The region south of the Judean hill country, rather than the region south of the Arabah rift. It is exactly this region into which Judah expanded after the campaign of Hazael (see

[86] Meshel, *Kuntillet ʿAjrud*, 96.
[87] See, e. g., Blum, "Jacob," 209.
[88] Own translation of: "Dafür, dass es einen Ort Teman gegeben hat, spricht nichts." (Knauf, "Teman," 2.1).
[89] Knauf, "Art. Teman."
[90] Gesenius, *et al*., *Handwörterbuch*, 1436–1437; Hoftijzer and Jongeling, *DNWSI*, 1212.
[91] Meshel, *Kuntillet ʿAjrud*, 96.
[92] Tebes, "Home," 175.
[93] Tebes, "Home," 176.
[94] Frevel, "Israel"; idem, "Emergence."
[95] Leuenberger, "Jhwh."
[96] Finkelstein and Römer, "Comments," 328.

below). If so, Kuntillet ʿAjrud does not give evidence of the origin of YHWH, but rather of the expansion of his sphere of influence.

This fits very well with my understanding of the early history of Yahwism, which can be presented in a nutshell as follows: YHWH was first a god connected to the exodus story, and particularly with the tribes in the Ephraimite and Manassite hill country. From this background, he became the patron god of the Omride dynasty in Samaria. Although his origins *may* still be in Northern Arabia far to the South (it is impossible to decide the issue since there is no compelling evidence), he was not introduced in Judah until the 9th century BCE – and not from Edom or the South, but from the North: The Omrides brought him to Jerusalem, and from the palace compound in Jerusalem he expanded to Judah, and finally into the Negev. There is no particular need to speculate that the construction of the so-called Solomonic temple, which fits to the developments of the late 9th/early 8th century, was connected to the introduction of YHWH in Jerusalem by the Omride dynasty, but for me this assumption is very tempting. Thus, to summarize, the Kuntillet ʿAjrud evidence contributes nothing towards uncovering the historical roots of the brotherly conflict between Esau and Jacob, and it contributes even less to the origin of YHWH than usually assumed. "Extrapolating from mid-8th century North Israelite inscriptions to the biblical tradition of YHWH's origin in the South in the late thirteenth century BCE is, in my opinion, methodologically and materially unlikely. All that can legitimately be stated is that the 8th century inhabitants of Israel considered 'YHWH Shomron' to be the god of the Samaria region, and that 'YHWH Teman' was the god of the southern Palestinian districts."[97] The evidence from Kuntillet ʿAjrud does not "reflect the 'transfer' of Yhwh from Edom to 'Israel'."[98] In contrast, the inscriptions attest YHWH as the god of the region in which the struggle between Jacob and Esau is located (see below).

4. The fourth possibility is the most extensive explanation for the Jacob-Esau enmity, characterized by the hypothesis of Israel Knohl. He considers the brotherhood to be rooted in the second millennium BCE and attested in Egyptian documents. How reliable is such a hypothesis? One might agree that the name "Jacob" is an apocopated form of *Yaʿqub'ilu/Yaʿăqōb-'Ēl* "'God/El protects,' which is frequently found in extrabiblical sources."[99] Yet this does not guarantee that this "Jacob-El" has anything to do with the biblical Jacob, nor that there was already any relationship between Edom and Jacob in the 13th century. No single attestation of the name Jacob-El in the second millennium can be related to the biblical figure, neither from the Hyksos scarabs nor

[97] Na'aman, "Inscriptions," 316.
[98] Finkelstein and Römer, "Comments," 332.
[99] Wöhrle, "Jacob."

in any Aramean evidence. The connection between the toponym *Yaʿqub'ilu* and the biblical Jacob remains unproven and, even in some ways, unprovable. Thus, such speculations about the origins of Yahwism and the emergence of Israel are quite odd. Knohl's article ends with the following statement: "Later on, the clans of Jacob-el, joined other clans and they formed together the early national entity 'Israel' who is mentioned in the late 13th century by Merneptah. In this way they could serve as the mediators who brought the name and the cult of YHWH from Seir-Edom to early Israel. This process might be seen as the birth of biblical Religion."[100] The link between Jacob-el and Isra-el in the Merenptah Stele is wishful thinking (or drawn in a circular manner from the Jacob cycle) rather than reliable evidence: Jacob-el, if one existed at all, and Isra-el have no connection in the textual tradition and it is quite speculative to join them in this historical respect. Since there is no link between the people group mentioned in the Merenptah Stele (see above), there is no link between the Jacob-el group and Edom.

In summary, explaining the enmity between Jacob and Esau through the history of Yahwism has failed, as has locating it in the second millennium BCE. Thus, it is advisable to focus on an approach that accounts for historical, political, geographical, and territorial-historical aspects.

6. Judean State Formation and the Jacob-Esau Rivalry – A Suggestion

In my understanding, the regional development of the Southern Levant in the 9th–7th centuries is most elucidating and forms the background for the composition of at least the Jacob-Esau tradition, and perhaps even the whole Jacob cycle. I agree with Omer Sergi that "rivalry between neighboring political entities were a major factor in the formation processes of the Levantine kingdoms."[101] However, there were also processes of economic and political entanglement and disentanglement that influenced these processes of emergence, formation, and consolidation of polities. I still cannot see Judah (apart from perhaps an uncertain 11th century Jerusalemite polity) having the strength to give rise to a network of patronages able to be addressed as a "state" in the 10th or 9th centuries. Thus, I maintain the view that the North has precedence over the South in several respects: economy, politics, and religion. The emergence of a "state" in Judah was subsequent to state emergence in Israel, as the Omrides and Nimshides ruled

[100] Knohl, "Jacob-el," 484.
[101] Sergi, "Emergence," 16.

over Jerusalem until the 8th century BCE.[102] I do not follow the re-evaluation of Judah's strength as a *presupposition* of Omride expansion to the South as Sergi puts forth in his article on the emergence of Judah:

> "Read within the archaeological context of the Jerusalem–Benjamin region in the 11th–9th centuries B.C.E., it seems that the growing political power of Judah, especially in the Benjamin Plateau, was the reason behind the Israelite attempt to annex the region in the early 9th century B.C.E."[103]

In contrast, the golden age of the Judean state, resulting in its expansion into the Shephelah and at least the Negev (starting in the late 9th and accelerating in the 8th century BCE), is the *outcome* of Northern patronage in Jerusalem.

It seems to me that this southern expansion constitutes both the condition for and the overtone of the Jacob-Esau rivalry. The Negev is often assumed to have been a peripheral and marginal zone that was nearly dead before the Assyrian development of long-distance trade linking the Arabian Peninsula with Gaza. Notwithstanding the dry area's harsh living conditions hampering a thriving development, this assumption is largely incorrect and driven by colonial perceptions.[104] It underestimates the continuous growth of long-distance trade[105] and the presence of "Edomites" and proto-Arabic tribes as well as the prosperous situation between the 8th and 6th centuries BCE. In contrast to the view that the region was developed only by the *Pax Assyriaca,* it had already been an important economic intermediary of exchange, beginning with bitumen and salt from the Dead Sea and copper produced from the Faynan and Timna, and extending into (but not limited to) spices, resins, and frankincense of distant origins. This transitory role is underscored by how the trade system bridged Egypt and the Southern Levant on the one hand and linked Transjordan and the Arabah with the Southern Levantine coast on the other, ultimately spreading goods throughout the Mediterranean via harbors that served as important hubs of international exchange.[106] The view also minimizes the agricultural importance of the region apart from the trade routes, which was no "granary of Palestine," but by no means insignificant.[107] It implies that the expansion of Judah had no resistance in the South whatsoever and that it was only limited by geological and climatic conditions in the arid zones of the Negev. As I have argued elsewhere in more detail,[108] a more plausible scenario than this "empty space conception" is the rise of conflicts over the control of the central and southern Negev in the Naḥal Besor and in the Beersheba basin up to the southern end of the Dead Sea (such

[102] Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 221–265; idem, "State."
[103] Sergi, "Emergence."
[104] Thareani, "Empires," 411; Koch, "Interface."
[105] Finkelstein, "Trade"; idem, *Fringe*, 144–149; Frevel, "Esau," 354.
[106] Thareani, "Forces."
[107] Thareani, "Empires," 410.
[108] Frevel, "Esau."

as the line drawn by Tell Ǧemme, Tell Haror, Tel Seraʿ/Tell eš-Šerīʿa, Beersheba, Arad, Tel Masos, Tel ʿAroer, and Ḥorvat Qitmit). It is especially important to acknowledge that in the Iron II, the Negev was part of an economic zone including the Arabah and the southern Transjordanian plateau. The rift valley was by no means a dividing border,[109] and the whole of Seir was a thriving economic border zone.

As Assyrian interest and protégé increased in the 7th century BCE, the more a counterfort to Judean expansion emerged. The Assyrian policy allowed (or even promoted) the Judean expansion that followed the expansion of the Aramean king Hazael into the South,[110] since they had been interested to employ the existing and arising communities as buffers and intermediaries. The four main sites of economic prosperity were Tel ʿAroer, Tel Malḥata/Tell el-Milḥ, Tel ʿIra/Ḫirbet el-Ġarra, and Beersheba (as the administrative center). The many unfortified farmsteads and small settlements in the region[111] demonstrate its economic power. The Judeans benefited not only from long-distance trade in the hub of the Beersheba basin where the trade routes ended, but also from the redistribution of agricultural products. However, the new "Judeans" gained through southern expansion were not settlers or newcomers, but were rather integrated into the webs of reciprocal relations and interactions that had already been established. To a degree, the same holds true with the so-called "Edomites" in the southern steppe – though speaking of ethnic identities and boundaries is misguided.

The name "Qôs" in Ḥorvat Qitmīt, Arad, and Tell el-Kheleife, the personal name Qôsaʾ on a seal from Aroer, the Edomite ostraca from Ḥorvat ʿUza, TelMaḥalta, and Aroer, the South Arabic letters on ostraca from Aroer, Tel Beersheba, Tell Ǧemme, Tell el-Kheleife, and ʿĒn Ḥaṣeva, and many other examples in material culture easily demonstrate that there was no ethnic homogeneity in the area. It was rather a "mixed zone" determined and shaped by exchange and redistribution.

Rather than speaking of borders between Judah and Edom, Yifat Thareani has described the situation as a "mixed zone," "buffer zone," or "ethnic mosaic,"[112] and she also speaks of an "oscillating frontier."[113] The Negev was an "area of intense (and intensifying) interaction among diverse cultural groups."[114] Even when the region was controlled by the Negev fortresses in the 7th century, it was not merely "Judean" in political respects. To be clear, neither from the historical developments nor from the archaeological record it is easily to discern whether Tell Ǧemme, Tel Haror/Tell Abū Hurēra, Tel Seraʿ, Tel ʿIra/Ḫirbet el-Ġarra, Tel

[109] Jericke, "Art. Negev."
[110] Frevel, "Esau," 353.
[111] Thareani, "Self-Destruction," 191.
[112] Thareani-Sussely, "Archaeology," 74.
[113] Thareani, "Empires," 411.
[114] Crouch, *Making*, 71.

Masos/Ḫirbet el-Mšāš, Tel ʿAroer, Ḥorvat Rogem, Ḥorvat ʿUza, Ḥorvat Raddum, Tel Malḥata/Tell el-Milḥ were consistently Judean.

The given situation makes the Arad-Beersheba region, in which the Jacob-Esau cycle is attributed, a cultural interface between various traditions and cultures. In this view, the way the narrative explicitly locates the composition in this area through later layers in Gen 24:62 and particularly Gen 25:18 is important, as well as implicitly through older layers with the terms "Seir" and even "Edom" (Gen 25:30; 27:11, 23; 32:4; 33:14, 16). Thus, it is quite plausible to relate the conflict between Jacob and Esau to this situation, should Edom and Seir already be related to Esau in the earliest traditions (Gen 25:25).[115] Since the combination of the Jacob-Esau conflict with the Jacob-Laban cycle is one of the main features of the composition, the conflict's setting becomes the anchor for dating the earliest stratum of the Jacob cycle as forming "Israel" as an identity encompassing both the North, with the core territory of the Samarian state and the Gilead, as well as all of Judah, including the contested territory to the far South. The composition of the Jacob-Laban and Jacob-Esau cycles is therefore linked to the constitution of an "Israel" as a mode of collective identification that not only includes Judah, but also comes from Judah. It is the twinhood of Jacob and Esau that characterizes their proximity ("Judah" and "Edom" as state-like entities are historically almost co-original in the late 9th/8th centuries BCE) while also characterizing at the same time the priority of Judah.

The different characterizations of the figures in the narrative then shape Judah's ancestral control over the Negev in Seir on the one hand and Beersheba on the other hand (with both standing for *regions*). The struggle for "birthright" and "blessing" reflects the perspective of Judah in a position of supremacy. Any struggle or *de facto* denial of existence is decided in favor of Judah. This feature does not fit the hostile situation of Edomite dominance in the 6th century, in which Na'aman and others locate the conflict.[116] Thus, the narratives of birth and blessing can be read as a legitimization of Judean control.

Such discourse is also hidden within the framework of the Jacob-Esau struggle at the Jabbok in Gen 32–33. Whether the narratives of the firstborn and the blessings are of the same origin does not have to be decided here; what matters is that it reflects a Judean perspective of supremacy. I do not agree with Jakob Wöhrle that the oldest stratum necessarily implies the expulsion of Esau.[117] The perspective of separation is most explicit in the post-priestly vision of segregation, which is theologically driven and can be understood as a consequence of the older layers determining the supremacy of Jacob. By the expulsion of Esau into the East, a situation of juxtaposition is achieved that includes a utopian demar-

[115] Frevel, "Esau," 350; Wöhrle, "Koexistenz," 314.
[116] Na'aman, "Jacob Story [2014]," 103.
[117] Wöhrle, "Koexistenz."

cation between Jacob/Israel and Esau/Edom. This is wishful thinking even in the 4th century BCE. However, the segregation of Jacob and Esau has its roots in the parting of the ways in Gen 33:14–15. Jacob once again cheats his brother by making him believe that he will follow him to Seir in due time, while he is instead headed for Succoth, Shechem, and Canaan.

The struggle over supremacy makes the topic of the rivalry between Jacob and Esau, the identification of YHWH as the god of Jacob, and his transformation from "El" in the older Jacob-Laban traditions (Gen 28:19; 33,20; 35:7–9) to YHWH (Gen 28,21; 27:7, 20, 27) even more interesting. Strikingly, the god of "Israel" who fights Jacob at the Jabbok goes unnamed, yet Jacob still names the place Penu-*El* (Gen 32:31). Conversely, the god YHWH is the "driving force" in the birth narrative of Jacob and Esau. By foreshadowing in the narrative of Jacob stealing Esau's blessing, this also impacts the *barûk yhwh* passages in the Jacob tradition (Gen 24:27, 31; 26:29; 30:27, 30).

Finally, Jacob being renamed "Israel" does not belong to the basic layer of the narrative in Gen 32, and even its pre-priestly origin is debated.[118] The phenomenon of renaming attested with Abram/Abraham (Gen 17:5) and Sarai/Sarah (Gen 17:15), or Gideon and Jerubbaal (Judg 6:32) suggests a later date, and thus may indicate a redactional rewriting of the Jacob tradition in post-priestly reception. However, placing the rationale of the renaming within the context of Hasmonean imperial policy[119] is a rather absurd avenue of explanation. Should the renaming in Gen 32:28–29 be an addition to the earliest narrative, one must wonder whether Jacob and Israel had already been identified with each other in the pre-priestly tradition at all. However, the issue is not so straightforward, and it may perhaps be helpful to differentiate between an implicit identification (see the considerations on the literary growth of the Jacob cycle above) and an explicit identification. Only this *explicit* identification of Jacob with Israel is not present before the Joseph story and the priestly strand of the Pentateuch.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, the results of the tradition-building process regarding the Jacob-Esau enmity are quite similar to the processes we have discussed above regarding the emergence of an inclusive concept of Israel: at the earliest stages, it is implicit rather than explicit, and is made explicit only in priestly and post-priestly reception. It is misleading to take only the explicit concepts as a point of departure.

The argument of this chapter traces the inclusive conception of the identity of "Israel" that was ultimately included in the late-postexilic twelve-tribe

[118] See the list in Wöhrle, *Fremdlinge*, 89–90; Diebner, "Umbenennung," 259.
[119] Diebner, "Umbenennung," 263–264, 266.

system of the constructed exodus-Sinai-wilderness-conquest-nation narrative. The twelve-tribe system has no *historical* root in the pre-monarchic or post-monarchic periods. At no time in the second or first millennium BCE was there a *real* twelve-tribe Israel. However, the fictious form has significant parallels in the Greek world in the 7th and 6th centuries, and thus the invention of a twelve-tribe Israel is most probably *not merely* a postexilic construct in its entirety. The present argument differentiates between the concepts of common origin and common ancestry, which are complementary to each other and were enhanced and intensified in postexilic times. However, without being explicit regarding common ancestry, Deut 1:23 employs the number of twelve representatives to symbolize the completeness of Israel. The concept behind this is already inclusive in various ways, by building on a common prehistory from which a united Israel has emerged and by deliberately making clear its consolidation into a single nation. The birth narrative in Gen 29–30 was expanded in postexilic times to lay the foundation for the common ancestry of all Israel within the framework of the twelve-tribe Israel. However, the narrative within the Jacob cycle had already been functioning to combine Northern and Southern tribes into "Israel." Northern traditions were included and combined within the Jacob cycle with the Jacob-Esau struggle, which took its point of reference in the struggles for supremacy in Judah's southern zone of contact with Edom in the 8th century. By bringing together the traditions of North and South, a figure for collective identification was created in the figure of Jacob as early as the 7th century, which, through its connection with the exodus narrative, had originally implicitly established "Israel" as a unified entity. In the course of the postexilic and post-priestly interpolations, this collective identity was expanded and became more and more explicit, whether through explicitly renaming Jacob (based on Deutero-Isaiah?) and identifying him with "Israel," or through structuring the earliest notions of "Israel" into a twelve-tribe system.

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