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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to describe the Jacob narrative through the lens of memory. Taking Gen 28:10-22 as a case study, the objective is to place Jacob's visit to Bethel alongside other ancient referential claims, analyzing it for authentic memories. However, the complex nature of memory is susceptible to preservation and revision. That is to say, having no desire to comport to modern historical-critical sensibilities, memory's epistemological underpinnings are concerned primarily with reconstructing a remembered past for subsequent generations of Israelite tradents. In order to understand the historical background to the Jacob narrative in its entirety, a formal analysis of Iron Age scribal practices is employed, that is, the type of knowledge innate in Iron Age sources—oral and written—as well as the function of alphabetic prose narrative texts. Finally, the conclusion reached in this thesis is that the Jacob narrative contains early and late features that resonate well with memory's trappings.

Remembering Jacob: The Literary Representation of Memory in the Jacob Narrative

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School of Theology

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Isaac Borbon

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This thesis, directed and approved by the committee for the thesis candidate Isaac Borbon, has been accepted by the Office of Graduate Programs of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Old Testament

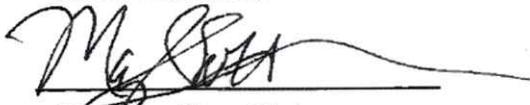


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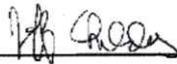
Date

4/6/2021

Thesis Committee



Mark Hamilton, Chair



Jeffrey Childers

Christopher Rollston

Christopher Rollston

I would like to dedicate this thesis first and foremost to my wife, Emily Borbon. She endured countless days, weeks, and months as I tucked myself away in the library. This research would not have been possible without her patience, and for that, I am most thankful. She most certainly resonates with what the wise teacher penned long ago (Ecclesiastes 7:8): טוב אַתְּרִית דְּבַר מְרֵאשִׁיתוֹ טוֹב אַתְּרִיתוֹ מִגְּבוּהַ־רוּחַ (“Better is the end of a thing than its beginning; the patient in spirit are better than the proud in spirit”). I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my family, for they put up with countless conversations over what, exactly, my thesis is all about. Further, I would also like to dedicate this work to Rob Kranz, one of my best friends. His thoughtful questions provoked much dialogue between the two of us, and led me to further clarify my arguments, and to reflect deeply upon Iron Age stories. Perhaps Saint Thomas Aquinas was correct about friendship when he stated: “Friendship is the source of the greatest pleasures, and without friends even the most agreeable pursuits become tedious.” Lastly, this thesis is dedicated to my teacher Dr. Mark Hamilton, a wonderful friend and mentor. He spent countless hours with me discussing the nature of this thesis as well as pointing me in the right direction, for which I am most thankful. Without his mentorship and scholarly expertise, this work would not have been possible. To him applies the description from Ben Sira (Sirach 39:1): σοφίαν πάντων ἀρχαίων ἐκζητήσει (“He seeks out the wisdom of all the ages”).

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I would like to acknowledge the help from my thesis committee: Professors Mark Hamilton, Jeffrey Childers, and Christopher Rollston. Each one of these erudite teachers guided me in the right direction and saved me from countless research mistakes. Without their expertise in history and writing in the ancient world, this thesis would have been a lost cause.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Cultural Memory and Its Practitioners

The purpose of my thesis is to demonstrate that 1) the Jacob narrative reflects the literary presentation of cultural memory; 2) Hebrew narrative prose, with its earliest antecedents in Northwest Semitic alphabetic writing of the Late Bronze Age and beginning of the Early Iron Age, utilized memory as one of its primary sources; 3) the scribes behind the Jacob narrative fashioned a remembered past through the constant reshaping, updating, and transformation of its source material; 4) this phenomenon is traceable throughout those texts in the Jacob narrative that exhibit historical features that are in line with the purported timeline but also seem to betray a time in which Iron Age scribes were fashioning the narrative; and 5) this study has significant epistemological implications for the ways in which modern historians view the Jacob narrative through the lens of cultural memory.

This study will take seven key figures as its point of departure for an appropriate terminology of memory: Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assmann, Mark S. Smith, Ronald Hendel, Philip R. Davies, Daniel Pioske, and Paul Ricoeur.¹

1. Maurice Halbwachs and Lewis A. Coser ed., *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Mark S. Smith, *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory, and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004); Ronald S. Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Philip R. Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Biblical History - Ancient and Modern* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008); Daniel D. Pioske, *Memory in the Time of Prose: Studies in Epistemology, Hebrew Scribalism, and the Biblical Past* (New York: Oxford University Press,

Perhaps it is fair to say that memory has been “more practiced than theorized”² by biblical historians of ancient Israel. The much broader discipline of history has witnessed a sweeping interest in the concept of memory, resulting in new vistas by which to analyze documents of antiquity.³ On the other hand, there appears to be no unanimity in regards to a well-defined definition of memory. This has led to an impasse in terms of memory’s relationship to history—in this case, modern critical-historiography. A lack of a sustained reflection on memory’s relationship to history and “its claims about the past” pertaining to the “historian’s critical representation of what once was” has caused scholars to be in disarray. To be short, what differentiates memory from history is no easy question to answer. Separated from an era whereby oral and written sources were depended upon to craft prose texts, modern historiography tends to ask questions about the past that antiquity was not overly concerned with. Thus a brief analysis will be given below of what, exactly, memory purports to contain, and what is its relationship to history. Followed by this analysis, a brief definition of memory will be provided.

A Brief History of Research

Historians of the southern Levant have given recourse to memory as an object of study since it purports to describe important cultural and social values attached to an

2018); Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2004).

2. Quoted in Daniel D. Pioske, “Retracing a Remembered Past: Methodological Remarks on Memory, History, and the Hebrew Bible,” *Biblical Interpretation* 23 (2015): 2.

3. See Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*; Y. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982; repr., Seattle University Of Washington Press, 2002); A. Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1386–1403; Jens. B. Kofoed, *Text and History: Historiography and the Study of the Biblical Text* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005); Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Memory, Tradition, and the Construction of the Past in Ancient Israel,” *BTB* 27, 3 (Aug. 1997): 76–82.

ancient community's concept of the past. Maurice Halbwachs, responsible for pioneering the modern scholarly study of cultural memory, outlined the key facets of memory's underpinnings, that is, the impact cultural memory plays in shaping and constructing individual and communal identity. He remarks, "No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people in society to determine and retrieve their recollections."⁴ As such, individuals draw from a pool of linguistic, cultural, and social values—immaterial and material and wedded to their respective communities—in order to craft a remembered past. Cultural memory has gained traction among historians because it values monuments and artifacts, attaching tremendous significance to them, and inviting scholars to analyze and scrutinize these material means.

Moreover, it was Jan Assmann who coined the phrase "Mnemohistory"⁵ in his important contribution to memory and history. Concerned primarily with a "reception" view of memory, Assmann defines mnemohistory as follows:

Unlike history proper, mnemohistory is concerned not with the *past as such*, but only with the past as it is remembered. It surveys the story-lines of tradition, the webs of intertextuality, the diachronic continuities and discontinuities of reading the past. Mnemohistory is not the opposite of history, but rather is one of its subdisciplines, such as intellectual history, social history, the history of mentalities, or the history of ideas.... Mnemohistory is reception theory applied to history.⁶

Assmann, however, does not articulate memory's relationship to history, but rather is primarily concerned with studying the "phenomena of collective memory"⁷ or describing

4. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 40.

5. *Ibid.*, 8.

6. *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

7. *Ibid.*, 9.

the history of memories. In other words, he is not interested in verifying memory's historical claims about a past that once was.

Nevertheless, Mark S. Smith called for a significant “paradigm shift”⁸ in the way historians of ancient Israel view the biblical material. Smith's turn to cultural memory is a plea for a growing dissatisfaction with labels such as “history” or “historiography” attached to prose narrative texts in the Hebrew Bible. In this vein of argument, Smith suggests viewing the Hebrew Bible not as “the locus of Israel's historical record (or not), but as the partial record of Israel's cultural memories of its past that contain some accurate historical information.”⁹ Smith appears to operate along the lines of modern historical-critical judgements, namely whether a text is historically accurate. J. Kofoed, similar to Smith, argues for leaving behind strict dichotomies of “history” or “historiography” when he argues for a multiplicity of methods when approaching the Hebrew Bible's narrative texts.¹⁰ Still, Smith and Kofoed offer no lucid examples of what the relationship is between memory and history.

Ronald Hendel, in his works on Abraham and Genesis,¹¹ perhaps came closer to a much more substantial articulation of memory and history. His insistence on employing the term “memory” intimates a partiality for this term instead of history as such. He contends that the ancient “roots of modern historical consciousness” began in the minds

8. Smith, *The Memoirs of God*, 131.

9. *Ibid.*, 131-132.

10. *Ibid.*, 2-32.

11. Hendel, *Remembering Abraham*; *idem*, “Cultural Memory,” in *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods*, ed. Ronald Hendel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

of the ancient Greek historians of the Persian era.¹² By contrast to a “critical” stance regarding historical reconstruction, ancient Israel operated under a different set of criteria. “To the biblical writers, the traditional stories of the collective past are true, though these stories are subject to revision in order to maintain or revive their purchase on the truth.”¹³ In Hendel’s conceptualization of memory and history in the Hebrew Bible, ancient Israelites did not entertain the separation of myth and history; rather, the Hebrew Bible is an amalgamation of myth, history, and memory. This is in stark contrast to modern historical-critical endeavors to reconstruct the past.¹⁴

Moving further along, epistemological questions began to be asked of the biblical material in relation to history. That is to say, what kind of literature is the Hebrew Bible, and what role does it purport to play in terms of crafting the past as it once was? Provan, Long, and Longman, and Philip Davies have discussed the epistemological questions though from alternate viewpoints.¹⁵ Key to their historical reconstruction of ancient Israel, Provan and Long focus on a key epistemological issue influencing the historical analysis of a remembered past, that is, the value given to testimony.¹⁶ They suggest,

12. Hendel, *Remembering Abraham*, 96.

13. *Ibid.*, 97.

14. For a general survey of the history, methods, and complexities of modern historiography, see Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); *idem*, *The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1973). For other important contributions pertaining to memory and history in terms of ancient Israel, see Mario Liverani, *Israel’s History and the History of Israel* (London: Equinox, 2005); Finkelstein and Amihai Mazar, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel: Invited Lectures Delivered at the Sixth Biennial Colloquium of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, Detroit, October 2005*, ed. Brian B. Schmidt. SBLABS 17 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

15. See Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015); and Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel*.

16. Provan et al., *Biblical History*, 36-61.

“Indeed, our reliance upon testimony is pervasive; it is as fundamental a source of knowledge as perception, or memory, or inference,” and “in the same way that reliance on testimony is fundamental to knowing about reality in general, so it is also fundamental to knowing about historical reality in particular.”¹⁷

Provan and Long, to a certain degree, safeguard the biblical texts from any scrutinization. In essence, their methodology is in “opposition to ‘scientific’ epistemological frameworks capable of testing hypotheses and predicting behavior through repeated experiments.” Thus they establish a “close link” between “historical knowledge and trust.”¹⁸ Their methodology leads to an “epistemological openness” to memory’s historical claims and therefore leaves no room for a nuanced view of memory’s enigmatic nature, that is, its ability not only to preserve but to forget.¹⁹ While their work is to be commended, there appears to be no method by which to assess the validity or invalidity of particular memories.

Davies offers a much more skeptical approach towards memory. Davies argues that memory is not concerned with any sort of historical recollection of the past; it is, rather, susceptible to transformation and invention.²⁰ Although he is correct in discerning memory’s susceptibility to refashioning and updating, Davies is not consistent in differentiating between authentic memories and pure invention. Indeed, Davies sees a stark contrast between history and memory, arguing that much of the Hebrew Bible’s

17. Ibid., 48. Provan et al. draw from a wide range of philosophical writings, notably that of Thomas Reid. See *ibid.*, 47, 53.

18. Pioske, “Retracing a Remembered Past,” 8.

19. See below, Ch. 3.

20. Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel*, 111-12.

narrative texts are “unverifiable” and are the result of the author’s imagination.²¹

Essentially, the historian can do little to reconstruct a lucid account of ancient Israel’s past since such historical reconstructions must be based on the principle of “independent attestation.”²² However, this view is unnecessarily “restrictive.”²³ Scrutinizing memory’s historical value is more complex than Davies suggests.

Finally, both Ian Wilson²⁴ and Daniel Pioske²⁵ provide the most recent treatment of memory’s relationship to history and their epistemological underpinnings. Drawing from Paul Ricœur’s philosophical writings on memory, Wilson argues for defining memory as a “sociocultural system that helps construe communally shared narratives about the past.”²⁶ Furthermore, memory in ancient Israel (particularly, in ancient Judah) was “concerned with the making of story, with the meaningful interconnection of events past, present, and future.”²⁷ For Pioske, his definition of memory, and the one employed throughout this essay, is defined as follows:

For cultural memory, a past is disclosed through the cultural practices and frameworks of a collective remembering: the transmission of stories from generation to generation through oral tales and shared texts, participation in ritual acts of commemoration, the common experience of sacred places, the mutual encounter with past symbols, the veneration of familiar monuments. Cultural memory is in this sense participatory and selective, communal and self-enclosed, and as such exhibits little interest in the historian’s individual, critical

21. Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel*, 126-28.

22. *Ibid.*, 126.

23. Pioske, “Retracing a Remembered Past,” 9.

24. Ian D. Wilson, *Kingship and Memory in Ancient Judah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

25. Pioske, *Memory*.

26. Wilson, *Kingship*, 30.

27. *Ibid.*, 30.

examination of evidence in an effort to render a historically accurate account of a given occurrence.²⁸

Accordingly, one can readily see the dynamic interplay between memory and history from the above definitions.

Nevertheless, the above sketch of research pertaining to memory provides the present essay with a starting point. Indeed, the following analysis of memory in ancient Israel, in particular, the Jacob narrative, will seek to scrutinize memory's referential claims through modern historical-critical methodologies. In essence, the "chasm between history and memory"²⁹ will be made manifest once the historical reconstruction of the Jacob narrative is accomplished.

Epistemological Implications

A corollary of this definition, one in which the above scholars do not deal with in their research—except Pioske—is that cultural memory should be probed by a historical-critical method. Indeed, as evident from Pioske's definition, memory alone has little interest in modern historical-critical endeavors about the past it purports to tell. In turn, then, my thesis will utilize modern historiography to get beyond cultural memory, to sift through each narrative to find out "what once actually occurred in the past through the evidence solicited and cited."³⁰ A general survey of the Jacob narrative will show how memory takes on various forms, preserving, adapting, and reshaping the past it purports to tell.

28. Pioske, "Retracing a Remembered Past," 12; see also idem, *Memory*.

29. Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 497.

30. Pioske, "Retracing a Remembered Past," 13.

In essence, the Jacob narrative reflects the literary presentation of cultural memory. That is to say, the narrative as it stands, is set against the backdrop of the second millennium, yet peppered with Iron Age features. In other words, the scribes responsible for the Jacob story envisioned a distant past, where the nation of Israel was not yet an entity and that somehow still had relevance in an Iron Age setting. The scribes behind the Jacob narrative had no intention of writing a historical-critical account; rather, they were more concerned with how this patriarchal figure and his story provided meaning for the current, later audience. This was so simply because of the kind of information available to Iron Age biblical scribes.

The epistemological implications realized through such an endeavor is made clear when considering modern historical-critical sensibilities. In light of much recent theoretical work concerning the issue of writing a history of ancient Israel, especially the difficulty of furnishing a clear definition of history,³¹ this thesis will employ Marc

31. For the relevant literature, see Hans M. Barstad, *History and the Hebrew Bible: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); John Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Megan B. Moore, *Philosophy and Practice in Writing a History of Ancient Israel LHBOTS* (London: T&T Clark, 2006); P. Davies and D. Edelman, *The Historian and the Bible Essays in Honour of Lester L. Grabbe* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010); L. L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* (New York: T&T Clark, 2017); idem, *Enquire of the Former Age: Ancient Historiography and Writing the History of Israel* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011); H. G. M. Williamson, *Understanding the History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller, *Israelite and Judean History OTL* (London: SCM Press, 1990); idem, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006); Megan Bishop Moore and Brad E. Kelle, *Biblical History and Israel's Past: The Changing Study of the Bible and History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know, and When Did They Know It?: What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2001); Diane Banks, *Writing the History of Israel*, LHBOTS 438 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006); Liverani, *Israel's History*; and Robert D. Miller II, *Chieftains of the Highland Clans: A History of Israel in the Twelfth and Eleventh Centuries B.C.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

Brettler's definition of history: "a narrative that represents a past."³² This definition is rooted in R.J. Shafer's concept of history.³³

The goal, then, is to probe memory's referential claims by way of historical-critical methods. It must be stressed that this thesis does not intend to verify the Jacob narrative, placing it in categories of "history" or "fiction." Rather, the aim is much more modest in that using modern historiography, this thesis seeks to locate authentic memories, realizing that such memories of the past are susceptible to refashioning and preservation.

Viewing the Jacob narrative through the lens of memory has substantial epistemological implications for the modern historian. If Hebrew prose depended on memory as one of its primary sources for fashioning stories, then the knowledge obtained from them can be "connected to a prolonged, cumulative process."³⁴ The remembered past contained in the Jacob narrative should not be interpreted as historical in the modern sense of the word, such as being verifiable by eyewitness testimony. Nor should it be considered as pure invention. Rather, it should be perceived as "the dynamic interplay between preservation and adaptation." And "just as the present assuredly influences the content of a remembered past within a community, so also does past reality limit what can be maintained within these cultural recollections."³⁵ Thus modern historians should be sensitive to memory's epistemological underpinnings.

32. Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 12.

33. See Robert Jones Shafer, *A Guide to Historical Method* (Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1980), 2-3.

34. Pisko, "Retracing a Remembered Past," 14.

35. *Ibid.*, 15.

My thesis will not simply be an overview of what Iron Age scribes remembered about Jacob. Rather, one of the primary aims of this study is to cast light upon the tension that exists between the knowledge derived from memory and the modern historian's research. That is to say, this study has no intention of adopting memory's claims uncritically, but at the same time, it is aware that all historical reconstructions of the past are dependent on the memories and recollections of others. Moreover, a second important goal of this thesis is to try to place memory's referential claims about a remembered past alongside an assemblage of ancient referents—textual and material. This means that memory's claims cannot be *a priori* rejected; rather, they must be shown so through a historical endeavor.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUNDS TO THE RELEVANT ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS

Writing in the Iron Age

The Jacob narrative, at least in part, arose out of an era when alphabetic texts were first being written, namely the Iron Age. Iron Age Israelite scribal texts developed out of the matrix of ancient Near Eastern epics, myths, and annalistic inscriptions, written under the guise of poetic stylistics. Indeed, in order to have a clear grasp of the traditions surrounding Jacob, they must be seen against the backdrop of writing in the Iron Age Levant, which ultimately have their origin in Bronze Age cuneiform writing. It must be stressed that Iron Age alphabetic texts were still heavily informed by a society dominated by oral storytelling. Hence, there is no need to set up a strict dichotomy between orality and literacy. In fact, as has often been argued, Iron Age Israelites wrote and performed their narrative prose works, as exemplified in the texts themselves, by an “oral aesthetic.”¹

Hebrew prose narrative, similar to its ancient Near Eastern counterparts, depended on memory as one of its constituent sources for knowledge of the past. Composed during an era in which lengthy narrative texts were still in their infancy, Iron Age scribes did not have long textual stories about Jacob upon which they could draw. At their disposal, though, would have been short stories, either written or passed down by word of mouth.

1. Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996); Polak, “The Oral and the Written: Syntax, Stylistics, and the Development of Biblical Prose Narrative,” *JANES* 26 (1998): 59–105.

This was due to the high value placed on the spoken word of stories and tales. F.W. Dobbs-Allsop states the matter succinctly: “. . . the management of knowledge and its verbalization in Israel and Judah was dominantly and prominently oral, communicated in speech, face-to-face, embodied. The world of the Bible and the world in which the Bible took shape was a thoroughgoing oral world.”² With this in mind, scribes drew upon knowledge that was entangled in a cultural memory in order to write out a story such as the Jacob narrative. Memory, at the same time, evokes forgetfulness. This may be why, as will be demonstrated in this study, there are repetitive pericopae, especially ones in which we find different historical eras occurring within the same story. As stated above, though, stories composed in a time when modern historical-critical sensibilities were not present exhibit historical refashioning and transformation.

Viewing the Jacob narrative through the lens of memory has substantial epistemological implications for the modern historian. If Hebrew prose depended on memory as one of its primary sources for fashioning stories, then the knowledge obtained from them can be “connected to a prolonged, cumulative process.”³ The remembered past contained in the Jacob narrative should not be interpreted as historical in the modern sense of the word, such as being verifiable by eyewitness testimony. Nor should it be considered as pure invention. Rather, it should be perceived as “the dynamic interplay between preservation and adaptation.” And “just as the present assuredly influences the content of a remembered past within a community, so also does past reality limit what

2. See F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 233.

3. See Pioske, *Memory*, 13.

can be maintained within these cultural recollections.”⁴ Thus modern historians should be sensitive to memory’s epistemological underpinnings.

In short, this section will seek to reconstruct the ancient Near Eastern background in which alphabetic texts arose; the Jacob narrative is an extension of this environment. In order to accomplish such a task, we must pay attention to the dynamic interplay between orality and literacy as well as to how prose narratives functioned in an Iron Age culture. One of the primary questions the present study seeks to answer is this: what did it mean for Iron Age scribes to construct lengthy narratives about a distant past—a past that did not leave behind any written historical accounts in the modern usage of the term?

Recent scholarship on the formation of the Hebrew Bible has noted that the biblical texts were created and read in predominantly oral contexts, crafted aurally for the ear.⁵ To be certain, biblical scholars had already pointed out the oral nature of biblical texts, famously espoused by Hermann Gunkel.⁶ But the oral and literary model adopted by Gunkel that drove a sharp wedge between an older, oral mindset and a much more mature literate one is no longer defensible. Instead, written and oral forms of discourse operated on a continuum over the course of the Hebrew Bible’s formation, “with modes

4. *Ibid.*, 14.

5. See, for example, Niditch, *Oral World*; Polak, “The Oral and the Written”; William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); David M. Carr, *Written on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); *idem*, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); *idem*, “Orality, Textuality, and Memory: The State of Biblical Studies,” in *Contextualizing Israel’s Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production*, ed. Brian B. Schmidt (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 161–74; Karl van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

6. So Hermann Gunkel and Mark E. Biddle, *Genesis* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997).

of textuality and orality shaping and being shaped by one another among societies in which writing was known but oral communication pervasive and persistent.”⁷

Lastly, this section seeks to articulate an epistemological query in relation to alphabetic texts: what did it mean for ancient northwest Semitic narratives to function anonymously? In contrast to ancient Greek prose narratives, the Hebrew Bible leaves no trace of authorship, militating against any review or scrutiny, something that the Greek historians Thucydides and Herodotus were adamant about. Compiling his work in an oral dominate society, Thucydides was careful not to shy away from historical scrutiny: “Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναῖος ξυνέγραψε τὸν πόλεμον τῶν Πελοποννησιῶν καὶ Ἀθηναίων” (“Thucydides, an Athenian, has composed [an account of] the war of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians.”).⁸ Herodotus, another Greek historian of the Persian period, accented his writings with authorship as well. The above two Greek historians’ views should give the historian pause, since both writers wrote in a culture still dominated by stories being passed down by word of mouth. What is perhaps most stunning about the two historians’ literary methodologies is their preference for the written over the spoken. Indeed, this is all the more heightened when read against the suspicion of writing in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (circa 370 BCE), in which Socrates equates the written word to φάρμακον, meaning both “remedy” and “poison.”⁹

7. See Pioske, *Memory*, 17-18; furthermore, Carr remarks that written texts functioned orally, and oral texts functioned literarily, furnishing a creative dynamic between the interplay of orality and textuality. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 7.

8. As quoted and translated in *ibid.*, 18. For the main text, see Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War: Books I and II*, trans. Charles Forster Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 3.

9. *Ibid.*, 22. For the main text, see Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Flower (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 274^c.

A corollary to the above issue is the nature of source material available to scribes. What kind of sources did scribes such as Iron Age Israelites draw upon? Once again, the examples from Thucydides and Herodotus are instructive. For the Greek historians, past knowledge was primarily mediated through oral sources. Daniel Pioske offers a brief description of the nature of oral and written sources during the Persian era:

At work in a society predominantly oral in its methods of storytelling, the prose that Thucydides developed was an account derived primarily, and necessarily, from oral source material. Prose texts penned by other Greek authors of particular moments in the Peloponnesian conflict simply did not exist for Thucydides to consult In a culture in which narrative prose texts were rare and oral storytelling traditions much more familiar, it could not be otherwise. Past knowledge was mediated primarily through the spoken word and not the written one.¹⁰

This is all the more clear for prose narratives in the Hebrew Bible. What this means for the present study is that the Hebrew Bible relied upon and was influenced by oral traditions, raising various issues for the historian. Since the primary sources for Iron Age scribes were inherently oral, what type of information or knowledge was available to the biblical scribes for the stories they “told about a past that preceded their own time by a generation or more?”¹¹ When reading accounts about Jacob and his various journeys and the establishment of cultic sites, how are we to theorize the kind of information contained in the narrative texts, especially since there is an enormous gap in the historical timeline between the events themselves and the scribes who produced these stories?

The answers to the above questions are the driving forces behind the present study. First, in order to delineate an appropriate answer, the present chapter will explore the background of Iron Age prose narrative texts. One of the issues of this endeavor is

10. Pioske, *Memory*, 22-23.

11. See the question in *ibid.*, 25.

establishing a timeframe in which Hebrew prose texts were birthed; thus a provisional time period will be given. Moreover, various ancient Near Eastern stories—epigraphical and non-epigraphical texts—will be explored in order to see whether the Jacob narrative finds any resonance with other northwest Semitic traditions. Second, this chapter will explore the nature of oral and written sources, and in particular, their epistemological implications. The vast majority of traditions that Iron Age scribes drew from were oral, and a necessary consequence of oral sources is that they are wedded to memory and its delicate and ultimately non-critical nature. Hence, the present study will probe memory’s epistemological foundations with the help of modern historical-critical methods.

Features of Hebrew Prose

The prose texts found in the Hebrew Bible are distinguishable by a number of features. They were written out in a linear alphabetic script¹² and composed primarily in Hebrew, a Northwest Semitic language used “by a modest number of individuals in the ancient world who occupied regions in the southern Levant.”¹³ The Hebrew scribes responsible for the composition of the Hebrew Bible shared many philological and linguistic characteristics with the surrounding Canaanite cultural milieu, though the scribes themselves may or may not have considered themselves to be “Hebrew,” according to PISOKE.¹⁴ Yet the language employed in the prose texts is consonant with

12. For a number of important works on the rise of NorthWest Semitic alphabetic scripts, see Joseph Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet: An Introduction to West Semitic Epigraphy and Palaeography* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1982), 53-112; Christopher A. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 11-19; Dennis Pardee, *The Ugaritic Texts and the Origins of West Semitic Literary Composition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

13. PISOKE, *Memory*, 26.

14. *Ibid.*, 26.

this West Semitic dialect. Interestingly, spoken within a limited geographical region and among a people who were frequently conquered, Hebrew never became a national language—in contrast to Akkadian, Aramaic, and Greek, that were widely adopted by scribes outside of those empires and whose mother tongue differed from the dominant cosmopolitan languages.¹⁵

Another characteristic of Hebrew prose is that it offers lengthy accounts about the past “by narrating former affairs through forms of emplotment and by drawing on a distinct collection of literary conventions to do so.”¹⁶ These elements include the use of allusions, dialogue between characters, a narrative preterite, and the inner dynamics of biblical stories, inviting the reader into the minds of various characters.¹⁷ The prose that the biblical scribes left behind is not like the Mesopotamian royal inscriptions or annals,¹⁸ but is more akin to Egyptian prose stories about the past. Indeed, Pioske argues for affinities between the biblical prose texts and Sinuhe (COS 1.38); Wen-Amun (COS 1.41); and in terms of plotline and themes, to a wide array of Northwest Semitic texts, as

15. See *ibid.*, 26-27; Seth L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Urbana: University Of Illinois Press, 2009), 1-11, 36-41.

16. Pioske, *Memory*, 27. The use of emplotment is drawn from Hayden White and Paul Ricœur. See Hayden White, *Metahistory*, 7-11; and Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, vol. 1 (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1984), 52-90.

17. On the use of such literary features, see Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature.*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 3-23; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative : Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 58-185, 264-341; Robert S. Kawashima, *Biblical Narrative and the Death of the Rhapsode* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 1-16, 63-76, 125-60.

18. It must be stressed that biblical prose does bear similarities to ancient Mesopotamian annals such as recounting the affairs of certain monarchs in 1-2 Kgs. However, these examples are similar to a degree. That is to say, 1-2 Kgs is aware of how to catalogue a monarch’s reign, similar to that of Assyrians annals. I wish to thank Dr. Christopher Rollston for drawing my attention to such historical matters. See Van Seters, *In Search of History*, 55-76; as well as Jean-Jacques Glassner and Benjamin R. Foster, *Mesopotamian Chronicles* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 37-53.

found in the epics of Kirta (COS 1.102) and Aqhat (COS 1.103).¹⁹ Moreover, Hebrew prose shares similarities with southern Levantine inscriptions such as the Tel Dan Inscription and the Mesha Stele.

Certainly, biblical prose narrative arrived out of the matrix of the above Near Eastern counterparts, yet there are distinct patterns that set apart Hebrew prose texts from their surrounding neighbors. For instance, the use of the third person²⁰ is a prominent pattern found throughout the biblical corpus. In striking contrast to monumental inscriptions,²¹ the biblical scribes sought to maintain anonymity throughout its various stories, only vaguely and intermittently revealing the nature of the author, forming a striking contrast to the Greek historians Herodotus and Thucydides, and ancient Near Eastern royal inscriptions.²² In addition, the use of Hebrew in prose narrative texts exhibited and distinguished itself from other writings of the ancient Near East in that it was composed in a vernacular tongue. That is to say, instead of employing national languages such as Akkadian or Sumerian, the biblical scribes opted for a language that

19. Pioske, *Memory*, 28. For a rich comparative analysis, see Simon B. Parker, *The Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition: Essays on the Ugaritic Poems Keret and Aqhat* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch: The Jacob Cycle and the Narrative Traditions of Canaan and Israel* (Atlanta, Scholar Press, 1987); Mark S. Smith and Simon B. Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, *Writings from the Ancient World*, vol. 9 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997). See also William W. Hallo and Lawson K. Younger eds., *The Context of Scripture 4 Vols.* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

20. The Tel Dan Stele, however, does employ the use of a third person narrator.

21. To be sure, certain royal inscriptions employed the third person (e.g., “The Deeds of Šuppiluliuma I” [COS 1.74]), but what sets apart the biblical material is its inclusiveness of both elite and non-elite groups in third person voice. See Pioske, *Memory*, 29-30.

22. Van Seters, *In Search*, 55-78, 92-99; for a sophisticated analysis of the historian in the ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic worlds, see Peter Machinist, “The Voice of the Historian in the Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean World,” *Interpretation* 57, (2003): 117–37.

was wedded to a cultural minority whose allegiance was to the dominant empire at the time.²³

The above analysis is simply meant to set the stage for the emergence of Hebrew prose. Not that a fixed date can be stipulated, but simply a provisional timeframe for when the above characteristics start to appear in the historical record. Namely, linear alphabetic scripts, the usage of emplotment and the preterite, scribal anonymity, and written texts in a vernacular language. All of these points help establish certain characteristics that set apart Hebrew prose narrative from its neighboring cultures. The next section will seek to articulate when biblical prose originated. The results will have profound historical implications for establishing a provisional timeframe for when the traditions surrounding Jacob took shape, and more importantly, how Iron Age scribes fashioned those traditions under the tutelage of memory's epistemological underpinnings.

The Origin of Hebrew Prose²⁴

Historical evidence points to the Iron Age II (1000-540 BCE) as the impetus for Hebrew prose. Indeed, Christopher Rollston states the matter succinctly: "The late-tenth and early-ninth centuries are the time during which Israel came of age."²⁵ It is during this period that Iron Age II kingdoms come into their own, with their political achievements being evidenced in the erection of monumental stela. Israel, Judah, and Moab each

23. See Sanders, *Invention*.

24. The standard chronology for the Iron Age is as follows: Iron Age IA (1200-1150 BCE); Iron Age IB (1150-100 BCE); Iron Age IIA (1000-900 BCE); Iron Age IIB (900-700 BCE); Iron Age IIC (700-539 BCE).

25. See Rollston, *Writing and Literacy*, 44; idem, "Inscriptional Evidence for the Writing of the Earliest Texts of the Bible: Intellectual Infrastructure in Tenth and Ninth Century Israel, Judah, and the Southern Levant," in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America*, ed. Jan C. Gertz et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 45.

employed a distinct script no longer wedded to their political overlords. During the horizon of the Iron II period, each of these three kingdoms employed an alphabetic script on stone monuments, known as monument scripts. The epigraphic remains from this period attest to the deliberate decision by Israel to create a distinct international script since the ninth century attests to Israelite hegemony.²⁶ Ironically, the first epigraphic witness to Hebrew prose is attested in Moabite inscriptions,²⁷ perhaps due to Israel's subjugation of Moab in the ninth century. Joseph Naveh points out this irony when he states, "strange as it may seem, the first distinctive features of Hebrew writing can be discerned in the scripts of the ninth-century Moabite inscriptions, namely, the stele of Mesha and the fragmentary inscription which mentions Mesha's father Kemošyat."²⁸ To be sure, the language of the Meshe Stele is Moabite, but the script is nonetheless Hebrew. In historical terms, though, a distinct Hebrew script is an epigraphic latecomer. Certainly, the archaeological record bears witness to much earlier written remains found in Israel such as the Kefar Veradim Bowl (10th century), the Gezer Calendar (late 10th/early ninth century), and the Tel Zayit abecedary (late 10th/early ninth-century),²⁹ but these epigraphic finds were not written in the Hebrew script. In fact, what these two artifacts point to is a common, national script that was employed throughout the Levant and

26. Rollston, "The Alphabet Comes of Age: The Social Context of Alphabetic Writing in the First Millennium BCE," in *The Social Archaeology of the Levant: From Prehistory to the Present*, ed. Assaf Yasur-Landau, Eric Cline, and Yorke Rowan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 371–90.

27. However, somewhat debated is the Khirbet Qeiyafa Inscription, which may contain the earliest instances of an ancient Hebrew script. Once again, I thank Dr. Christopher Rollston for drawing my attention to this matter.

28. See Naveh, *Early History*, 65.

29. So *ibid.*, 65; and Rollston, *Writing and Literacy*, 29-31.

shared by many Northwest Semitic peoples, namely Israelites, Judahites, and Moabites (11th-10th centuries). The script that preceded the Iron II scripts is known as the Phoenician script, or in Rollston's terms, the *Mutterschrift*.³⁰

Dialectal differences aside, Israel and Judah employed the same script, inherited from their *Mutterschrift*. It was during the ninth century that Israel began to establish dominance over other Semitic kingdoms, namely, Moab and Edom. Perhaps this is why the Mesha Stele is written in the Hebrew script.³¹ The Northwest Semitic epigraphic remains that attest to Hebrew prose are diverse in various ways. It will be prudent for us to consider those Hebrew inscriptions that bear witness to the rise of Hebrew prose narrative. However, first a look to Ugarit shall suffice.

Ugarit provides a relatively larger corpus of cuneiform texts. Many of the cuneiform texts comprise a limited number of signs, which scholars have labeled "alphabetic cuneiform script," which "adapted the techniques of cuneiform writing—i.e. clay tablets and stylus—to the alphabetic principle."³² It is within this large scale of texts that we find many similarities with ancient Israel's literature, anticipating as it does the genres of myth and epic. Indeed, the tales of Kirta and Aqhat, to name but a couple, antedate many of the Hebrew Bible's literary motifs and features by at least two hundred years.³³ Most striking about the Ugaritic texts is that, functioning under the auspices of

30. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy*, 44.

31. Naveh, *Early History*, 78; Rollston, *Writing and Literacy*, 42.

32. Naveh, *Early History*, 29.

33. See Parker, *Narrative Tradition*; Hendel, *Epic*; Mark S. Smith, "Biblical Narrative between Ugaritic and Akkadian Literature: Part I Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible: Consideration of Comparative Research," *RB* 114, (January 2007): 5–29.

the Akkadian empire for quite some time, these scribes decided to write texts in their own distinct script—linear alphabetic—creating a rippling effect for later Northwest Semitic scribes.³⁴ Nevertheless, Ugarit provides the earliest example for the “present-day alphabetic sequence.”³⁵

The Tel Dan stele (ninth century) attests to similar stories in the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, in the narratives surrounding King David (1 Sam 9-10) Yahweh is said to support the king of Israel, a common motif found throughout the corpus of narratives. The Tel Dan stele, similarly, exhibits aspects of written narrative prose. The inscription itself notes how the deity Hadad established the Syrian monarchy. Moreover, it tells of similar scenes from the traditions in 1-2 Kgs. The Syrian king is said to engage in battle with the king of Israel (Jehoram son of Ahab) and the king of the House of David (Ahaziah son of Jehoram). It should be noted that Hadad is the theophoric element found in various Syrian kings’ names (“Hadadezar, 1 Kgs 11:23).³⁶

The Meshe Stele (ninth century BCE), according to Rollston, is “among the most impressive of all Iron Age Northwest Semitic inscriptions.”³⁷ The inscription lauds King Mesha of Moab and his political victories over Israel; King Mesha provides his patronymic (son of Kemoshyat) and labels himself “Daibonite.” Further on, the inscription states that Moab’s deity, Kemosh,³⁸ had been “angry” with Moab and had

34. We will discuss the historical implications of this phenomenon below. For now, see Sanders, *Invention*.

35. Naveh, *Early History*, 30.

36. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy*, 51.

37. *Ibid.*, 53.

38. See the reference to Moab’s god in 1 Kgs 11:7.

allowed it to be placed under Israel's hegemony. The Israelite king responsible for subjecting Moab was none other than King Omri of Israel. Omri's son decided to continue his father's policy, though his name is not mentioned in the inscription. Much to Israel's dismay, though, Mesha states that Kemosh had mercy on them and returned to pay vengeance upon Israel through military assistance, resulting in the restoration of Nebo and Yahaş. Similarly, the Hebrew Bible contains stories of Yahweh's anger kindled against Israel and sending in other, foreign nations to subdue them (Judg 3-4; 2 Kgs 23). Mesha further states that he "took the vessels of Yahweh" and "dragged these vessels before Kemosh," which was a common ancient Near Eastern practice.³⁹

Nevertheless, the Hebrew Bible does contain traces of what once was on inscriptions. Although there are no remains of written narratives hailing from the Iron II Age, this does not negate Hebrew prose tradition as deriving from this era. Indeed, the poems, epics, and myths one encounters in Northwest Semitic inscriptions are the matrix out of which Israel drew its traditions. That is to say, these inscriptions help situate an appropriate, though provisional, timeframe for the emergence of Hebrew prose. As we will see below, the birth of alphabetic texts furnished an environment for petty kingdoms to write their own, distinct traditions, written in a vernacular. As such, Israel took part in this phenomenon, though at a later time (ninth century). The conscious decision to write down the past through the medium of narrative prose had profound implications for Iron Age II scribes. Yet, it must be remembered that these scribes did not have at their disposal a cache of written texts from which to draw, but oral and written sources

39. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy*, 54.

permeated scribal sources, wedded to and at the mercy of memory's epistemological sensitivities.

Whence did this phenomenon originate? The next section of the present study will seek to articulate an appropriate timeline for the emergence of Hebrew prose. This will be accomplished by focusing attention on Northwest Semitic inscriptions that bear relations with narratives found in the Hebrew Bible, and more specifically, the traditions surrounding the Jacob narrative. In order for us to have a clear grasp of Jacob's historical context, this study will attempt to situate when Northwest Semitic prose began to take shape, paying careful attention to those inscriptions that share common motifs and lexical elements with the Hebrew Bible. This is not to say, however, that an absolute chronology can be established. Rather, historical-critical methods will be employed to probe the literary representation of memory underlying the Jacob narrative in order to place it alongside other historical referents. The nature of the source material is too varied and complex to establish absolute dates, much less memory's dynamic interplay between the past and the present. In short, caution must be heeded when analyzing ancient prose texts that have cultural memories as their foundation; thus, memory must not be received uncritically, but must be scrutinized in order to reveal its many-faceted historical layers.

Iron Age Texts

The past century has witnessed a rise in the study of comparative perspectives pertaining to ancient Israel and its broader cultural neighbors. A comparative approach, according to Mark S. Smith, goes beyond mere source, redactional, and inner-biblical interpretations. In essence, the comparative approach seeks to contextualize Israel's prose and poetic texts alongside other Northwest Semitic and Mesopotamian writings. Syro-

Palestine (Ugarit, in particular) has yielded a plethora of texts, inviting scholars to explore them for possible links with Iron Age Israel. Moreover, the neo-Assyrian period yields significant monumental inscriptions. Taken together, these two cultural spheres of influence offer new interpretive vistas for understanding Hebrew prose.⁴⁰

Hebrew prose, in particular the written Jacob narrative, began to take shape in the period of the monarchy (ninth sixth centuries BCE), with oral antecedents prior to the ninth century. This is evident when the Hebrew Bible is placed adjacent to Ugaritic's literary remains. The Ugaritic cuneiform tablets provide a wide range of material that is part and parcel, according to Smith, of Israel's "Levantine heritage."⁴¹ Indeed, Frank Moore Cross was quick to notice shared literary motifs and genres between Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible, which bear resemblance to Israel's "epic"⁴² material. However, "epic" may not be the correct term to employ since it is found primarily in poetic texts that deal with conflict between the gods, a feature that Hebrew prose seems to have suppressed.

Nevertheless, in terms of geographic location and historical dating, Ugarit provides the closest literary tradition out of which Israel's writings originated. S.B. Parker showed that Ugaritic and biblical traditions share a wide range of similarities in the form of motifs and type-scenes.⁴³ The scenes and motifs of Aqhat and Kirta can be picked up from stories in the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History. Literary aspects are not the only indicators of a common "Levantine heritage," but also cultural and religious elements. The head of the Canaanite pantheon, El, shows up in various

40. See Smith, "Biblical Narrative Part I," 6-7.

41. *Ibid.*, 8.

42. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, viii.

43. For a fine analysis, see Parker, *Narrative Tradition*.

places throughout Hebrew prose narrative.⁴⁴ Perhaps the rise of Yahweh as Israel's national deity resembles Baal's rise to the pantheon over El.⁴⁵

The comparison between Ugarit and Israel does not provide a one-to-one ratio of literary, religious, and cultural correspondence. For example, the extant prose Hebrew texts do not attest to a full-fledged mythic battle between Yahweh and the gods, even though the Hebrew Bible seems to have countered those sorts of features of Canaanite stories. This is not to say, however, that Israel's literature contains no hints of such mythic and polytheistic features. Smith has pointed out glimpses of texts that speak to a mythic background: Deut 33:27; Ps 68:5, 74:12-17, 89:26; Job 3:8.⁴⁶ Israel does offer its own unique literary and cultural aspects, but its literature did not arise out of a vacuum. A striking similarity between Ugarit and Israel is their conscious decision to fashion prose texts out of linear alphabetic scripts. Although under the hegemony of various kingdoms and in various periods, these two cultures provide history with something new and distinct.⁴⁷

A proper comparison between the Ugaritic texts and the Hebrew Bible shall suffice. S.B. Parker remarks:

Since their decipherment, the Ugaritic poetic narratives have been compared most often with the language and literature of the Bible A broad view of ancient Near Eastern languages and literatures suggests that Ugaritic represents better than any other second millennium language or literature the antecedents of the

44. See the relevant texts: Exod 6:3; Gen 28:10-22, 49:25; Num 23-24; and the El names in 1 Sam 1-3. Seow has provided a substantial analysis of El material in 1-2 Sam See Choon Leong Seow, *Myth, Drama, and the Politics of David's Dance* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 11-54.

45. See the comparison in Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

46. Smith, "Biblical Narrative Part I," 10.

47. Seeb Sanders, *Invention*.

language and literature of ancient Israel. The cultural continuities between the second and first millennium literatures of the Levant, so far as we know them, seem to be stronger than those among the various regional or national literatures of the second millennium or the first millennium.⁴⁸

Indeed, Parker's remarks are a reminder to those desiring to contextualize Israel's texts that they must do so in relation to their antecedents of the Levant, namely Ugarit.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that Israel simply did not borrow material from the Ugaritic texts. Rather, both corpora of texts derive from a common cultural milieu, that is, the Levant. As the examples below seek to demonstrate, both ancient Israel and Ugarit crafted stories in a similar manner, but this does not entail mere copying from the other. It simply indicates that the means by which both cultures fashioned stories were in line with how such stories were told and written. In short, both groups drew from a common pool of traditions.⁴⁹

Chief among those texts are the stories of Kirta and Aqhat. The birth narratives in the Kirta and Aqhat epics seem to have inspired Israel's narratives. Dated prior to 1365 BCE,⁵⁰ the Ugaritic birth stories share, in substance, an overarching motif with the Hebrew Bible, that is, the announcement of a birth by the divine and a woman who finds herself barren. Although Ugarit and Israel differ in age and geography—one "slightly earlier and to the north, and one slightly later and to the south"⁵¹—they both can be viewed as variant traditions. The religious and political structures of Israel do not point towards an "unbridgeable historical gulf between Canaanite and Israelite cultures,"

48. Parker, *Narrative Tradition*, 225.

49. I am most thankful for Dr. Mark Hamilton's keen insights pertaining to this matter.

50. See Hendel, *Epic*, 47.

51. *Ibid*, 48.

Hendel continues, “just as Hebrew is a Canaanite language, so we may regard the early Israelite narrative traditions as a variety of Canaanite narrative.”⁵²

The Kirta Epic begins with the King’s desire for an heir, for his wife and children have perished. In this sense, it resembles the book of Job, but also shares similarities to the birth stories in the patriarchal narratives. The following is an example from the Kirta Epic:⁵³

The house of a king has perished:
A house with several brothers,
Even eight mother’s sons!

Kirta—his progeny’s ruined!
Kirta—his line is sundered!

A proper wife he’d found, Yes,
and rightly wed.

He wed a wife, she “departed.”
She’d had a mother’s brood.

A third died in health; A quarter
by disease.

A fifth was gathered by Rashap;
A sixth by the Lad of Yamm.

A seventh part—By the sword it
was felled.
He sees his progeny, Kirta, He
sees his progeny ruined, His
dynasty utterly sundered.

So all his descendants have
perished. In sum, the lot of his
heirs.

52. *Ibid.*, 48.

53. CTA 14.7-43. Translation provided by Edward L. Greenstein in Smith and Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, 12-13.

He enters his chambers, he cries;
An inner alcove (?), and weeps.

His tears are poured forth Like
shekels on the ground, Like five-
weights on the couch.

As he cries, he falls asleep; As he
weeps, there's slumber.

Sleep overwhelms him, he lies
down; Slumber, and he crumples.

Now in his dream, El comes
down; The Father of Man, in his
vision.

Now El approaches, asking
Kirta:

“What ails Kirta, that he cries?
That he weeps, the Pleasant, Lad
of El?

Is it kingship like his Father he
wants?

Or dominion like the father of
Man?”

Further on in this scene Kirta replies to El, stating the reason for his cry: not riches but the need for a child.⁸⁹ Hendel notes the similarities between Kirta and Yahweh and Abraham's dialogue in Gen 15:1-6. Yahweh appears to Abraham in a vision (מחזה) in which Yahweh promises Abraham riches, but Abraham replies in a similar fashion to Kirta: מה תתן לי ואנכי הולך ערירי (“What can you give me, since I continue being

89. CTA 14.52-58.

childless?” [verse 2]). The motif of dreams/visions, the divine offer and request for offspring readily attest to their commonality.⁹⁰

Caution is to be heeded, though. Both Kirta and Gen 15 display similar features, yet there is some variation as well. For instance, Kirta is a king, whereas Abraham—as well as Isaac and Jacob—are nomadic herdsman. Claus Westermann, in his book *The Promises to the Fathers*,⁹¹ notes literary differences: in the Abraham cycle, the series of events begins with the barrenness of Sarah (Gen 11:30) in contrast to the beginning of the Kirta Epic, which describes the lament of the king. The lament of the “childless man” does not occur in the Abraham cycle until 15:2-3. Westermann adds: “It is noteworthy that in the Old Testament the lament of the childless mother appears more often than that of the childless father,” and this variation may be rooted in “different social conditions.”⁹²

Later on in the epic, Kirta makes a vow to Asherah of Tyre, displaying striking affinities to that of Jacob at Bethel (Gen 28:10-22). Part of the narrative reads as follows:⁹³

He there makes a vo[w, Ki]rta
the Noble:

“As Asherah of Tyrians lives,
The Goddess of the Sidonians,

If I take Huraya into my palace,
And have the girl enter my court,

90. Hendel, *Epic*, 50-51.

91. See Claus Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers: Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

92. Westermann, *Promises to the Fathers*, 171.

93. CTA 14.199-206; Greenstein, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, 19-20.

Her two parts I'll make silver,
Her third part I'll make gold!

After taking Hurriya into his house, Kirta apparently ignores the vow he made, and Asherah decides to send judgement upon him.⁹⁴ Further on, Kirta falls sick, initiating El's intervention to heal the king by means of a healing goddess.⁹⁵

The revelation to Jacob at Bethel, while similar in substance, displays striking differences. Both the Kirta Epic and Gen 28 mention the theme of vows offered to the deity while on a journey to a distant land,⁹⁶ yet in contrast to the Ugaritic epic, there is no trace of the theme of the "bride-quest," at least according to the northern non-P strand in Gen 28:10-22⁹⁷ in the Bethel narrative. Moreover, the Jacob narrative is colored with early and late features, perhaps due to the confluence of northern and southern traditions. As he journeys back to Bethel, Jacob builds an altar to El while it is conceivable that Kirta neglected his vow.

Both the Kirta Epic and Jacob's encounter at Bethel share a common origin in West Semitic epic. By virtue of their vows to the deities, Kirta and Jacob represent "examples of a common repertoire of stock narrative themes and episodes."⁹⁸ From this common heritage, Israel drew upon similar motifs, themes, lexical elements, and

94. CTA 15.3.25-30.

95. CTA 15.4-15.6.

96. Aside from the "grammatical and source complexity of the text (note the shift from the third person address to second person address, and the shift from Elohim to Yahweh to Elohim)," both Kirta and Jacob's vows contain striking thematic similarities. See Hendel, *Epic*, 61-62. Gen 28:10-22 is a confluence of non-P sources.

97. Hendel, *Epic*, 62. Note, however, that Gen 28:1-5, a P text, suggests the need for a wife as the underlying motivation for Jacob's departure.

98. *Ibid.*, 62-63.

geographic details. Another case in point is the place names in the Jacob narrative.

Hendel posits continuity in how the land of Canaan was remembered among Israelite scribes. For instance, he states:

The place names Bethel and Penuel also suggest a continuity between the Israelite cult and the Canaanite cult. The form of a place name *בֵּית* + DN is common in Syro-Palestine and indicates that El in the name Bethel (*בֵּית-אֵל*) refers originally to the Canaanite high god, El. Other such local place names mentioned in the Hebrew Bible include: *בֵּית-דָּנוֹן*, *בֵּית-הוֹרֶן*, *בֵּית-עֵינָת*, and *בֵּית-שָׁמֶשׁ*. In all of these forms the divine name is a proper name, thus we are justified in reading the Bethel story as, at least in part, a reflection of an old tradition of the founding of a Canaanite cult place. Gunkel's remark that the patriarchal stories are "essentially Canaanite" finds some support in the story of Jacob's founding of the cult place of the "House of Bethel."⁹⁹

The high god El was not the only divine figure shared between Northwest Semitic peoples, but a remnant of the lower tier of the Canaanite pantheon appears in the patriarchal narratives, namely the "messengers of God" (*מְלָאכֵי אֱלֹהִים*). These divine figures appear throughout the Ugaritic texts, functioning as servants to their superiors Yamm,¹⁰⁰ Baal, Gapnu, and Ugaru.¹⁰¹ In the Hebrew Bible the messengers of El/Yahweh function as servants who carry out various tasks and perhaps are members of an Israelite divine assembly.¹⁰²

The cosmic "ladder" (*סֻלָּם*) that Jacob encounters in his dream in Gen 28:12 is unknown in Israelite and Canaanite literature. However, it still suffices to point out that it bears relation to an Iron Age mythic story, the myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal. In the neo-

99. Ibid., 64.

100. CTA 2.1.22-42.

101. CTA 3.3.33; 4.7.54; 4.8.47; 5.1.12; 8.6-7.

102. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 186-90. For biblical descriptions of the function of the *מְלָאכֵי אֱלֹהִים*, see Gen 19:1, 15; 32:2; Exod 14:19; Judg 13:3-23.

Assyrian tablet of the myth, Anu deploys a messenger to the underworld to send a message to Ereshkigal. The messenger, Kaka, descends the *simmelat*, translated as “the staircase of heaven.”¹⁰³ Kaka shares a similar function to the מלאך אלהים in that both deliver messages to a deity through a similar medium. However, both El/Yahweh and Jacob are the recipients of the message. In other words, Gen 28:12 performs a similar literary function that other Northwest Semitic texts did.

The above Ugaritic material shares various similarities with the Hebrew Bible’s narrative texts. The common themes of the barren wife, the journey of a hero, and the cultic aspects point to a shared “Levantine heritage.” Perhaps what is most striking is the shared medium of prose: writing stories in a linear alphabetic script. This was in contrast to the previous Early Bronze Age, in which Canaanite scribes employed the *lingua franca*, that is, Akkadian, for writing. So, too, does the Hebrew Bible employ its own alphabetic script to tell stories of the distant past.

Moreover, the Ugaritic material provides scholars with a broad timeline in which to place the composition of Israel’s earliest prose texts, in particular, the Jacob narrative. This comparative approach locates Israel’s literature alongside its Northwest Semitic neighbors, especially in light of their religious affinities.¹⁰⁴ This is not to say that Hebrew

103. See Hendel, *Epic*, 65, and references cited.

104. For a somewhat nuanced view on the history of Israelite religion, arguing that scholars must not place a strict dichotomy on Israel and Canaanite religion, see Christopher B. Hays, “Religio-Historical Approaches,” in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009), 170-71; he states, “The most detailed recent histories of Israelite religion emphasize diachronic change and thus favor a middle way between extremes of credulity and skepticism.... A scholarly majority has long perceived a large amount of textual production in Israel and Judah during Iron Age II; if that is an important period for the production of Israel’s religious documents, then it is also an important period for the production of Israel’s religious documents.”

prose texts do not attest to late features. They do. However, the point of such literary and historical analyses is to find whether the Hebrew Bible contains early features that can be placed adjacent to a constellation of other ancient references. The Jacob narrative bears witness to having roots in Ugaritic epic and mythical material while also displaying later features characteristic of memory's epistemological underpinnings.

The Mesha Stele is the longest Iron Age inscription that bears striking literary similarities to the Hebrew Bible. Composed during the late ninth century,¹⁰⁵ it details Mesha's triumphal victory over his enemies. As mentioned above, it finds parallels, although not perfect, with 2 Kgs 3:4-8. The language is Moabite but the script is Old Hebrew. The stele bears a sophisticated use of alphabetic scripts and literary techniques. Separated by dots, the words of the inscription are structured according to scribal techniques, and it exhibits a "higher level of segmentation of the text by a series of thirty-seven vertical strokes... which display the dots where they occur."¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the Mesha Stele contains three major parts: an introduction describing Moab's defeat of Israel; a series of accounts of building activities; and a conclusion. Each section is then subdivided into smaller units, which Parker labels "paragraphs," displaying "structural parallelism."¹⁰⁷ Consequently, the Mesha Stele offers an important "peg for the understanding of Hebrew narrative style and its place in language history."¹⁰⁸

105. See Parker, *Stories in Scripture and Inscriptions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 44; Polak, "The Discourse Structure of the Mesha Inscription: 'I-Style,' Intonation Units, and Oral Performance," in *Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz*, ed. Shamir Yonah et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 407.

106. Parker, *Scripture and Inscriptions*, 44-45.

107. *Ibid.*, 44.

108. Polak, "Mesha Inscription," 407.

Frank Polak has indicated that the Mesha inscription is structured according to common narrative patterns found in the Hebrew Bible. For instance, the details of Mesha's building activity is crafted by the usages of the preterite, *qatal* forms, and when employing the first person, the stele utilizes *wayyiqtol* patterns.¹⁰⁹ Employing an "I" technique (אני) to begin the narrative account, the Mesha inscription finds resonance with Hebrew narrative prose. According to Polak, this "I" style was not solely based on Mesopotamian autobiographical inscriptions. Rather, it should be contextualized alongside other Northwest Semitic inscriptions. For example, Phoenician building inscriptions at Byblos from the tenth century BCE, the Bir Hadad inscription, and various Luwian royal inscriptions in Anatolia and North Syria attest to parallel features.¹¹⁰ A constellation of Hebrew narrative prose texts attest to this feature as well: Ps 81:11; Exod 20:2; Hos 12:10; 13:4; Isa 43:11, 25; 44:24; 51:12; with אני see Gen 15:7; Isa 43:3; 45:21; 48:17.¹¹¹ Another feature of the Mesha Stele that speaks to its Iron Age West Semitic setting is its usage of spoken exchange between characters. According to line fourteen, Mesha is told to take Nebo from Israel: ויאמר לי כמש לך אחז את נבה על ישראל.¹¹² Further, there is the usage of speech from Omri's son in the form of a monologue in line 6: אענו את מאב ("I will oppress Moab").¹¹³

109. Ibid., 407.

110. Ibid., 408.

111. See the list in *ibid.*, 412.

112. Text and translation of the Mesha inscription taken from John C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions 3 Vols.*, vol.1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 1.74-77.

113. Ibid., 74.

In view of the above similarities, the Mesha Stele contributes much to an appropriate historical setting for Hebrew prose. Though much of biblical narrative contains thematic and syntactic features characteristic of Neo-Assyrian monuments, it must also be seen in relation to its Northwest Semitic counterparts. Polak states the matter succinctly: “The narrative structure of the Mesha inscription contributes much to our understanding of Biblical Hebrew narrative, as a contemporary of ninth-century Israelite history, and even relative to events from the narrative about Joram’s Moabite campaign.”¹¹⁴

Thus it is highly plausible, as indicated by the above evidence, that Iron Age Hebrew scribes crafted their narratives along the same line as their Northwest Semitic neighbors, namely Ugarit and Moab. The usage of thematic, linguistic, and other stylistic features point to a common stock tradition from which Iron Age scribes pulled.

However, it is essential to note the contention surrounding the nature of orality and literacy in the Iron Age. Scholarship is not unanimous regarding the nature of written texts from the period of early Israel. In particular, the ninth–eighth centuries BCE have been a focal point of discussion as it pertains to Hebrew narrative prose. Although there is wide agreement on the nature and composition of Iron Age inscriptions, this is not the case for document production, that is, written narratives on perishable materials. Thus such a point of contention provides warrant for a brief discussion on literary texts and the possibilities of their being composed on perishable materials, namely papyri.

114. Polak, “Mesha Inscription,” 412-13.

Jessica Whisenant, in her contribution to the study of writing and literacy in the Iron Age Levant, has argued that West Semitic inscriptions do not indicate that scribes also wrote their stories on documents prior to the eighth and seventh centuries. She states:

Even the longest texts from the southern Levant that we do possess—the mid-ninth century Mesha Stele, the mid-ninth century Tel Dan inscription, and the early eighth-century Deir Alla plaster texts—hardly justify the notion that reams of scrolls were composed prior to the eighth and seventh centuries. The fact that the majority of provenanced inscriptions, including the two groups of Hebrew bullae from controlled excavations, bear dates in the late eighth through early sixth century range suggest this late Iron II period as the likeliest candidate for the production of scrolls of any great length.¹¹⁵

Not all scholars agree with Whisenant's conclusion. Matthieu Richelle has pointed out the precarious correlation between stable socio-economic resources and the production of literary texts. The latter is contingent on the former, that is, in order for a scribal elite to produce written texts, they must live under the auspices of the state, one that is thriving in its socio-economics. Furthermore, Israel and Judah do not develop into mature states until the eighth or seventh century BCE. Hence, this rules out the notion that literary texts were being produced prior to those eras.¹¹⁶

However, Richelle argues that such arguments are historical misnomers. For instance, the Tel El-Amarna letters speak to a possible Late Bronze Age scribal education in Jerusalem (circa 14th-century BCE) that may have carried over into the Iron Age I and II.¹¹⁷ This is given more weight due to the Levant's adoption of Egyptian hieratic

115. See Jessica Whisenant, "Let the Stones Speak! Document Production by Iron Age West Semitic Scribal Institutions and the Question of Biblical Sources," in *Contextualizing Israel's Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production*, ed. Brian B. Schmidt (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 152.

116. See Matthieu Richelle, "Elusive Scrolls: Could Any Hebrew Literature Have Been Written Prior to the Eighth Century BCE?," *VT* 66 (October 12, 2016): 557-58.

117. See Ryan Byrne, "The Refuge of Scribalism in Iron I Palestine," *BASOR* 345 (2007): 1-31, for a stimulating analysis and history of the scribal transition in Canaan from the LBA to the EIA.

inscriptions since the Canaanite city-states were weak and not independent of Egypt in the Late Bronze Age.¹¹⁸ According to William Schniedewind, the Egyptian hegemony during the Nineteenth Dynasty (circa 1292-1190 BCE) established administrative centers along the southern Levant, enabling scribal elites to write administrative texts, some on perishable materials, while others on imperishable materials.¹¹⁹

The findings of bullae in the Levant point in the direction of written texts' having been composed on papyri. The production of lengthy literary texts, according to Richelle, would have been written on papyrus or parchment. There is evidence for at least one written document on papyrus in Judah from the seventh-century.¹²⁰ This document is much later than the Mesha Stele and the Tel Dan Stele, indicating a possibility for no written documents prior to such a time. However, due to the climate in the Levant, materials such as papyri and parchment would have easily perished. Yet as Richelle notes, the findings of bullae point to the employment on such perishable materials in the Iron I-II periods. Moreover, the Deir 'Alla inscription bears signs of copying from a scroll, as displayed in its cursive style.¹²¹ At any rate, the evidence for papyri is not conclusive since the only remains that have survived hail from the seventh-century. Thus it is highly plausible, but not certain, that Israelite scribes of the Iron I-II ages wrote lengthy texts through the medium of papyri.

118. As pointed out by William M Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins through the Rabbinic Period* (New Haven: Yale University, 2013), 56-60; see also Richelle, "Elusive Scrolls," 579-80.

119. Schniedewind, *History of Hebrew*, 57.

120. See Richelle, "Elusive Scrolls," 564-67.

121. *Ibid.*, 593.

Another plausible factor for the impetus of Israelite writing prior to the eighth and seventh centuries is the existence of an Israelite statehood. Richelle,¹²² along with Rollston,¹²³ claims that an Israelite scribal elite, operating under state hegemony, crafted literary texts during the Iron IIA (circa 900-800 BCE), Iron IIB (circa 800-722 BCE), and Iron IIC (circa 722-586 BCE). Perhaps the greatest strength for such an argument is the Meshe Stele itself. Mesha, already a kingdom by the ninth-century, seems to have adopted a “national” script that was not its own. That is to say, the language of the inscription is Moabite, but the script is Hebrew, indicating that Moab must have adopted an Israelite script that was already widely recognized by circa 850 BCE. Therefore, it is highly plausible that the northern kingdom of Israel had established its own distinct script early on, enabling other kingdoms such as Moab, to latch onto such an historical phenomenon.

Brian B. Schmidt presents several arguments for the sparsity of lengthy texts prior to the ninth century. Dividing them into phases, Schmidt posits three hypothetical stages for the rise of narrative texts in the Levant: Phase 1 comprises the “*state-scribal development*.”¹²⁴ It is during this initial phase that literature was predominantly oral, lasting the entire first half of the ninth century. Schmidt argues that an unknown Syria-Palestine polity sought to emulate Assyrian monumental inscriptions by crafting a linear alphabetic script. Furthermore, this engendered the emergence of a scribal apparatus,

122. *Ibid.*, 589.

123. See Rollston, *Writing and Literacy*, 134.

124. See Brian B. Schmidt, “A History of Israel’s Earliest Literature,” in *Contextualizing Israel’s Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production*, ed. Brian B. Schmidt (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 124. Italics original.

enabling the creation of short texts. During the second phase, in the second half of the ninth century, scribes began to produce longer written texts but on a much smaller scale than the Late Bronze Age due to political conflicts among Assyria, Aram, and Israel/Judah. Finally, sometime during the late ninth century—Schmidt’s third phase—lengthy monumental writing began to appear throughout the Levant, but this does not indicate the production of literary texts on perishable materials.¹²⁵ For the era of lengthy literary texts does not arrive, according to Schmidt, until the eighth century or later. This historical phenomenon is stated succinctly by Schmidt:

Late Bronze Age Ugarit’s contrast with the southern Levant of the Iron 2 period is telling. With similar designs on emulating foreign prestige (here, that of Mesopotamia), the Ugaritians produced an indigenous literary repertoire using their own alphabetic writing system. They did so, however, from an advantageous position of a politically stable and sociohistorically conducive scribal environment. As such, Ugarit inversely serves to underscore just how profoundly long lasting political stability.... could impact the production (or nonproduction) of lengthy literary texts in the ancient Levant theatre.¹²⁶

While Schmidt offers a compelling case for the sparsity of lengthy written texts prior to the second half of the ninth century, his presumptions appear precarious.

While it is true the southern Levant presents no lengthy texts from the tenth and ninth centuries on perishable materials, such as papyri or parchment, this does not indicate that a scribal apparatus produced no such texts. The evidence of bullae would speak against such an argument. Schmidt’s arguments also rest on a strict correlation between state infrastructure and writing, which, as discussed above, is historically

125. *Ibid.*, 124-26.

126. *Ibid.*, 126.

unnecessary.¹²⁷ According to André Lemaire, the plaster texts from Deir ‘Alla posit a possible reconstruction for the usage of texts written on perishable materials. Lemaire is much more reserved in his argument concerning the dearth of lengthy texts in the Iron I-II periods, since, he argues, the tenth to ninth centuries provide an enigmatic portrait of what writing may have looked like in Northwest Semitic scribal circles.¹²⁸ In other words, the absence of evidence for lengthy texts during the ninth to eighth centuries is not evidence for absence. Lemaire states the issue succinctly: “West Semitic epigraphy dated to the 9th and early-8th centuries BCE may indirectly illuminate the history of the 10th century BCE Levant and so should not be neglected.”¹²⁹

The above arguments portray the complex nature of writing in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. Although the tenth-ninth centuries are a bit murky as it pertains to writing, this does not inhibit the possibility of lengthy texts being written during that time. Hebrew prose as found in the Hebrew Bible contains early and late features, which span the second millennium through the first millennium. The Jacob narrative, as this essay hopes to show, grew out of such a historical matrix. In essence, it is highly plausible, though not absolute, that Hebrew prose began to evolve during the Early Iron Age and fully blossomed during the eighth to sixth centuries BCE.

127. It should be pointed out that Schmidt presumes that during the LBA and EIA, stories were primarily oral, that is, passed down from group to group, with no written texts involved. However, it must be stressed that the oral/literary dichotomy is precarious. A text could be fashioned with oral and literary features. See Robert D. Miller II, *Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), for an analysis of a written/oral dynamic.

128. See André Lemaire, “West Semitic Epigraphy and the History of the Levant during The 12th-10th Centuries BCE,” in *The Ancient Near East in the 12th-10th Centuries BCE: Culture and History; Proceedings of the International Conference Held at the University of Haifa, 2-5 May, 2010*, ed. Gershon Galil et al. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), 307.

129. *Ibid.*, 307.

CHAPTER III
THE JACOB NARRATIVE

Defining the Nature of the Source Material

A survey of the literary strata found in the Jacob narrative will suffice before a formal analysis of the relevant texts is given. Broadly speaking, the literary sources that are incorporated in the Jacob narrative are related to and contingent on the sources that constitute the rest of the book of Genesis. Since ancient narrative texts—particularly, Iron Age texts—are the result of a fusion of oral and written sources, there may well be synchronic and diachronic variations. Indeed, when read in that light, the Jacob narrative and Genesis as a whole, turns out to be a “fractured” book.¹³⁰ Both literary and historical analyses of Genesis have uncovered various traditions underlying the text; as such, many scholars have postulated they derive from different sources or schools of thought from ancient Israel’s scribal tradition.

The Jacob narrative must be viewed against the backdrop of Genesis as a “book of cultural memory.”¹³¹ As such, it bears the distinctive characteristic of memory that “is always built on previous representations of the past, and revisions are constrained by practices that persist in the present,” and in this vein, “cultural memory is a

130. See Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), vii.

131. See Hendel, *Cultural Memory*, 29.

reconstruction of the past in which the old and new are melded together into a complex whole.”¹³² In that sense, Genesis can be viewed through the lens of a remembered past, one that bears the marks of forgetfulness and remembrance, colored with early and late features. Memory is “an experience of an idea that is already at one remove from the original event. Memory recalls the idea of the event rather than the event proper.”¹³³ No matter how personal, memory is inherently social. That is to say, individuals reconstruct the past by drawing from an assemblage of linguistic and epistemological factors that are contingent upon a social framework. Memory, in other words, is “jointly constructed.”¹³⁴ To be sure, each individual contributes something unique to a remembered past; yet an individual’s reconstruction of the past is contingent upon, and fostered by, the group to which he or she may belong. Thus memory is susceptible to preservation and variation.

At the same time, Genesis was the beginning of source-critical theories, culminating in the classic “new documentary approach (JEDP).”¹³⁵ Accordingly, the “documentary hypothesis” spurred much debate over the nature of the Pentateuch as a whole, leaving scholars in disarray over how one ought to view the nature of the texts. The final form was scrutinized in order to arrive at a more primitive form; but like any other diachronic analysis of ancient texts, such historical-critical endeavors remain provisional. Nevertheless, deconstructing the final form is not a trivial pursuit, especially

132. Ibid., 29.

133. Ibid.

134. See Adam B. Seligman and Robert P. Weller, *How Things Count As The Same: Memory, Mimesis, and Metaphor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 34, for an insightful analysis on how religious practices tend to transform their foundational narratives to fit present understandings of reality.

135. Carr, *Fractures*, 4; See also Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to History of Ancient Israel: With a Reprint of the Article Israel from the Encyclopaedia Britannica*. (New York: Meridian Books, 1958).

since it enables readers to glean the various nuances between competing literary readings in Genesis, in particular, the Jacob narrative.

In turn, this study will analyze the constituent threads that piece together the Jacob narrative; yet in order to complete such a task, the narratives themselves must be seen against the backdrop of Genesis as a whole. This is both synchronically and diachronically necessary, for modern readers of the text are faced with the final form and at the same time are left with literary and historical gaps that can be explained by the piecing together of various literary strands.¹³⁶

It must be stressed from the outset that although contextualizing the various extant sources does have its place in any exegetical analysis of the Pentateuch, this study does not permit the scope or time to assign a specific source from Genesis to an absolute historical location or era, nor does it have any desire to place one theory over the other, diachronic or synchronic. Rather, the aim is much more modest in that the overall analysis is to probe the Jacob narrative for potential memories embedded in the text. It may be the case that, say the priestly source, does provide a glimpse into ancient Israel's exilic or post exilic setting; however, there is no intention of assigning any one of the sources to an absolute historical period. Rather, the aim is to assign the sources embedded in the Jacob narrative to broad historical periods; in other words, any historical conclusion the present study provides is conjectural.

136. See Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 20-31, esp. 27. Baden's primary task is to begin with the canonical form of the text and work backwards, so to speak, to the earliest literary layer. Dissatisfied with tradition-criticism, Baden claims that assigning the documents (JEDP) to specific historical periods has no effect on a literary reading of the Pentateuch; see *Composition*, 31. Cf. Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. Bernhard W. Anderson (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981).

Moreover, the present study will employ the nomenclature's P and non-P for those sources that can readily—yet provisionally—be identified in Genesis and the Jacob narrative as a whole. The reasons for this are as follows.

First, while there is much dispute over whether there exists a J or E source, many scholars are much more resolute to agree upon the existence of a P source. Indeed, in his study, Thomas Römer calls for the demise of the Yahwist source, pointing out that much of recent European scholarship has abandoned all hope for such a document.¹³⁷ By way of contrast, a postulated priestly source seems to rest on much more secure grounds, for there can be seen a consistent narrative unity starting from Genesis and ending in Deuteronomy. Moreover, Römer contemplates whether P was responsible for the formation of the Pentateuch, since priestly language and themes can be witnessed throughout its entire corpus.¹³⁸ This has led scholars such as Carr to abandon the labels J and E. For him, it is much more necessary to employ terms such as P and non-P.¹³⁹

Let us turn our attention to the so-called P source. Carr considers P to have been independent of the other non-P sources until it was combined with other narratives to form the Pentateuch. It is clear that P drew on a range of materials to form its own narrative arc. In particular, “some version of the non-P traditions” in Genesis were employed and adapted to fit P's story such as “the creation of humanity, the creation-to-flood genealogy, and the flood; and then between versions of various elements of the

137. See Thomas Römer, “The Elusive Yahwist: A Short History of Research,” in *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Research*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 9.

138. *Ibid.*, 26.

139. Carr, *Fractures*. Indeed, Carr views P as having dominance over any of the non-P sources, to the extent that the former has the final say in the shaping of the pentateuchal narratives.

ancestral history.”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, P ranges from Gen 1 to the death and burial of Jacob in Gen 49-50. The Priestly material consists of the covenantal promises to the patriarchs (Gen 12-50) and various cultic features that were formed out of the matrix of ancient Near Eastern social and religious customs.

Although they consider the P tradition to have been modeled on a J source, Anthony F. Campbell and Mark A. O’Brien mark certain factors that distinguish P from the other sources embedded in the Pentateuch, namely, genealogies and cultic characteristics:

As envisaged by Martin Noth, the Priestly document is quite different from the Yahwist narrative. Rather than a continuous narrative, on the model of J, the Priestly document can be thought of as a necklace, with its major stories as pearls strung on the thread spun of genealogies, itineraries, and a terse story line.¹⁴¹

Certainly, not every scholar agrees with the above statement, yet the P tradition constitutes a formidable document to the extent that Konrad Schmid considers it “the proper basic document of the Pentateuch.”¹⁴²

According to Schmid, the P material organizes the whole of the Pentateuch, while the non-P material is redacted in line with P’s own conceptual framework. This theory is based on contextualizing P in the Persian period, which Schmid considers the prime time for the formation of the Pentateuch. After being released from the bondage of the Babylonians, ancient Israel had to rethink and re envision what it meant to be back in the promised land. Indeed, the patriarchal promises had to be interpreted in light of these new

140. Ibid., 117.

141. Mark A O’Brien and Antony F. Campbell, *Sources of the Pentateuch: Texts, Introductions, Annotations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 21.

142. See Konrad Schmid, *The Old Testament: A Literary History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 148.

phenomena, exhibited by Ezra and Nehemiah.¹⁴³ Contrasting source-critics, Schmid seems to subscribe to a certain kind of diachronic analysis of the Pentateuch, in which one picks apart certain Pentateuchal texts and assigns them to a specific era in Israel's history. Ironically, Schmid fuses together source-critical practices with form and tradition-critical ones, something that Julius Wellhausen opted for.¹⁴⁴

Along with other scholars, Schmid considers P to be a well-established document and employs labels such as P and non-P. This is because he views no literary structure across the Pentateuch, apart from P and the Deuteronomist. In accord with historical-critical analyses, he argues that the patriarchal traditions are separate entities that have their own distinct origin and not deriving from a J or E source.

Another reason for this study's employment of P and non-P derives from the complicated theory of the "documentary hypothesis." The updated version of the "documentary hypothesis," espoused by the so-called Neo-Documentarians, has been the object of intense scrutiny as of late since it argues that four distinct and coherent literary strands span the entire Pentateuch. While this recent approach to the Pentateuch, carried out under the auspices of a purely synchronic analysis, does have its merits, there is yet to be a consensus as to how one ought to label and define the source material. Noteworthy is the contention surrounding those sources that do not seem to align with priestly language, themes, or theology. How is it possible to differentiate each source from the other, especially if a text employs alternative names—the classic criterion for identifying a

143. Ibid., 148-49.

144. See Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*.

source¹⁴⁵—for the divine (אלהים/יהוה)? It is precisely this sort of issue that Joel S. Baden seeks to articulate in his version of the documentary hypothesis.

Although he is a strong advocate of the documentary hypothesis, Baden admits that such a task is provisional.¹⁴⁶ This is especially the case when considering the role of the compiler, or editor, of the final form of the Pentateuch. For the sake of argument, consider the complicated history of J and E. Were both J and E originally separate, distinct sources, or were they one, unified whole? The answer to this query depends on the particular type of theory one subscribes to. Baden seems to opt for the former, that is, both J and E were separate sources. Yet even he admits that the compiler of the Pentateuch may have worked with an incomplete form of E.¹⁴⁷ Thus not all four sources may be complete literary texts.

To further complicate matters, the “European Approach”¹⁴⁸ has dispensed competing theories to the scholarly field, namely the supplemental and fragmentary hypotheses. These two competing theories argue for a much more complex understanding of the nature of the Pentateuch. In essence, the European Approach headed, by Rolf Rendtorff in the late twentieth century, argued for a diachronic analysis of the Pentateuch under the strict guidance of form-critical and tradition-critical analyses.¹⁴⁹ Rendtorff’s

145. As argued by Astruc in 1753. See Alan W. Jenks, *The Elohist and North Israelite Traditions* (Missoula.: Scholars Press For The SBL, 1977), 19.

146. See Baden, *Composition*, 225-26.

147. *Ibid.*, 225-26, esp. 225.

148. The phrase is used by *ibid.*, 54.

149. See Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990).

arguments, anticipated in the work of Martin Noth,¹⁵⁰ sought to conceptualize the literary growth of the Pentateuch, not by means of a synchronic approach, but in terms of a diachronic explanation. In contrast to Baden's method, this alternative approach was to begin with the "smallest literary unit" of a passage and seek to articulate how the final form of the text grew.¹⁵¹ Narrative gaps, literary repetitions, and contradictions between texts were for Rendtorff evidence of incomplete documents. Much like Hermann Gunkel, Rendtorff sought to explain these textual nuances by way of oral tradition. According to the former, traditions of oral tradition were limited in what they could pass on to others. That is to say, in a society dominated by oral storytelling, an individual was not able to retain long stories but only the smallest unit.¹⁵² Accordingly, any sort of coherence between passages in the Pentateuch were considered to be secondary, or later insertions. Thus supplementary and fragmentary hypotheses are much more willing to attribute an active role to the compiler of the Pentateuch than, say, Baden is.

Perhaps a contributing factor to the diachronic and synchronic debate is partly due to the complicated history of orality and literacy in the ancient Near East, as previously mentioned. Literacy rates in the ancient Near East, much less the southern Levant, are far from obtaining a statistical consensus among scholars. Indeed, the literature is vast, with one side arguing for low literacy rates, while another for high rates. Bracketing for the moment any discussion of an orality/literacy dichotomy, Jean-Louis Ska argues—in agreement with form and tradition critics—that ancient Israelite scribes began by writing

150. See Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 1-7.

151. Baden, *Composition*, 54-55; Rendtorff, *Problem*, 24-31.

152. Hermann Gunkel and Mark E. Biddle, *Genesis* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 314.

short texts, “fragments” that in turn produced “documents.”¹⁵³ This perspective matches much of what Rendtorrf argued for, as well as Gunkel’s oral traditional theory. In fact, Ska seems to latch on to Gunkel’s phrase, “*Sammlung von Sagen*.”¹⁵⁴ Such “popular stories” were not meant to be written on extended documents but were passed on in fragments to other tradents in ancient Israel.

Although these sorts of theories appear to be grounded in concrete historical realities, they risk a high degree of subjectivity, especially as it pertains to the nature of orality and literacy in the ancient Near East. Orality and literacy need not be pitted against each other. We must not picture ancient Israelites as one day placing a halt to oral tradition, essentially barring them from the public realm, and whimsically deciding to write texts. Such a theory places a strict dichotomy between orality and literacy as if the two could not have existed in tandem. Interestingly, though, in a society dominated by the spoken word, ancient Israelites adhered to employing a mixture of both orality and literacy, and this can be seen by attending to those texts that contain an “oral aesthetic.”¹⁵⁵ One should, therefore, envision a continuum, in which orality and literacy operated alongside each other. This is especially the case when considering that ancient

153. See Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 176. Ska argues for a limited literacy rate among ancient Israelites, and limited use of scrolls; see the discussion in *Introduction*, 175-76.

154. As quoted in Ska, *Introduction*, 180. Italics original.

155. See Polak, “The Oral and the Written,” 59–105, for an account of how biblical narratives functioned as stories to be performed.

texts were read aloud, allowing them to come alive, so to speak, in the midst of others listening to them being performed.¹⁵⁶

To be sure, many form and tradition critics see some form of continuity throughout the Pentateuchal texts; however, the crux of the issue is that continuity is evidence of redaction, whereas for many source critics, especially Baden, this kind of unity is based on distinct sources flowing through the Pentateuch. In other words, there is disagreement between synchronic and diachronic issues. The final form of the Pentateuch is an assemblage of oral traditions with competing historical variations that were redacted to fit the respective communities or authors theological and ideological interests.

The divine names are not the sole criterion by which to distinguish the sources from each other; rather, J may employ יהוה, but so, too, might P or E. The essential differences have to do with narrative flow and plot alone. Each respective document has a narrative and plot uniquely its own, and one can trace each narrative thread from Genesis to Deuteronomy.

Dividing the sources into four distinct, coherent documents that have been unaltered by a redactor or set of scribes seems to be too simplistic of an explanation. According to Baden, only the literary evidence can explain how the sources were combined, and in the case of a redactor, it is to be a last resort.¹⁵⁷ First, Baden forces interpreters to imagine four complete documents that have been untouched and woven together. Even though he is arguing on purely narrative grounds, he inevitably runs into

156. See the works of Miller II, *Oral Tradition*; Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*; Carr, *Formation*; idem., *Written on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature*; Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word*, 79; Pioske, *Memory*, 73-83.

157. *Ibid.*, 215.

historical issues. Namely, the “compiler” not only works within but outside the text. They work with texts that have been handed down to them through time. If the evidence of narrative prose does not arise on the historical scene until the ninth or eighth century, then there is justification to look to a diachronic analysis of the composition of the Pentateuch. In other words, if the assumption arises that there is one “compiler” responsible for the composition of the Pentateuch, it logically follows that all four documents were completed by the time they reached the compiler’s hands. Yet looking at other documents of the ancient Near East, we notice that various narratives were edited and supplemented throughout time.

In line with the above arguments, that is, employing P and non-P, the present study is primarily concerned with analyzing those sources in which there are strong affinities with the Northern Kingdom of Israel. As mentioned previously, the bulk of the Jacob tradition originated in a northern provenance. Gen 28:10-22 is a prime example of how northern traditions remembered, through the lens of memory’s epistemological underpinnings, the founding of the cultic site of Bethel. Jeroboam I’s siege of Bethel and Dan (1 Kgs 12:1-20) serve as a primary indicator for how Iron Age scribes superimposed their current crises onto a much earlier historical era, namely the second millennium. In short, the traditions surrounding Jacob, elusive as they are, are rooted in and informed by a northern circle of scribes. That is not to say, however, those traditions were untouched by southern circles, as shown by Gen 28:10-22. As will be discussed below, the non-P sources that make up the bulk of the Jacob narrative are some of the most ancient of traditions. In particular, those non-P traditions that find resonance in a northern provenance betray a period(s) in which stories about Jacob were being remembered under

literary representations and were updated and refashioned to fit each generation of Israelite scribes' ideological and theological worldviews.

According to the classical “documentary hypothesis,” the non-P source that tends to betray a northern provenance is labeled E.¹⁵⁸ In broad terms, the main criterion for distinguishing E from P has been the use of the divine name אֱלֹהִים. Hence, when one turns to Gen 28:10-22, it is readily apparent that the dual use of יהוה and אֱלֹהִים are indicative of two disparate sources: the Yahwist (J) and the Elohist (E). Such a conclusion is primarily based on a synchronic reading of the text in which each source is understood to have employed distinct vocabulary and linguistic features. To be sure, the synchronic arguments surrounding an E source satisfy the enigmatic nature of the Pentateuch to a certain extent.¹⁵⁹ Yet keeping in mind the debates surrounding the “documentary hypothesis,” we are much more prudent to label such a source non-P. Certainly, the divine name אֱלֹהִים, as exhibited in Genesis, finds itself in traditions that are distinct from a Priestly source; but, P also utilizes אֱלֹהִים in its narrative texts (Gen 1). Moreover, in what some scholars would consider the Yahwist document, there appears to be an intermingling of divine names that are not peculiar to any one source (e.g., Gen 15; 28:10-22).

Moreover, the label non-P is justified based on the scarcity of an E source and its elusive history. For instance, Ska argues that E was considered by many documentarians as the “poor stepchild” of the Pentateuch.¹⁶⁰ Texts that could not be assigned to a Priestly

158. For a defense of employing the nomenclature E, Miller 103-28; Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*; Jenks, *The Elohist*, 19-68, 101-6. For a rejection against the existence of such a source, see Ska, *Introduction*, 131-33; Rendtorff, *The Problem*.

159. For a full-length picture of the four sources, see O'Brien and Campbell, *Sources*.

160. Ska, *Introduction*, 1

or J source were, in essence, given the name “Elohists.” Those texts were fragmentary in nature, finding no parallel in P or J. In Ska’s words: “We might say that, like a phantom, E only appeared in the dark corners of the Pentateuch. Scholars used E to solve problems in difficult texts such as Genesis 15; 20-22; 28:10-22.”¹⁶¹ What is striking about the so-called E source is, perhaps, its relation to the so-called J source, or in terms of this thesis, those non-P traditions that may have specific ties to a southern provenance. Already in the early twentieth century, scholars such as P. Volz and W. Rudolph considered the Elohist to be a variant form of J, “that is, a series of texts that were parallel to J’s and were transmitted orally for a long time before being integrated into the Yahwist’s work.”¹⁶² Sadly, though, there is little talk of an E source today since it appears, if at all, in fragmentary form, fragments in the sense that those texts yield no plot or consistent theme throughout the Pentateuch. Thus based on synchronic conclusions, the label non-P is much more appropriate.

Aside from purely synchronic arguments, the use of non-P may be justified on diachronic grounds as well. For example, Alan W. Jenks has offered compelling arguments for assigning many of the patriarchal narratives to a northern circle of scribes. His arguments are based on certain thematic, historical, and theological points that seem to align well with the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Although he bases his use of E on Wellhausen’s research, he urges readers to look beyond mere linguistic features for the sole criterion of distinguishing sources. Jenks is adamant that scholars take into

161. *Ibid.*, 131.

162. *Ibid.*, 132.

consideration linguistic, ideological, historical, and theological factors as proof for the identification of two disparate sources, namely, J and E.¹⁶³

J and E, according to Jenks, are to be seen as two separate traditions. Much like source critics, Jenks is quick to ascribe certain traditions to four documents that span the entire Pentateuch. Aside from the precarious nature of distinguishing four distinct sources, Jenks's does provide compelling arguments for identifying certain texts in Genesis based on diachronic and synchronic grounds and assigning them to different Israelite traditions. In particular, we shall look at his analysis of the so-called E source, fully cognizant of the fact that this study has opted for the label non-P. Jenks's study offers us a starting point in locating those traditions about Jacob that may have originated in northern scribal traditions but have also been reshaped by competing traditions, most notably after the split of the so-called United Monarchy.

Jenks acknowledges that one must not use the divine name, Elohim, as the sole criterion by which to distinguish a distinct tradition in the patriarchal narratives. Rather, he argues for other "constants" that speak of a unique circle of traditions.¹⁶⁴ These "constants" are made up of synchronic and diachronic features. The usage of Elohim must be accompanied by the presence of style and other interests of the composer(s) of the pentateuchal narratives. Those interests find their identification in the historical background of certain texts. That is to say, if one were to probe the pentateuchal texts for historical information, one would inevitably be able to contextualize them into a specific era. Hence, certain historical periods can be gleaned through a text's diachronic features.

163. Jenks, *The Elohist*, 15.

164. *Ibid.*, 20.

Consequently, then, Jenks is able to assign certain texts to a particular era based on passages that speak of cultic sites as well as certain theological characteristics.¹⁶⁵

To provide an example of Jenks's methodology, he interprets Gen 28:10-22 to have originated in a northern provenance. Genesis 28:10-22 is a composite of sources, in which a redactor, or compiler, assembled two disparate traditions from Israel's pool of traditions. This is evident by the fragmentary nature of the pericope itself; for instance, 28:10 is a continuation of 27, which Jenks labels J. Yet when the rest of the chapter is attended to, certain features stand out as deriving from a different source, or tradition. In particular, verses 11-12, 17-18, and 20-22, have their origin in a northern sphere of tradition. By contrast, verses 13-16 and 19 derive from a rather different and competing circle of influence. Jenks interprets those sources as belonging to a southern, or Yahwist, tradition.¹⁶⁶

Jenks's arguments rest not only on a literary reading of Genesis, but historical factors as well. For him, the use of Elohim/El was the divine title favored by the Northern Kingdom of Israel in its heyday. Before it came to associate itself with the cult of Yahweh, Israel worshipped the Canaanite deity El, drawing from a wide array of ancient Northwest Semitic traditions, and it was not until the Solomonic era that strict El worship lost favor with its many Israelite adherents.¹⁶⁷ Jenks, in effect, follows Wellhausen in his history of religion approach, seeking to articulate a linear correlation between the four documents of the Pentateuch and Israel's religious evolution.

165. *Ibid.*, 101-6.

166. *Ibid.*, 35-39.

167. *Ibid.*, 38.

The theological intricacies of a northern provenance reach beyond mere talk of the divine. Indeed, as indicated above, Gen 28:10-22 seems to date to an era that at one time favored the sanctuary at Bethel. Bethel is the focal point in the Jacob narrative: it becomes the point of departure and return for the patriarch, framing the cycle as a whole. Jenks considers Bethel to be the favored cultic location of the Northern Kingdom, based on 1 Kgs 12. It is in this passage that Jeroboam I establishes the northern capitals: one in Bethel and the other in Dan. Furthermore, the author(s) behind Gen 28:10-22 are aware of a tithe that was to be given at the Bethel sanctuary. Jacob is seen as the founder of the Bethel cult, establishing its authority and enduring significance for a northern Israelite audience.

Aside from the Bethel narrative, what other sorts of factors contribute to the possibility of the Jacob narrative originating from the circle of northern Israelite scribes? It is possible, and highly probable, that the matrix of northern traditions—out of which the Jacob narrative grew—were first fashioned in written form between the ninth and seventh centuries BCE. Although Jenks operated under the assumption of an oral/literacy dichotomy, his argument for dating the northern traditions after Solomon, circa 922 BCE, holds weight. By contrast, there seems to be doubt as to whether those northern traditions constitute an epic tradition since the Hebrew Bible is scarce with epic material although hints of it may remain in certain poetic sections.¹⁶⁸

Although the above argument from Jenks is possible, it is highly unlikely that a full-fledged northern tradition would have been written down so early on, especially

168. See Smith, “Biblical Narrative between Ugaritic and Akkadian Literature Part I Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible: Consideration of Comparative Research,” *RB* 114 (January 2007): 5–29.

when considering the nature of writing during the tenth century BCE.¹⁶⁹ Much more likely is the conceptualization of a continuum in which oral and written sources existed, each playing off the other.

More specifically, it is worthwhile to consider those traditions in the Jacob narrative that can be placed alongside other northern traditions interspersed throughout the Hebrew Bible. The Jacob narrative shares certain characteristics with other northern texts of the Hebrew Bible: prophecy, revelation through dreams, the use of El/Elohim, and, of course, certain cultic sites. For instance, Elohim appears to Jacob in a dream, once in Gen 28, and another in 31 and 35. Perhaps the revelatory nature of the northern traditions is related to its preference for the office of prophet. This is especially the case in passages that deal with Abraham (Gen 15; 20:1-17; the use of הלוים in verses 3, 6, and the title נביא in vs. 7).

Outside of the Pentateuch, scholars have long recognized northern traditions in the Deuteronomistic History and the early northern prophet Hosea, that share affinities with certain pentateuchal texts. The Samuel traditions possibly provide glimpses of northern relics since the Deuternomist may have composed his narrative shortly after the split of the United Monarchy.¹⁷⁰ Jenks views certain language employed in the Samuel narratives as having striking similarities to the patriarchal narratives, namely theological language. In particular, Samuel's ability to see the divine in dreams is reminiscent of Abraham's and Jacob's encounter with El/Elohim, which befits the role of prophet.¹⁷¹

169. As argued above, there are some indications that writing of a fragmentary nature did occur before the eighth and ninth centuries BCE, but nothing of the sort we would label prose narrative. See Richelle, "Elusive Scrolls," 556–94.

170. See Carr, *Fractures*, 264-71; Jenks, *The Elohist*, 83-84.

171. Jenks, *The Elohist*, 89-91.

Another parallel text is Hosea, which remembered the Jacob narrative during the time of its written composition. We will analyze Hosea first since it occupies a much shorter parallel to traditions surrounding the Jacob traditions.

The northern prophet Hosea seems to be familiar with, and remember, the traditions surrounding Jacob. If an early mid-eighth century date for Hosea is acceptable, as seems to be the case,¹⁷² then it speaks to an early reference to Jacob outside of the Pentateuch. If not, as argued by Nadav Na'aman,¹⁷³ then it is purely an exilic story, fashioned for a later Israelite audience to cope with the Babylonian captivity. However, as argued previously, the formation of the Jacob narratives seems to have originated out of the matrix of Northwest Semitic alphabetic writing, set against the backdrop of the 9th-7th centuries BCE. Furthermore, Hosea depended on the Jacob story, perhaps its earliest antecedents, not the other way around. Albert de Pury argues that this is evident in Hos 12: the birth of Jacob and Esau, the etymology of the name Jacob, the victory of the patriarch over the divine being; the theophany at Bethel, Jacob's flight to Haran, and much more.¹⁷⁴

Na'aman's stance regarding the late date of the Jacob narrative, as reflected in Hos 12, is perhaps due to his insistence that both texts, when placed adjacent to each other, display peculiarities. These contradictions posit, in his estimation, a late date for

172. See Albert de Pury, "The Jacob Story and the Beginning of the Formation of the Pentateuch," in *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2006), 59; see also Carr, *Formation*, 474-75.

173. See Nadav Na'aman, "The Jacob Story: Between Oral and Written Modes," *SJOT* 33 (2019): 136-58.

174. See the full list in de Pury, "The Jacob Story," 61.

the Jacob story, that is, a date that resonates with the sixth century. In his words: “The author’s shaping of his figure—which is deeply influenced by his literary, religious, and ideological ideas—considerably distanced it from that of the oral story.”¹⁷⁵ Na’aman, though, is positing a strict dichotomy between oral and written, which is not necessary as narrative prose texts from the Iron Age displayed oral and written features. Thus orality is not the sole criterion for establishing a text’s date. At any rate, Hos 12 offers readers a window into how the Jacob story was remembered in the eighth century. Indeed, Hos 12 is the most extensive account of the Jacob tradition outside of the Pentateuch; overall, it renders the Genesis Jacob story from beginning, middle, and end. Perhaps Hosea and Genesis relied on a common Jacob tradition, but “the parallels are specific and broad enough that a dependence of these portions of Hos 12 on the Genesis Jacob story is more likely.”¹⁷⁶ This is not to say that the book of Genesis was completed by the eighth century; what this does mean, though, is that certain traditions concerning Jacob circulated in the Iron Age. Whether they were written or oral traditions it is difficult to state with absolute certainty. This is to be expected in an oral-written culture.

The Samuel narratives do not shy away from displaying a family type of religion, which knows the deity by El/Elohim. This patrilineal religion, in which the father’s god was to be worshipped by the familial unit, is shared across the patriarchal narratives as well. Indeed, the author(s) of Genesis as well as Samuel seem to remember a time in Israel’s past when the deity was worshipped in various ways, in contrast to later Israelite history, when Yahweh becomes the supreme recipient of worship. The era in which

175. Na’aman, “Oral and Written Modes,” 137.

176. Carr, *Formation*, 474.

familial religion dominated was, according to some scholars, before the monarchy.¹⁷⁷ It was in that historical period in which the tribes of Israel were not yet united under a monarch, of whom was granted the authority to establish statewide religion. Thus the Israelites, notably the patriarchs, recognized numerous gods as being worthy of worship. Though it is difficult to determine a firm timeline for the Deuteronomistic History, it is plausible to associate its formation with that of the patriarchal narratives, especially in light of particular northern traditions between the two corpora.¹⁷⁸

Karel van der Toorn, in his book on family religion in the ancient Near East presents compelling evidence for the appropriate historical background out of which the patriarchal and Deuteronomistic narratives grew.¹⁷⁹ Much in line with the present study, van der Toorn views the premonarchial era as a time in which Israel practised family, or clan, religion. This type of religious ideology encompassed each clan's adopting its respective patriarch's god and having no obligation to worship a national deity.¹⁸⁰ As far as historians are aware, Israel was without a king during the Early Iron Age, 1200-1000 BCE; therefore, there was no gravitational pull toward paying homage to a national deity. Each family in Israel worshipped that of the father's god. Van der Toorn sees traces of this type of religion as originating in the Late Bronze Age and trickling down into the Early Iron Age, consonant with the time of the Merneptah Stele.¹⁸¹ It should be stressed,

177. Jenks, *The Elohist*, 101-6.

178. More will be said below concerning the historical and cultural milieu shared between the patriarchal and Deuteronomistic narratives.

179. See Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Ugarit, and Israel: Continuity and Changes in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

180. *Ibid.*, 241.

181. *Ibid.*, 242.

though, that family religion was not entirely restricted to earlier periods in Israelite history but that they were most dominant then.

Moreover, the early clan religion finds its origin in an “Ephraimite”¹⁸² background, rather than a Judahite one. This northern pool of traditions is most evident in those texts that mention personal names as well as northern locations and bear resemblances with the patriarchal narratives. Although the finished product of the Hebrew Bible is colored with a Judean perspective, one can still find hints of a northern sphere of influence. This is particularly the case with personal names and locations as they tend to preserve historical kernels.

Accordingly, personal names tend to resist alterations throughout history, hence, allowing interpreters to view the text in a crystallized form, so to speak. There seems to be evidence of this kind for the period of the judges. The era of the judges offers us a window into early northern “names, personal as well as topographical, and archaeological remains.”¹⁸³ In the central hill country, archaeological remains, in combination with the biblical material, yield significant results pertaining to the religion of early Israel. Namely, personal names, on the one hand, and geographical names, on the other, exhibit specific Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age features. The Canaanite deity אל, from the Early Bronze Age, seems to have carried over into Israel’s religious climate. Though אל tends to function as a generic term for ‘god,’ it most certainly functions as a proper name

182. Ibid., 261.

183. Ibid., 237.

in those texts that bear affinities with an “Ephraimite” background (Gen 20; 28:10-22; 33:18-20; 35:1-8, 14-20).¹⁸⁴

Furthermore, it is prudent to look at how these features are exhibited in the Jacob narrative. In other words, those early northern traditions found in the Deuteronomistic History have affinities with the Jacob narrative. Perhaps this is due to the same historical, religious, and cultural matrix out of which both narrative traditions grew.

As previously mentioned, the present study has no intention to utilize nomenclatures such as JEPD; rather, P and non-P will be employed. The earliest non-Priestly traditions encompassing the Jacob narratives share characteristics with some of the material in Judges and, perhaps, the Samuel traditions. In particular, the “Ephraimite” traditions that run through Judges bear striking similarities with the Jacob narrative. The most obvious examples have to do with Jacob and his activity of erecting altars at various locations.

An important site in the non-Priestly northern traditions is the sanctuary at Bethel. On his way to Haran (according to one strand of tradition, typically considered the Yahwist), Jacob stops at Bethel to spend the night. During his lodging there, Jacob has a dream in which he witnesses angels and the deity אל (Gen 28:10-12). Upon awakening from his dream, Jacob sets up a stone, pours oil on top of it, and promises to pay tithes if the deity brings him safely home. In the words of Gen 28:19, Jacob calls the place “Bethel.” (בית אל). Afterwards, Jacob promises to pay tithes to the deity if brought back safely to his “father’s house” (בית אבי).

184. See the list in *ibid.*, 255n87.

Aside from the complex literary difficulties in the Bethel foundation legend,¹⁸⁵ Gen 28:10-22 preserves memories of pre-monarchic Israel and its religious affiliations with the surrounding Canaanite culture. Perhaps the usage of *בֵּתֵל*, attached to a particular northern location, is the most telling example of having derived from northern traditions. The cult of El is “conducted at topographically fixed sanctuaries.”¹⁸⁶ The Ephraimite texts which deal with Jacob remember Bethel as a key sanctuary. After Jacob receives the revelatory dream at Bethel, he journeys eastward, and it is in the land of the east where Jacob receives another dream from the deity. This time, though, he is told to journey back to the land of his father (Gen 31:13). While on his way back, Jacob stops at Bethel once again and builds an altar to El (Gen 35:1-3). After a second vision from the deity, Jacob sets up another stone, paying homage to El. Though Gen 28 and 35 appear to draw on different traditions, they are consistent in connecting the cultic site of Bethel with El, the god of Jacob. The narrator is sure to note that Jacob worshipped the god of his fathers, as indicated by Gen 46:1. Though it is a southern location, the site of Beersheba is an important component in the Jacob narrative in that the patriarch returns there in Gen 46 to offer sacrifices “to the god of his father Isaac” (46:1). Moreover, Beersheba is connected to the Abraham traditions as well, as indicated by Gen 21:33, in which Abraham plants a tamarisk tree dedicated to “the Everlasting God” (*אֵל עוֹלָם*). It should be noted that,

185. More will be discussed below pertaining to the literary complexity of Gen 28:10-22. For now, it must be stressed that vv. 13-16 may have been inserted by a southern redactor(s)—J/Yahwhist according to source critics—in contrast to the overall northern character of Gen 28. See Baden, *Composition*, 71, 230-245; O’Brien and Campbell, *Sources*, 112, 170; Sean McEvenue, “A Return to Sources in Genesis 28,10–22?,” *ZAW* 106 (1994); Westermann, Claus, *Genesis 12-36* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 453.

186. van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 259.

although he is a northern prophet, Amos speaks harshly about the sanctuaries of Bethel and Beersheba (Am 5:5).

The cult of the family god El, according to the northern traditions, consisted of vows and sacrifices, a common motif that occurs throughout the Jacob narrative. As pointed out by van der Toorn, vows are an essential component of the Jacob narrative since the narrator has employed them as a “theological motif” to string together Gen 28, Gen 31:4-16, and Gen 35:1-5.¹⁸⁷ Perhaps the mention of vows at Bethel reflects the time of the narrator, whereby that sanctuary was prominent during the reign of Jeroboam I. However, Jacob’s vow to pay tithes to the stone he erected shares certain historical parallels with the cities of Mari and Emar. Indeed, the cult of stelas, which may have included offerings, was “widely practiced in the second millennium Syria.”¹⁸⁸ This may speak to a genuine memory, a memory that can be placed alongside second millennium historical references yet have been colored with Iron Age features in order to fit the narrator’s point of view.

The “god of the father” described by the northern traditions is not to be confused with the generic term “god.” Indeed, אֱל in the patriarchal narratives suggests that family religion before the monarchy was concerned with Canaanite El. In this respect, the usage of El in theophoric names, and in particular northern sanctuaries, suggests that there was a continuation of El worship in pre monarchic Israel.¹⁸⁹ Frank Moore Cross posits that El “is rarely if ever used in the Bible as the proper name of a non-Israelite, Canaanite deity

187. Ibid., 259.

188. Ibid., 261.

189. Ibid., 261.

in the full consciousness of a distinction between El and Yahweh, god of Israel. This is a most extraordinary datum.”¹⁹⁰ To be sure, Cross is correct, if the Hebrew Bible is interpreted in its final, synchronic sense. Cross views no distinction between Yahweh and El; the two deities are to be identified with one another, especially since Yahweh is identified as the supreme god in Exod 3 and 6. Indeed, given that the final form of the Hebrew Bible is filtered through a Judahite perspective, it is certainly reasonable to envision El and Yahweh together as one and the same god of Israel.

However, that is merely a retrojection on the behalf of later Israelites, historically speaking. If analyzed diachronically, there seems to be a distinction between the two deities. Consider Exod 6:2-3: “God also spoke to Moses and said to him: ‘I am the Lord (יהוה). I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty (אל שדי), but by my name ‘The Lord’ (יהוה) I did not make myself known to them.” In this respect, the scribes who penned this text seem to have remembered a time in Israel’s past when the deity was known as אל שדי, distinct from יהוה. To be sure, the divine name יהוה is mentioned in the patriarchal narratives (Gen 28:13-16), yet as previously mentioned, different traditions, non-P ones, seem to be behind the Yahwistic texts. In fact, Cross seems to be aware of a more primitive form of Israelite religion. According to him:

We should argue that the development of Israel’s cultic themes and institutions was a more complex evolution than is envisaged by either of these schools. In the pre-Yahwistic phase of the religion of the patriarchal folk, we can discern both historical and mythic features On the other hand, there was the cult of Canaanite El, the Divine Patriarch, ‘creator of heaven and earth,’ and leader of cosmic armies. How early these types of deity could merge in the cult of one god we do not know. At all events, these two had coalesced in the figure of Yahweh in the earliest stratum of Israelite tradition.¹⁹¹

190. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 44.

191. *Ibid.*, 89.

In terms of later Israelite religion, Yawheh ascended to the hierarchy of the pantheon, yet that was not the case in pre-monarchical Israel. The usage of the theophoric element El as and the archaeological and topographical instances speaks against El being a generic term in many of the patriarchal narratives.

The nature of El in comparison to Yahweh in early northern traditions will be discussed now. The former dominates the latter in terms of theophoric elements. Israelite names of a particular historical period may be indicative of the religious ideas and beliefs of that period. Indeed, an analysis of the theophoric names from before the monarchy yield important insights into the religious climate of the early central hill country. If van der Toorn is correct, El as a theophoric element outweighs that of Yahweh: “Of the thirty-three theophoric names from the period of the judges attested for the areas of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Benjamin, only seven refer to Yahweh as god; sixteen have the name El as theophoric element.”¹⁹² Statistical analysis of the ancient world should yield caution, to be sure. However, the use of personal names is not the sole criterion; when it is seen in combination with other historical clues, the results point to El as the family god of at least a minority of early Israel.

The local family religion of the central hill country was a continuation of El-type religion. It is correct that El appears to be a generic term for “god” in many instances. Yet in the Late Bronze Age, El functioned as a proper name, which continued to be the case in the Early Iron Age. Bethel (Gen 28:10-22), Irpeel (ירפאל, Josh 18:27), Jabneel (יבנאל,

192. See the statistical results in van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 238.

Josh 19:33), to name but a few examples,¹⁹³ point to El functioning as a proper name. In fact, the El toponyms are mostly pre-Israelite, taken over from a Canaanite religious climate and adapted to Israelite places. They were maintained by early Israel, which indicates El worship. In striking contrast, the name of Yahweh from the Early Iron Age toponyms is absent.¹⁹⁴

Mark S. Smith has pointed out that Ugarit provides the most extensive use of the name El. Indeed, “The texts there attest to the word `il over five hundred times, in its generic use, in the name of the god, or in proper names.”¹⁹⁵ The extant texts derive from the Bronze Age, which have created contention among scholars seeking to locate the cult of El in the Early Iron Age. Van der Toorn, for instance, attributes devotion to El in Iron Age Phoenicia as merely rhetorical¹⁹⁶ while Smith sees El in earliest Israel as distinct from Yahweh. Aside from grammatical objections—El functioning as an appellative or a title for Yahweh—El and Yahweh appear to have distinct traditions pertaining to origin.¹⁹⁷

While it is certainly the case that Yahweh is the chief deity in the Hebrew Bible, and being synonymous with El, this was not the case in earliest Israel. The oldest biblical traditions identify Yahweh as a god in the south. Yahweh is said to hail from Edom, Midian, Teman, Paran, and Sinai. This tradition is attested in Deut 33:2; Judg 5:4-5; Ps

193. See the full list in *ibid.*, 240.

194. *Ibid.*, 241.

195. See Smith, *Origins*, 135.

196. As pointed out by Smith, *Origins*, 137. For van der Toorn, El was gradually replaced by Baal-shamen or Baal-shamayin.

197. *Ibid.*, 140.

68:9, 18; and Hab 3:3. Furthermore, inscriptional sources point to Yahweh's southern provenance in Teman, as attested in Kuntillet `Ajrud inscription.¹⁹⁸ By contrast, El is identified as hailing from northern locations, most extensively in the Ugaritic vicinity and, of course, in Israelite northern traditions. What, then, are we to make of the striking similarities between El and Yahweh? Perhaps the answer to that question lies in the biblical traditions themselves. The evidence for El's cult in the Iron Age is meager, but the Hebrew Bible does provide a window into how the two deities were related in later Israel. C.L. Seow argues for El language and characteristics in the narratives surrounding the cult of Shiloh.¹⁹⁹ In particular, El's heavenly abode described in the Ugaritic texts shares striking similarities with the tent traditions of Shiloh (Ps 78:60; Josh 18:1; 1 Sam 2:22). The divine appearance to Samuel in dreams, the divine gift of a child to Hannah, and the theophoric element El in Elqanah, each contribute to the identification of El's cult in Iron Age Shiloh.²⁰⁰ Moreover, the patriarchal narratives seem to carry genuine memories that El was worshipped by Israel's earliest ancestors.²⁰¹

When and how did Yahweh become Israel's chief deity? Smith points to three hypothetical stages: El was the original deity of early Israel, as witnessed in the theophoric element in the name Israel itself (יִשְׂרָאֵל); El was the head of ancient Israelite

198. *Ibid.*, 140.

199. See Seow, *Myth*, 11-54.

200. *Ibid.*; Smith, *Origins*, 140-41. Smith notes the repeated use of the name El in Psalm 78, a text that describes the fall of the sanctuary at Shiloh.

201. See Gen 33:20; 46:3. Aside from later theological tradition identifying El as Yahweh, the northern traditions surrounding the patriarchs attest to El's dominance. In comparison to the patriarchal narratives, Ugaritic El is described as the patriarchal god and rendered a "similar compassionate disposition toward humanity." (Gen 20:17; Num 12:13). See *ibid.*, 142.

pantheon, with Yahweh functioning as its warrior-god; and finally, El and Yahweh were eventually identified as a single deity, perhaps before the Song of Deborah (Judg 5). This merger may have taken place at different rates in various locations of early Israel.²⁰²

In short, Yahweh's cult gradually moved north into the central highland territories and ascended to the top of the pantheon in what was the pre monarchic era, perhaps not without a struggle, since El's cult was still active in the Early Iron Age. What this indicates, then, is an early memory of El worship in Israel's early religious history. However, the memory itself is clouded with later theological and cultural assumptions. The scribes responsible for the northern traditions surrounding the patriarchs as well as the Deuteronomistic History have colored its earliest history with Iron II characteristics, making it difficult to peel back the most ancient layers of Israel's history. As mentioned previously, cultural memory is inherently social, blending old and new memories together, creating a palimpsest of Israelite history.

In turn, then, the task of this section has been to peel back the pages from Israel's earliest traditions, seeking to establish its resonances with Bronze Age and Early Iron Age precursors. In doing so, the present study has argued for locating the Jacob narrative against the backdrop of early northern, or "Ephraimite," traditions, spanning the 10th-8th centuries BCE. A historical reconstruction such as the above helps view the Jacob traditions alongside other Northwest Semitic cultures. This assists in furnishing a proper historical-critical interpretation, whereby one can envision the earliest roots of Israel that helped shape the Jacob narrative and its religious and cultural aspects through the lens of cultural memory. Being fully cognizant of such a historical reconstruction, though

202. *Ibid.*, 143-45.

provisional, the next section will seek to probe the memories surrounding the Jacob narrative with proper historical-critical methods, sensitive to memory's epistemological underpinnings.

The Literary Fashioning of Memory in the Jacob Narrative

The primary memory to be probed deals with Jacob's journey to Bethel in Gen 28:10-22. It is here where an authentic memory concerning the location of Bethel has been preserved, though not perfectly in a strict historical-critical sense. Indeed, places tend to play a prominent role in the Hebrew Bible, especially in the patriarchal narratives. Yet the remembrance of geographic locations is not particular to ancient Israelites; ancient Greek writers espoused the importance locations tend to play in one's memory. In the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, claiming to be written by Cicero—though it is now believed to be pseudepigraphical²⁰³—the author distinguishes between two kinds of memory: natural and artificial. Natural and artificial memory are discussed in the larger context of the author's discussion of *loci memoriae*, that is, memory pertaining to specific locations. In the author's words:

The natural memory is that memory which is imbedded in our minds, born simultaneously with thought. The artificial memory is that memory which is strengthened by a kind of training and system of discipline. (16.28) The artificial memory includes backgrounds [loci] and images. We can grasp [. . .] for example, a house, an intercolumnar space, a recess, an arch or the like. (16.29) And that we may by no chance err in the number of backgrounds, each fifth background should be marked. For example, [if] in the fifth we should set a golden hand [. . .], it will then be easy to station like marks in each successive fifth background. (18.31)²⁰⁴

203. See Pim Den Boer, "Loci Memoriae—Lieux de Mémoire," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 19-20.

204. As quoted in *ibid.*, 20.

Interestingly, the function of a cultic location in Gen 28 appears to have been the anchor for the fashioning of such a story. Jacob is remembered as setting up a “stone” in 28:18-22 and promising to pay tithes to the sanctuary at Bethel. Jacob’s departure to Bethel was a story that memory held onto yet in peculiar ways: since memory is not concerned with historical-critical sensibilities, Jacob at Bethel was refashioned, transformed, and updated to fit subsequent generations’ cultural and social values. Indeed, this will be displayed below when placed alongside second and first millennium stories and geography—Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic. Coming to terms with the historical data will show what can be known, historically speaking, about Gen 28, that is, what can properly be placed alongside other, ancient historical references from the same period that may shed light on the Bethel narrative. This is not to test whether the story is historically accurate; but rather to engage memory’s foundations and see what the author(s) remembered and did not remember, what sort of function memory plays in such a story.

Our analysis of Gen 28:10-22, I will argue, brings forward several conclusions. First, because of the nature of orality and memory in the ancient Near East, specifically during the late Iron Age (830-586 BCE), the present state of Gen 28:10-22 contains features of a combination of both literary and historical nuances. Second, rather than subscribing to one hypothesis (fragmentary, supplementary, or documentary), it is more appropriate to entertain the possibility of each hypothesis being employed. It is reasonable to assume that in writing down texts, particularly narrative prose texts, different scribes used different methods. Third, and this is the lens through which we will analyze our text, orality and memory were the primary sources upon which scribes depended for the composition of Jacob’s divine encounter. Orality and memory, as they

seem fit, are exactly the reasons that we should allow for all three of the above hypotheses.²⁰⁵ Indeed, the multivalent nature of Gen 28:10-22 is the result of these combinations.

The story of Jacob at Bethel reads as follows:

וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעַר שֹׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חֲרָנָה: וַיִּפְגַּע בְּמָקוֹם וַיִּלֶן שָׁם כִּי־בָא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וַיִּשָּׂם מִרְאֲשֵׁיתָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב בְּמָקוֹם הַהוּא: וַיַּחְלֶם וְהִנֵּה סֶלֶם מַצֵּב אֲרָצָה וְרֹאשׁוֹ מִגִּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְהַנְּהַל מִלְּאֲנֵי אֱלֹהִים עֲלִים וַיִּרְדּוּ בּוֹ: וְהִנֵּה יְהוָה נֹצֵב עָלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹרָהֶם אָבִיךָ וְאַלֹהֵי יִצְחָק הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אִתָּה שָׁכַב עָלֶיךָ לֹךְ אֶתְנַנְּה וּלְזוֹרְעֶךָ: וְהִנֵּה זָרְעֶךָ כַּעֲפָר הָאָרֶץ וּפְרֻצֹתָ יָמָה וְקִדְמָה וְצָפֹנָה וְנִגְבָּה וּנְבָרְכוּ בְּךָ כָּל־מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאֲדָמָה וּבְזוֹרְעֶךָ: וְהִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי עִמָּךְ וְשָׁמַרְתִּיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־תֵּלֵךְ וְהִשְׁבַּתִּיךָ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת כִּי לֹא אֶעֱזָבְךָ עַד אֲשֶׁר אִסַּעֲשִׂיתִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּרְתִּי לָךְ: וַיִּיקָץ יַעֲקֹב וַיַּעֲקֹב מִשְׁנֵתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אָכֹן יֵשׁ יְהוָה בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי: וַיִּירָא וַיֹּאמֶר מִה־נִּזְרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה אֵין זֶה כִּי אִם־בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים וְזֶה שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם: וַיִּשְׁפֹּם יַעֲקֹב בְּבֹקֶר וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאֲבָנִים אֲשֶׁר־שָׂם מִרְאֲשֵׁיתָיו וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתָהּ מִצְבֵּה וַיִּצַק שָׁמֶן עַל־רֹאשָׁהּ: וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא בַּיִת־אֵל וְאוּלָם לְזוֹ שֵׁם־הָעִיר לְרֹאשְׁנָהּ: וַיִּזְרַר יַעֲקֹב גִּדְרָא אֶמֶר אִם־יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי וְשָׁמְרָנִי בַדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ וְנִתְּנֹלִי לְחֶם לֶאֱכֹל וּבְגָד לְלַבֵּשׁ: וְשָׁבַתִּי בְשָׁלוֹם אֶל־בַּיִת אָבִי וְהִנֵּה יְהוָה לִי לְאֱלֹהִים: וְהָאֲבָן הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר־שָׂמְתִי מִצְבֵּה יְהוָה בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר תִּתְּנֹלִי עֲשׂוֹר אֶעֱשֶׂרְנוּ לָךְ

Jacob departed Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and spent the night there, since the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he placed it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed. And look! There was a ladder set up on the earth, the head of it reaching to the heavens; and look! The angels of Elohim were ascending and descending on it. And look! Yahweh stood beside him and said, “I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. And behold! I will be with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have fulfilled what I have promised you.” Then Jacob arose from his sleep and said, “Certainly Yahweh is in this place, and I did not know it!” And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of Elohim, and this is the gate of the heavens.”

Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had placed under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He named that place Bet-El; but the original name of the city was Luz. Then Jacob made a

205. For a plea for the use of all three hypotheses see Reinhard G. Kratz, “The Analysis of the Pentateuch.” *ZAW* 128 (2016): 529-61. Furthermore, for the sake of clarity and the present state of pentateuchal scholarship, I will use the nomenclature non-P for those texts that do not seem to fit the common traits of a Priestly author or school. See Kratz, “The Analysis of the Pentateuch,” 529-61; Carr, *Fractures*; Dozeman and Schmid, *A Farewell to the Yahwist?*; Reinhard Gregor Kratz, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005); Ska, *Pentateuch*.

vow, saying, “If Elohim will be with me, and will protect me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I return again to my father’s house in peace, then Yahweh shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be the house of Elohim; and of all that you give me, I shall give one-tenth to you.”²⁰⁶

When read in relation to the surrounding chapters (27 and 29), Gen 28:10-22 acts as a bridge or midpoint for Jacob’s journey to Laban. Genesis 28:1-5 contains Isaac’s blessing and command to go and obtain a wife from Paddan-Aram due to Rebekah’s fear that Jacob might find a wife among the Hittite women (27:46). Moreover, 28:1-5 follows directly after 27:46, and both are therefore interlocked with each other. Verses 6-9 provides background information for Esau’s troubled resentment concerning his brother Jacob. The reason for Esau’s anger is that Isaac had just blessed Jacob (apparently for the second time [cf. 27:27-29]). Verses 6-7, 8 contain two reflections by Esau, introduced by וירא עשו. The first reflection summarizes Isaac’s command to Jacob while the second seems to indicate Esau’s acknowledgment of his causing his parent’s grief (26:35). In order to make up for his wrongdoing, Esau marries one of his relatives, Mahalath, daughter of Ishmael, son of Abraham (verses 8-9). What comes next is the famous Jacob at Bethel scene in which our character, Jacob, encounters the divine through a dream. Throughout verses 10-22, we get a glimpse of what will be provided to Jacob (the promises that Abraham and Isaac also received, and divine protection). Moreover, just like Abraham, Jacob sets up an altar or pillar for the deity (28:18; 12:8). In the final scene of the Bethel narrative, Jacob makes a vow, וידר נדר, to the deity for protection on his way back to his father’s house (בית אבי, 20-22).

206. Translation mine.

To better understand the narrative before us, it is necessary to analyze the literary and historical features of Gen 28:10-22. According to David Carr and others,²⁰⁷ 28:10-22, belonging to a non-P tradition, contains evidence of multiple layers and signs of redaction. In particular, the divine promises in verses 13-15 are not part of the original story but have been secondarily added. One reason for this secondary insertion is that the author(s) wished to connect the Jacob tradition with the Abraham tradition, providing a parallel story with Gen 13:14-17, where Lot and Abraham parted ways. Just as the divine promises were revealed to Jacob after his separation from Esau, so too they were revealed to Abraham after his departure from Lot (13:14-17).²⁰⁸ What is more is that later, in Gen 31:13, the Jacob tradition does not seem to be aware of the divine promises but only the vow that Jacob made (וַיִּדַר נָדָר, 28:20-22). One could argue that the promises are original to the story, yet then we must reckon with Jacob's vow in verses 20-22, which seems to be in tension with the divine promises.²⁰⁹

In addition to the above issues, Jacob's response to the divine promises in verses 12-15 has two parts: 28:16 mentions Yahweh, connecting it to verses 13-15; 28:17 mentions "Elohim" and the "gate of heaven," connecting it to verse 12. Thus 28:16 belongs with verses 13-15, while 28:17 belongs with verse 12. In a way, then, it seems as though we have two competing traditions at play: a dream in which Jacob encounters the מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים and another encountering Yahweh. All of this may further suggest the notion that

207. Carr, *Fractures*, 204-6; Hong; "The Deceptive Pen of Scribes"; Rendtorff, *Problem*, 54; Kratz, *Composition*, 268-69.

208. For an alternative view see Van Seters, "Divine Encounter at Bethel (Gen 28,10-22) in Recent Literary-Critical Study of Genesis," *ZAW* 110 (1998): 503-13.

209. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 316-17.

28:13-16 belongs to a strand that was secondarily inserted while 28:11-12, 17-18 are part of the earliest layer.²¹⁰ Advocates of the Documentary Hypothesis view these data as evidence for two parallel sources intertwined with each other. The vision of the angels with Elohim belongs to E while the promises (verses 13-16) belong to J.²¹¹ Yet what argues against this interpretation is that there is no parallel J or E story of Jacob at Bethel before or after 28:10-22.²¹² Claus Westermann argues on literary-critical grounds that verses 10-12, 16-19, form an independent unit on their own without the insertions of verses 13-15. Thus this gives one the impression that Gen 28:10-22 contains features of early and late material.²¹³

Literary problems aside, Gen 28:10-22 contains historical complexities as well. Since Jacob is considered one of Israel's main patriarchal figures, he is therefore placed alongside the other patriarchal traditions.²¹⁴ Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all placed in a time, historically speaking, before the monarchy and therefore before written narratives about them were formed. Yet at the same time, Gen 28:10-22 has traces of a later period, one during the monarchal Age. As pointed out earlier, our story (or parts of it) may have been written down between the eighth and sixth centuries BCE. Ronald Hendel, commenting on the Jacob tradition, states: "the second-millennium homeland takes on a

210. Car, *Fractures*, 207.

211. Baden, *Composition*, 71, 230-45; O'Brien and Campbell, *Sources*, 112, 170; McEvenue, "A Return to Sources," 375-89.

212. Car, *Fractures*, 208, 269; Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 30n.93; Westermann, *Genesis*, 530-31. Gen 35:1-15 describes a similar story about Jacob's journey to Bethel. Yet even here one can see the hands of P; see Hendel, *Cultural Memory*, 33-46.

213. Westermann, *Genesis*, 453.

214. Whether the Jacob tradition was originally separate from the Abraham and Isaac traditions does not matter at this point, simply because the traditions as we now have them have been connected.

first-millennium ethnic coloring.”²¹⁵ This “first-millennium ethnic coloring” is one of the major signs that speak of a historical retention among Israelite scribes.

The final redactor of Gen 28:10-22, as detailed in Nahum Sarna’s commentary on Genesis, provided a coherent framework amidst the literary chaos. For instance, in order to account for Isaac’s forgetting that Jacob stole the blessing from Esau, verses 6-9—attributed to P—clean up this mess by casting the latter in a negative light, thereby lifting the blame from Jacob.²¹⁶ Perhaps the greatest literary theme holding this unit of texts together is verses 13-16. Here the divine promise is granted to Jacob, and Yahweh, instead of El, is the initiator. According to Sarna, if Jacob had known that Yahweh was going to reveal himself, he would not have treated the site of Bethel with profanity.²¹⁷ In the ancient Near East, people would sleep in the precincts of the temple in order for the deity to reveal its will. However, Jacob does not do this. The story is much more mundane: Jacob just happens to stumble upon Bethel (or “Luz”) because he finds himself exhausted. Sarna views polemical motives behind Gen 28:10-22 in that P/non-P attempts to conceal all idolatrous characteristics.²¹⁸ Thus the present story is indicative of later theological and literary refashioning, an attempt to suppress the much older material behind Jacob’s arrival at Bethel. Nevertheless, Gen 28:10-22 is a confluence of traditions, P and non-P.

How do we account for the literary and historical issues embedded in our narrative? I argue that Gen 28:10-22 was written down during a time when orality and memory were

215. Ibid., 42.

216. See Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 196.

217. Ibid., 198-99.

218. Ibid., 199.

the primary sources for the formation and passing on of stories. This seems to be the case for the very simple reason that our evidence of narrative prose, written in a vernacular language, does not appear in the historical record until at least the ninth century BCE.²¹⁹ In fact, we should expect such complexities in the narrative prose of Gen 28:10-22. If it is plausible to view early traditions of the second millennium BCE contained in this story—while the narrative itself was written down hundreds of years later—then it is also understandable why our story contains inconsistencies, contradictions, narrative disruptions, and secondary insertions. Since many years had passed between the oral formation and the written account, the scribal culture would have been working with multiple sources of Jacob at Bethel—sources located in a time before the rise of Hebrew narrative prose.

Divergent Traditions

Memory in a time of orality functioned in various and diverse ways. One can see this not just in the Hebrew Bible but in the Jacob tradition. The ways in which the biblical writers recalled the past through writing manifests itself in what some biblical scholars call “mnemohistory.”²²⁰ Unlike history in the modern sense, mnemohistory is concerned with the past as it is remembered. It can be likened to a recycled past, one in which a culture or community recalls the past for its present realities. In other words, the act of recalling the past is for the use of the present. This is, in fact, what some of the scribes accomplished when composing Jacob at Bethel in the form of narrative prose. One of the clearest

219. Schniedewind, *How The Bible Became a Book*, 38; Pioske, *Memory in the Time of Prose*, 34-35; Whisenant, *Let the Stones Speak!*, 152-57.

220. Hendel, *Cultural Memory*, 32. For more on memory in the patriarchal narratives see Hendel’s *Remembering Abraham*, 31-55.

examples of mnemohistory in Gen 28:10-22 is how the story remembers the ancient site of Bethel.

In the biblical material, Bethel was remembered as an ancient religious shrine. It was once home to the Ark of the Covenant (Judg 20:27). Geographically it was once part of the northern territory of ancient Israel, and it was settled, along with other northern territories, already in the Iron I Age (1200-1000 BCE).²²¹ Bethel was possibly home to the ancient deity El, who was the head of the Canaanite pantheon. There may have been a temple dedicated to him as well (אל־בית).²²² In addition, the ways in which Bethel is portrayed in Gen 28:10-22 are reminiscent of a pre-Israelite shrine. Along with the אל־בית, we encounter the מלאכי אלהים, who may be like the divine messengers at home in the Canaanite pantheon.²²³ The anointing of a stone is also an archaic trait used by cultures to mark borders or sacred sites. The stains of the oil would have been evidence for the marking of such a sacred site.²²⁴ Moreover, Bethel prospered mainly in the Iron I and Iron IIB, and it is possible that there was scribal activity at this location sometime during the eighth century.²²⁵

221. Israel Finkelstein and Thomas Römer, "Comments on the Historical Background of the Jacob Narrative in Genesis," *ZAW* 126 (2014): 317-38; Erhard Blum, "The Jacob Tradition," in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Joel N. Lohr (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 181-211; and for possible other patriarchal sites tied to historical location see William Foxwell Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (NY: Doubleday, 1957), 236-37.

222. Hendel, *Cultural Memory*, 44; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 44.

223. Hendel, *Epic* 64.

224. *Ibid.*, 66-67.

225. Finkelstein and Römer, "Comments on the Historical Background," 327.

In this pericope, the biblical scribes have fashioned a memory of the patriarchal homeland, where Jacob must travel to find a wife. The location that Jacob was told to journey was Haran (verse 10 [J]; cf. verse 2 [P]) since it was here that Jacob could marry within his tribe. During the Middle Bronze Age, Haran was an important place where the Yaminites would meet.²²⁶ Sacred treaties between a confederation of tribes were also completed at this location. Yet it has been argued that the references to Haran stem from the exilic or post exilic era, placing Gen 28 in a much later time period. However, based on other references to tribal homelands in the Hebrew Bible,²²⁷ Gen 28 may preserve an authentic memory hailing from the Middle Bronze Age. Indeed, Jacob's journey to Haran may preserve vestiges of ancient tribal memories that harken back to the Amorite tribal culture of the early second millennium.

Yet during the Late Bronze Age, the major vicinities surrounding Haran were largely abandoned. Near the end of this era, the major areas witnessed the influx of the Arameans. In the Hebrew Bible, the Arameans are typically depicted as Israel's enemies, and this is clear in Jacob's encounter with Laban, "the Aramean." This mistrust and rivalry between the two groups stems from the Iron Age, when Aramean kings captured various Israelite territories in the ninth century.²²⁸ In striking contrast, the Hebrew Bible calls Jacob a "wandering Aramean" (Deut 26:5), which contradicts a Late Bronze Age setting. In this sense, the Israelite enemy is also a friend. Thus embedded in these texts are early memories that have been reshaped and readapted to fit an Iron Age setting.

226. Haran was also prominent throughout the Iron Age.

227. Am 9:7 seems to be aware that the Philistines originated from Crete (Caphtor).

228. 1 Kgs 20, 22; 2 Kgs 8-13.

It is necessary to consider the Bethel narrative's northern background in light of the above results and its transformation. For instance, Marvin Sweeney has argued that the Jacob narrative is a reflection on Israel's encounter with Aram and Edom in the ninth and eighth centuries.²²⁹ Yet in its final form, it bears the marks of southern reworkings, straddling the lines of older and newer material—a distinctive characteristic of memory's trappings.²³⁰ Sweeney argues that scholars must realize that the redacted Jacob tradition is framed by narratives that place Jacob in the vicinity of Philistia and Judah, "thereby serving Judean interests."²³¹ Hong Koog Pyoung, in a similar vein, views Judeans reappropriating the Jacob narrative after the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (722 BCE).²³² This sort of literary reappropriation is not unique to Israel, though. For Assyria had done something similar to Babylon, as played out in the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic (circa mid-fourteenth century-thirteenth century BCE).²³³

Memory's epistemological biases are clear in Gen 28:10-22. In a time when the Northern Kingdom did not stand, Judean scribes were faced with a cultural conundrum: how must Israel's earliest traditions be appropriated, especially since they did not always conform with later theological and ideological beliefs? Perhaps one of the greatest cultural and literary achievements by southern scribes was their reworking of the northern

229. See Marvin A. Sweeney, "The Jacob Narratives: An Ephraimitic Text?," *CBQ* 78 (2016): 236–55.

230. So Hong Koog Pyoung, "The Deceptive Pen of Scribes: Judean Reworking of the Bethel Tradition as a Program for Assuming Israelite Identity," *Biblica* 92 (2011): 427–41; and Nadav Na'aman, "The Israelite-Judahite Struggle for the Patrimony of Ancient Israel," *Biblica* 91 (2010): 1–23.

231. Sweeney, "The Jacob Narratives," 252.

232. Pyoung, "The Deceptive Pen of Scribes," 433-34.

233. See the analysis and arguments in Machinist, "Literature as Politics: The Tukulti-Ninurta Epic and the Bible," *CBQ* 38 (1976): 455–82.

traditions, which is to say that they were able to take hold of much older stories—such as the Jacob traditions—and make them their own. After arising from his deep sleep, Yahweh appears to Jacob as an unknown deity, in striking contrast to the surrounding narrative which mentions El/Beth-El. Moreover, Jacob’s vow (verses 21-22) is not in line with the divine promises in verses 13-16. In short, there appears to be two layers of tradition at play in Gen 28:10-22, a northern and southern layer. The earliest layer possibly derives from the ninth-eighth century, while the second layer originates from eighth-sixth century scribal hands.

Perhaps the notion of a shared identity already common to Israel and Judah is taken for granted. Rightly so. The final form of the Hebrew Bible is, to be sure, polished with a Judean pen and therefore attempts to get behind this Judean coloring are necessary in order to arrive at the early northern traditions. Source criticism posits that Israel’s epic material—J and E—were combined after the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (circa 722 BCE). In broad terms, J belonged to a southern sphere of scribes while the latter derived from the northern area.²³⁴ Though the two geographic locations are not far from each other, as already indicated above, the two camps of traditions differed in terms of theology and ideology, and thus one should be cautious when discussing “Israel” and “Judah.”

Pyoung laments the fact that redaction critics have given insufficient attention to the transitional period (722-587 BCE) “between the northern Israelite layer and the southern exilic layer.”²³⁵ The fall of Samaria provided a unique opportunity for Judeans to reconceptualize their identity, and grafting the northern traditions into their own corpus of

234. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth*.

235. Pyoung, “The Deceptive Pen of Scribes,” 436.

literature was an essential component in “establishing a counter-memory to overcome the pre-existing memory.”²³⁶ Perhaps because source and redaction criticism are concerned with literary texts, it is difficult to articulate the oral precursors to such texts. However, since the present study seeks to peel back the layers of the Hebrew Bible’s earliest traditions, so to speak, it is essential to separate early from late material.

Nadav Na’aman has offered a compelling case for the “Israelite-Judahite Struggle for the Patrimony of Ancient Israel.”²³⁷ The name “Israel,” according to Na’aman, did not extend to both kingdoms, but it became appropriated by the two groups after the annexation of the kingdom of Israel by the Assyrian empire in 720 BCE.²³⁸ He describes the scholarly dilemma lucidly:

The Bible describes the people of Israel as a single entity, from the time of its emergence as nation in Egypt, the wanderings through the desert and the conquest of Canaan, to its peak during the United Monarchy, when all twelve tribes were included within the unifying political, religious and cultural bounds of the monarchy. Although the name ‘Israel’ was associated for about two hundred years only with the Northern Kingdom, while the kingdom to its south was called by a different name, for many years scholars assumed that the notion of unity had been preserved throughout the long period of the monarchical division. The names ‘Israel’ and ‘Israelites’ were therefore extended to the early history of Israel and the United Monarchy, as well as to the Kingdom of Judah and its inhabitants throughout the monarchical period and beyond.²³⁹

The above statement by Na’aman regarding the historical “Israel” is not new; it was already argued by P.R. Davies in the 1990s.²⁴⁰ Yet the explanation to this historical enigma

236. Ibid., 436.

237. Na’aman, “Israelite-Judahite Struggle.”

238. Ibid., 1. See also Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 68-90; Kratz, *Composition*, 181-82, 209, 218-19, 304-306, 309-19.

239. Na’aman, “Israelite-Judahite Struggle,” 1.

240. P. Davies, *The Origins of Biblical Israel*, LHBOTS 485 (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 1-24.

between the two scholars is different in that the former arrives at his conclusion in a much more different way than the latter.

It must be stressed that the dichotomy between Israel and Judah is much more complex than a northern/southern divide. Depending on how one defines identity in ancient Israel, there appears to be plenty of overlap between both northern and southern traditions. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are linked to each other, at least in terms of a purely synchronic reading of the Genesis narratives. Yet from the analysis above (the texts in Samuel and Gen 28:10-22), there are differences. Differences in terms of conceiving the nature of the deity and the divine promises. While there may not be a strict division between Israel and Judah, there are, to be sure, variations among the material.

Scholarly divergences aside, the main point is that, historically speaking, many early northern traditions may have been absorbed by Judahite scribes and transformed into something new. Indeed, the later history of Israel (post-722 BCE) was projected upon the early history of ancient Israel. Support for this argument is found in the Hebrew Bible's historiographical accounts themselves. For instance, during the 8th-century, the relationship between Israel and Judah was not on equal standing, as witnessed in the battles between the two kingdoms. During the reign of Joash of Israel and Amaziah of Judah, and that of Pekah of Israel and Ahaz of Judah, the two kingdoms engaged in two battles.²⁴¹ It should not be assumed that Israel and Judah always thought of themselves as equal partners, especially in terms of politics, since both were preoccupied by external desires to expand and build their respective kingdoms. The assumption that both parties were always

241. Na'aman, "Israelite-Judahite Struggle," 2-3.

identified as “Israel” may not hold historical weight and should therefore be taken with great caution.

Prior to its annexation by Tiglath-pileser III in 733/32 BCE, the Northern Kingdom of Israel held considerable superiority over Judah by various means. The historical evidence is manifested in the domain of statehood: “population, urbanization, monumental architecture, administration, and economy and trade.”²⁴² Indeed, this is already attested in the Mesha Stele, in which a distinct Hebrew script is employed by those under Israelite hegemony. Moreover, most of Palestine’s territory was incorporated into Israel’s territory (the Gilead, parts of Mishor, the upper and lower Galilee, the Jordan Valley, Jezreel and Bethshean, the central hill country, and the northern Shephelah).²⁴³

The Northern Kingdom, by contrast to the Southern Kingdom, was characterized by a much more diverse population. Once again, Na’aman summarizes this historical feature nicely:

The Northern Kingdom was a multifaceted state, comprising a heterogeneous population of diversified ethnic origin and cultic and cultural traditions, including many descendants of the former Canaanite population. No wonder, therefore, that it absorbed many religious concepts and cultic and cultural elements of Canaanite origin. Moreover, Israel bordered culturally influential kingdoms such as Aram Damascus and Tyre, and gradually absorbed cultic and cultural elements from its neighbors. Judah, on the other hand, was demographically quite homogenous, made up of settled local groups with pastoral roots. It was much more isolated, having a common border with only the two continental Philistine kingdoms of Ekron and Gath. Well until the 8th century, it lagged in all aspects of state organization and urban culture far behind its northern neighbour.²⁴⁴

242. Ibid., 14.

243. See *ibid.*, 14 for the entire list. Na’aman further notes that various territories occupied by Judah were scarcely populated until the late 9th century BCE. *Ibid.*, 15.

244. *Ibid.*, 15.

Furthermore, it was not until the 8th century that Judah came of age, as it were, and stronger systems of settlements began to emerge.²⁴⁵

The above historical situation changed significantly after Assyria's withdrawal from the Syro-Palestinian vicinity in the late 7th-century BCE. Judah's political status, however, remained intact, while Assyria's stronghold and internal cohesion may have broken down. This event spawned the Judahite king Josiah's (639-609 BCE) expansion northward in the highlands, with no resistance. Strikingly, Josiah's "reform" described in 2 Kgs 23:15-18 details his expansion to Bethel.

Josiah's religious reform bears importance for not only Judean absorption of Northern Israel but of the Jacob tradition as well. The inclusion of Bethel and its surrounding region into the district system of Judah fits well in the time period of Assyria's withdrawal from Syro-Palestine rather than in reigns Ahaz or Manasseh.²⁴⁶ This is highly plausible since it makes no historical sense for an Assyrian king to have handed over such an important administrative and cultic center to a "neighbouring vassal kingdom as a reward for loyalty."²⁴⁷ Arguing in a similar vein with that of Machinist, Na'aman views this historical shift in power—*Kulturkampf*—as bearing affinities with Tukulti-Ninurta I's subjugation of Babylon:

Following the Assyrian withdrawal from Palestine and the new political opportunities opened up before the kingdom of Judah, Josiah expanded northward and conquered several Israelite territories, conducted cult reform in his kingdom, and eliminated what was considered and 'Assyrian' cult — namely, one that contemporaries associated with the Assyrian empire. The creation of a new ethnic-religious-cultural identity for the inhabitants of Judah fits in well the objects of

245. Ibid., 16.

246. See Knauf, "Bethel."

247. Na'aman, "Israelite-Judahite Struggle," 19.

reform. Thus, the appropriation of the patrimony of the former kingdom of Israel as part of the formation of a new identity might be regarded as an integral part of the reform. To gain control of the Israelite heritage, Josiah may have plundered scrolls deposited in the temple of Bethel, just as Tukulti-Ninurta I and Ashurbanipal seized the scholarly tablets of Babylon. This may explain how the scrolls of Amos and Hosea, as well as historiographical works such as the story cycle of Jacob, the pre-Deuteronomistic 'Book of the Saviours', and a number of prophetic stories may have reached the court of Jerusalem. These works, which originally used the name 'Israel' to refer only to the Northern Kingdom, were later reworked and incorporated into the histories composed by Judahite scribes, in which 'Israel' appears in its new ethnic-religious connotation.²⁴⁸

It is plausible, based on the above analysis, that "Israel" may be understood first and foremost as relating to the Northern Kingdom, and only secondarily to Judah. It was not until post-722 BCE that the northern traditions were reworked and rearticulated by Judean scribes, transforming Israel's earliest narratives through the realm of cultural memory, into something new. Furthermore, the above analysis will provide a helpful historical basis for locating Judean reworkings contained in the Bethel narrative as found in Gen 28:10-22.

The Entanglements of Memory in Gen 28:10-22

David Carr recalls that Gen 28:13-16 has affinities with Abraham's journey in 13:14-16. Both passages describe the parting of ways between kindred before traveling to a dangerous place.²⁴⁹ Genesis 28:13-16 acts as a bridge to carry on the notion that Abraham and Jacob share the same divine plan and worship the same deity. Diachronically, they differ; but synchronically, one must not be read without the other.²⁵⁰ In other words, these two traditions developed along divergent trajectories, each with distinct theological and

248. Ibid., 20; Machinist, "Literature as Politics," 478-82; Hong, "The Deceptive Pen of Scribes," 436-41.

249. Carr, *Fractures*, 180-83.

250. See a succinct narrative analysis of the patriarchal narratives in Kratz, *Composition*, 260, 263-64, 269.

ideological views; but when the Northern Kingdom fell, a circle of southern Israelite scribes took the former on as their own, layering the Bethel story with Abrahamic features that fit the overall scheme of the patriarchal promises.

Nevertheless, in the realm of cultural memory, such literary reworking is normative. This is in striking contrast to modern historical-critical sensibilities, in which objective history is pursued, casting aside presumptions that might impede on the historian's rational account of what occurred in the past. Genesis 28:10-22 is one possible case study that exhibits how individuals construct their identities "on the basis of the recollected memories."²⁵¹ Numerous literary texts portray how communities remember their past by reshaping and transforming it. In such cases, this involves forgetting. Forgetting is not to be viewed in a negative light. Quite the opposite. Forgetting allows room for new, fresh understandings of what once was in a culture's past. Ancient texts that were produced in an oral and literary climate bear the marks of such forgetfulness, for the knowledge innate in memory is open to revision. Commenting on the literary representation of memory, Birgit Neumann states:

Such texts highlight that our memories are highly selective, and that the rendering of memories potentially tells us more about the rememberer's present, his or her desire and denial, than about the actual past events. This is particularly true for cultural memories because they involve intentional fashioning to a greater extent than do individual memories. Hence, literary fictions disseminate influential models of both individual and cultural memories as well as of the nature and functions of memory.²⁵²

251. See Birgit Neumann, "The Literary Representation of Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 333-34.

252. *Ibid.*, 333.

Literature can make the contingencies of memory and identity its object of study, because literature is “closely interwoven with the thematic complex of memory and identity.”²⁵³

Highly possible is the notion of Judean scribes reshaping the Bethel narrative in order not only to cope with the loss of the Northern Kingdom but also to reconstruct their identity, one that subsumes the northern traditions and makes them their own. Since the Northern Kingdom was home to various traditions and prominent cultic sites (Bethel, Shiloh, Dan, etc.), southern scribes may have felt compelled to subsume such formidable aspects of the former’s history and place them alongside their particular traditions. It must be remembered that memory is inherently social, meaning that individuals remember on the basis of a shared assemblage of linguistic and thematic characteristics.²⁵⁴ As such, northern historical particularities that can be gleaned from the Jacob narrative were clothed with a southern perspective, so to speak, in order to justify subsuming these stories.

The southern Judeans reconceptualized their role as the new Israel.²⁵⁵ Such historical reshaping was, perhaps, already anticipated in Assyrian epic material. Peter Machinist argues that the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic is a literary epic that sought to justify Tukulti-Ninurta’s sacking of Babylon and its king Kaštiliaš (circa 13th-century BCE).²⁵⁶ After a turbulent war with Babylon, Assyria arose the victor. Initially, however, prior to the thirteenth century, Assyria was the lesser of the two Mesopotamian kingdoms. The sphere of

253. *Ibid.*, 333.

254. See Halbwachs *On Collective Memory*; A. Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1386–1403; Hendel, *Remembering Abraham*; Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*; Y. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*.

255. Pyoung, “The Deceptive Pen of Scribes,” 440.

256. Machinist, “Literature as Politics,” 457-58.

power shifted with the rise of Aššur-uballit, placing Babylon under Assyrian hegemony.²⁵⁷

What is striking about this epic is how Assyria's relationship with Babylon is portrayed.

The reason for the downfall of Babylon, at least how it is portrayed in the epic, is due to the gods' disappointment and anger with Kaštiliaš. The ending of the epic comes in column VI and purports to describe the Babylonian defeat, its sacking, and the taking of the spoils from the temple. The spoils are then taken to Tukulti-Ninurta, and he dedicates them to the gods of Assyria. The epic constantly casts Kaštiliaš in a negative manner while Tukulti-Ninurta is viewed favorably. This is apparent from the beginning of the story as the first section of the epic glorifies Tukulti-Ninurta at the expense of Kaštiliaš.²⁵⁸

The most striking feature, though, lies in the epic's subsuming of traditions from the Sumero-Babylonian south. The language of the epic is Babylonian and the "poet" behind the composition "favors extended and often complicated parallelism of lines, likewise frequent in southern literary texts, both Sumerian and Akkadian."²⁵⁹ Parallel to the political struggle was the cultural issue, which Machinist describes as *Kulturkampf*.²⁶⁰ *Kulturkampf*, as played out in the epic, is the inherent struggle between Assyria and Babylon, that is, the struggle the former had with subsuming the cultural and religious conceptions of the latter. Assyria came to dominate over Babylon, taking over its distinctive theological and ideological views. Not only did Assyria sack Babylon, but it transferred its literary heritage, and its gods, to the capital of Assyria. In essence, Assyria

257. Ibid., 468.

258. Ibid., 459.

259. Ibid., 461.

260. Ibid., 470.

became “the new center of Mesopotamian culture,” and it established Assur as the “new Babylon.”²⁶¹ Not only do the southern gods abandon their southern home to relocate to Tukulti-Ninurta’s kingdom, but further on, they guide him back to claim their home. The force of all this is perhaps seen most clearly in the epithet “Assyrian Enlil,” the explicit title of Aššur.²⁶²

Machinist finds political motives behind such rhetoric. The strongest indicator for this is the audience of the epic. It cannot have been written to the Babylonians, for the story lauds the victory over them. Furthermore, no copy of the epic has been found in the south. The audience, therefore, must be the Assyrians, specifically the cultural and religious elites, namely the priestly hierarchy based in Assur. Overall, the epic was directed at those who opposed Tukulti-Ninurta’s sacking of Babylon and the ushering in of the foreign deities. It was written, perhaps primarily, to win over those Assyrians who were unhappy with their Assyrian overlord. In short, the epic is characteristic of the political motivations behind literature, essentially “created to explain and justify major political and cultural shifts.”²⁶³

Literature in this sense is part and parcel of some of the narratives contained in the Hebrew Bible. Genesis 28:10-22 bears resemblance to the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic in that both texts take older traditions and fuse them together with their own, and this is done under the auspices of memory. Scribes in the Iron Age who employed oral and written sources were faced with a type of knowledge in which the old and the new coalesced, creating a palimpsest of narratives. Narratives do not merely “imitate existing versions of memory,

261. *Ibid.*, 471.

262. *Ibid.*, 472.

263. *Ibid.*, 475, 478.

but produce, in the act of discourse, that very past which they purport to describe.”²⁶⁴ In a sense, Jacob’s encounter with Yahweh at Bethel provides new insights, through the enactment of literary refashionings, of a new memory. On the textual level, narratives create new vistas of memory. They select and edit features of culture to fit present realities: “they combine the real and the imaginary, the remembered and the forgotten, and, by means of narrative devices, imaginatively explore the workings of memory, thus offering new perspectives on the past.”²⁶⁵ The result gleaned from the Bethel narrative is a new perspective on the past, reconfigured and reshaped by later Israelite scribes.

To be sure, the analogy borrowed from Machinist is not perfect. The Assyrian epic is largely characterized by political motivations, written under the guise of propaganda. The Hebrew Bible is not entirely concerned with such motivations, but rather theological issues loom much larger. It does, however, offer an example of how older traditions and stories can be subsumed by later groups to justify particular ends.

Much like their overlords in the ninth-seventh centuries, Judah subsumed the traditions of northern Israel and made them their own, crafting a new memory, as it were. It is apparent that the Judean scribes—possibly P, or a variant of non-P (J, in some circles)—who reworked the Bethel tradition employed sources that contained early Iron Age attributes. The modern site of Bēṭīn has yielded archaeological information regarding the ancient site of Bethel.²⁶⁶ Although it was once argued that Bethel flourished during the Neo-Babylonian and Persian era, that is not the case because Bethel prospered in the Iron I

264. Neumann, “The Literary Representation of Memory,” 334.

265. Ibid., 334-35. See also Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

266. See the archaeological summary below.

and Iron IIB periods, according to Israel Finkelstein.²⁶⁷ This conclusion dovetails nicely with Gen 28:10-22 as the setting appears to be placed against the background of the second millennium,²⁶⁸ but also containing traces of a first millennium setting. The mention of “Haran” in verse 10, as argued by Finkelstein, would seem to fit well with a sixth century frame of reference, since it speaks to Assyria’s hold of that location.²⁶⁹

Archaeologically speaking, the modern site of Bētīn provides an excellent case study for the epistemological and historical entanglements of memory and locations. That is to say, those traditions in the Jacob narrative that remember Bethel do so in a way that bears the marks of knowledge that is accumulative and volatile, not wedded to a single historical era. Thus an archaeological analysis of Bētīn deserves attention.

Israel Finkelstein and Lily Singer-Avitz²⁷⁰ have provided an extensive reevaluation of Bethel in contrast to earlier archaeological excavations carried out under W.F. Albright²⁷¹ and J.L. Kelso.²⁷² The main differences in the recent analysis lie in chronology: for Albright and Kelso, Bethel’s history is described as continuous, with roughly no period of sparsity until the Hellenistic era; yet Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz propose that Bethel’s

267. See Finkelstein and Römer, “Comments on the Historical Background,” 325-26.

268. For a nuanced view of second millennium features having relevance for the patriarchal narratives, see Daniel E. Fleming, *Democracy’s Ancient Ancestors: Mari and Early Collective Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); idem Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah’s Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 72-77; Sweeney “The Jacob Narratives”, 236–55.

269. Finkelstein and Römer, “Comments on the Historical Background,” 322-23.

270. Israel Finkelstein and Lily Singer-Avitz, “Reevaluating Bethel,” *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palastina-Vereins* 125 (2009): 33–48.

271. W.F. Albright, “The Kyle Memorial Excavation at Bethel,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 56 (1934): 2–15.

272. James L. Kelso, “The Fourth Campaign at Bethel,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 164 (1961): 5–19.

occupational history is not as continuous as once thought.²⁷³ Both groups of scholars are in agreement concerning activity at Bethel throughout the Late Bronze Age to the Hellenistic periods; however, the disagreement is one of degree, that is, to what degree Bethel was occupied.

Albright's and Kelso's analysis of Bēṭīn led them to conclude that Bethel had been occupied beginning in the Chalcolithic period, with heightened activity in the Middle Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age II, and continuing throughout the Iron Age until the sixth century BCE. Bethel then declined and reached another period of activity in the Hellenistic era.²⁷⁴ Perhaps because Bethel is mentioned several times in the Hebrew Bible, covering the "entire biblically narrated sequential history of ancient Israel," the archaeological finds were believed to reflect a "continuous occupation" beginning in the Middle Bronze and reaching to the Iron Age II.²⁷⁵ According to Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz, however, the archaeological sequence must be consulted first and then the biblical material secondarily.²⁷⁶

Their reasoning seems to lie in their own findings of modern day Bēṭīn, which to them does not exhibit continuity but archaeological sparcity and gaps. Indeed, the settlement history of Bethel is characterized by "oscillations, with two periods of strong activity in the Iron Age I and the Iron Age IIB, two periods of decline—in the Late Iron Age IIA and in the Iron Age IIC, and two periods of possible abandonment in the Early

273. Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz, "Reevaluating Bethel," 42-43 (esp. 43).

274. Albright, "The Kyle Memorial Excavation at Bethel"; "The Fourth Campaign at Bethel."

275. Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz, "Reevaluating Bethel," 35.

276. *Ibid.*, 36.

Iron Age IIA and the Babylonian-Persian periods.”²⁷⁷ There appears to be some agreement between the two schools of thought, though, in that both agree Bethel was destroyed in the Late Bronze Age, but beyond this the two disagree.²⁷⁸

Iron Age I of Bethel provides scores of archaeological finds. Storage jars and cooking-pots, among other finds, date to this period, exhibiting that the Iron Age I settlement was occupied over a long period of time.²⁷⁹ This changed, though, during the Iron Age IIA. Only a limited number of vessels were unearthed from this period. Hence, on the basis of this number, it is highly plausible that there was some activity at Bethel in the Iron Age IIA (mid-to-late 9th- century BCE).²⁸⁰ Moving further into the Iron Age IIB-C (circa 8th-6th centuries BCE), a considerable number of pottery types depicting Judahite elements have been excavated. Yet in the late seventh century, Bethel appears to have been much smaller and sparsely settled.²⁸¹ Finally, the Persian and Hellenistic periods are summarized by Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz:

In any event, no unambiguous evidence for a full-fledged Persian-period occupation was found at Bethel—neither pottery nor *Jehud* seal impressions. This fits the description of the excavators [Albright and Kelso], according to which the foundations of the Hellenistic walls penetrated into the Iron Age II remains. The excavators speculated that a Persian-period settlement may have been located near the spring of *Bētīm*, under the built-up area of the village, but had such a settlement existed, it should have left a clear ceramic imprint on the site. A prosperous Hellenistic settlement was uncovered at Bethel.²⁸²

277. *Ibid.*, 42.

278. *Ibid.*, 37.

279. *Ibid.*, 37-38.

280. *Ibid.*, 39.

281. *Ibid.*, 39-41.

282. *Ibid.*, 42. Italics, original.

The archaeological analysis by Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz appears to display a geographic location whose history is complex, wedded to multiple historical eras. Moreover, archaeology and the biblical material appear to be at a crossroads; that is, a fissure is opened up when one attempts to fit the traditions surrounding Bethel in the Hebrew Bible with the modern archaeological findings.

Archaeology, according to Finkelsteing and Singer-Avitz, appears to show that Bethel's settlement history was not continuous in the Iron Age. This contradicts Jules Gomes' statement pertaining to biblical Bethel:

It emerges from our research, that the Bethel sanctuary dominated the landscape of the Northern Kingdom for over 400 years. A careful reading through the redactional layers of the books of Kings reveals a chronological thread spanning the centuries from the time of the schism to the post-exilic period (ca. 920-520)—from the First Temple to the Second Temple—throughout which Bethel remained at the heart of Israelite national, religious and political identity.²⁸³

Such a statement from Gomes seems to be based solely on literary grounds. Yet Gomes's argument is not false, for the biblical material remembers certain characteristics of Bethel that were consonant with the time it purports to describe (e.g. Jacob's vow to offer tithes possibly alludes to an Iron Age IIB setting).

The method deployed by Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz is tied primarily to the archaeological findings at Bethel while Gomes adheres to the text. What is not apparent from the above scholarly analysis, though, is an allowance for the archaeological and biblical material to speak on its own terms. In other words, archaeology and the Bible must not necessarily be pitted against each other.²⁸⁴ Texts that derive from oral sources, in which

283. Jules Francis Gomes, *The Sanctuary of Bethel and the Configuration of Israelite Identity*. BZFD. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 59.

284. For a survey on historical method, see Grabbe, *Ancient Israel*.

knowledge is accumulative and volatile, must be treated with epistemological care. In short, memory does not strictly yield “history” or “fiction” but a dynamic interplay between a past remembered and forgotten.

Bethel also provides an excellent window into how early Israelite religion underwent development since this ancient sanctuary endured from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age. As mentioned previously,²⁸⁵ Jacob’s encounter at Bethel in Gen 28:10-22 bears the marks of early and late religious attributes. In particular, the northern traditions embedded in 28:10-22 appear to have no parallel to the divine promise in verses 13-16; the Bethel etiology may also derive from Canaanite sources, since the location itself was undoubtedly Canaanite in origin.²⁸⁶ It is readily apparent that verse 22 stems from a time when there was a temple or sanctuary in which to offer tithes, indicative of the reign of Jeroboam I (tenth century) or Jeroboam II (eighth century).²⁸⁷

Nevertheless, Gen 28:10-22 and its epistemological underpinnings are tied to early and late historical periods. The well-known model of Israelite religion argues that El was Israel’s god first, only to be subsumed by Yahweh at a later time, perhaps during the tenth or ninth century.²⁸⁸ Aren Wilson-Wright notes that while this model is helpful, it does not tell the full story.²⁸⁹ He argues for the continuation of El worship during the composition of

285. See above, 66-73.

286. Gomes, *The Sanctuary of Bethel*, 69.

287. *Ibid.*, 69-70.

288. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 71-75; Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, trans. John Bowden, vol. 1. From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 144-45; Smith, *Origins*, 141.

289. See Aren Wilson-Wright, “Bethel and the Persistence of El: Evidence for the Survival of El as an Independent Deity in the Jacob Cycle and 1 Kings 12:25–30,” *JBL* 138 (2019): 705-720.

Gen 28:10-22, while the rise of Yahweh took place during the reign of Jeroboam II (eighth century). Kings 12:25-30 may provide some historical background to Jacob's encounter at Bethel, since both stories tell of a sanctuary there and El worship. Marvin Sweeney believes the account in 1 Kgs 12:25-30 to be from Judean hands, as exhibited by the Deuteronomists' clear polemic against Jeroboam I setting up calves at Dan and Bethel.²⁹⁰ Although both Bethel and Dan are the recipients of polemic, a comparative analysis of ancient Near Eastern material shows that golden calves functioned at "mounts for the deities, much as bulls function as mounts for the Canaanite Baal and Aramean Hadad.... And the ark of the covenant functions as a throne for the Judean Yhwh."²⁹¹ Moreover, the specific proximity of the calves' locations may be an early memory of Jacob's itinerary in Genesis and the promise of land and progeny.²⁹²

Is it possible to find earlier memories embedded in the Jacob narrative? Perhaps. Moving beyond the eighth and ninth centuries, and into the realm of the second-millennium BCE, biblical scholarship has been very hesitant to offer conclusions pertaining to ancient Israel's past, and rightly so. For moving beyond literary fragments, one is left with oral precursors, which are hard to historically verify as "true" or "false." By the same token, Iron Age Hebrew narrative prose employed sources that derive from the written and oral and have proved to contain kernels of historical memory—though not historical in the

290. Sweeney, "The Jacob Narratives," 245.

291. Ibid., 245. For the historical dilemma concerning the number of calves established by Jeroboam, see Smith, "Counting Calves at Bethel," in *Up to the Gates of Ekron: Essays on the Archaeology and History of the Eastern Mediterranean in Honor of Seymour Gitin*, ed. Gitin Seymour, Sidnie White Crawford, and Amnon Ben-Tor (Jerusalem: W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research, 2007), 382-94.

292. Gomes, *The Sanctuary of Bethel*, 59-60.

modern sense of the term. The above examples demonstrated that the Jacob narrative, particularly those traditions that remember Bethel, exhibit authentic memories pertaining to different historical periods. Yet could those traditions also preserve older memories, perhaps harkening back to the second-millennium? It is highly possible, considering that the Jacob narrative is a palimpsest of oral and written sources, which in turn may preserve memories of an earlier historical era.

As stated in the introduction, Albright's positivistic outlook on the patriarchal narratives has largely been abandoned. Perhaps this was due to the publications of Thomas Thomsons²⁹³ and J. Van Seters.²⁹⁴ In light of this essay's argument, namely, that memory's epistemological foundation is not concerned with modern historical-critical sensibilities but rather lies somewhere between history and fiction, it may be prudent to revisit what Daniel Fleming has labeled, Mari and the possibilities of biblical memory.²⁹⁵ In other words, remaining fully cognizant of memory's dynamic relationship with history, it is possible that the Jacob narrative preserves traces of a distant past, one that is wedded to various historical periods, some old and some new—in essence, knowledge that is both cumulative and recycled throughout subsequent generations of tradents.

Fleming suggests that Mari offers an excellent possibility for the claim that Israel's origins lie in a Syrian background. He states, “Mari offers us the best ancient written evidence for peoples with a similar profile, though they come from several centuries

293. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002).

294. John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

295. Daniel E. Fleming, “Mari and the Possibilities of Biblical Memory,” *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale* 92 (1998): 41–78.

earlier. These Amorite tribes inhabit the northern part of the same large region of West Semitic speakers, and share some concrete kinship, if a distant one.”²⁹⁶ This is in stark contrast to earlier forms of scholarship that argued that the biblical evidence finds no resonance in such a historical setting. This is due, perhaps, to the skepticism in comparing the tribal features of the patriarchal narratives to those of Mari. Indeed, Fleming disagrees with scholars such as Rowton, Thompson, and Lemche in their arguments to drive a wedge between the Mari administration and the surrounding tribes. Yet even Thompson notes that Mari resembles early Israel before the monarchy.²⁹⁷ Fleming elaborates on the contention further:

The biggest difficulty with the whole discussion between Rowton, Thompson, and Lemche is their shared assumption that the Mari administration functioned as a force foreign to the tribes. All the modern groups studied by Lemche live under outside state authority. According to Lemche, nomadic groups do not settle voluntarily because they are both better off than peasant farmers and better able to avoid taxation by the centralized state. This whole analysis is altered radically when Zimri-Lim is discovered to be the tribal king of the Sim'alites, newly ensconced at Mari. In this situation, sedentarization cannot progress only by foreign force, and nomadic peoples cannot be relegated to the periphery of the Mari state.

The origins of Israel before the first millennium kingdoms remain highly uncertain, but the analysis of Thompson and Lemche underestimates the potential relevance of the Mari evidence. Under Zimri-Lim, Mari is a Sim'alite tribal state that has taken over a city seat and adapted an administrative structure from the more mature kingdom of Samsi-Addu. This situation resembles in some ways the Israelite state ruled by David according to the biblical narrative. David is said to initiate the first successful Israelite monarchy, whose coalition of northern and southern tribes is cemented in part by capture of ancient Jerusalem as a neutral capital.²⁹⁸

While Mari may provide an early parallel to the transition from Israelite tribalism to a full-fledged statehood, it also offers historical analogies to the Jacob material.

296. *Ibid.*, 45.

297. Thompson, *Historicity*, 87-88.

298. Fleming, “Mari and the Possibilities of Biblical Memory,” 47.

Interestingly, the Mari material possibly illuminates certain aspects of the patriarchal tales, namely the tribe of Benjamin and the “family origin near Harran.”²⁹⁹ Fleming suggests that Jacob’s son Benjamin may provide a crucial link to tribal peoples of Mari known as the Yaminites. Indeed, earlier scholarship had already considered this a possibility, yet since Thompson’s publication, there has been skepticism regarding comparing the two ancient groups.³⁰⁰ The point of contention concerns whether Yaminite should be interpreted as a geographic location, as argued by Thompson,³⁰¹ or a tribal group, according to Fleming.³⁰²

The possible reconstruction of the name Yamininte, “son of the south,” was seen as an explanation to the name Benjamin, in terms of a “limited local geography as well, by reference to the large tribe of Ephraim in the northern hill country.”³⁰³ Hence, Mari and Benjamin came to be regarded as geographic locations instead of tribal groups. It is possible to reconsider the notion of defining the names Benjamin and Yaminite in terms of geography alone. It is commonly observed that the ancient Near East knew of a north-south tribal division, so it is not incorrect to see if Israel shared this concept as well. Based on the Mari texts, there is a clear division between various tribal groups after some apparent conflict with Zimri-Lim. Fleming argues:

Yamhad and Qatna represent the major western kingdoms of the Old Babylonian Mari period, and the latter governed territories that reached south into what is now southern Syria and Lebanon. Further unpublished texts show that some number of

299. *Ibid.*, 59.

300. *Ibid.*, 60.

301. Thompson, *History*, 62-64.

302. Fleming, “Mari and the Possibilities of Biblical Memory,” 63.

303. *Ibid.*, 61.

Yaminite chiefs took refuge at Qatna after Zimri-Lim defeated the tribal division early in his reign. The name Amurru appears to apply already to some part of the coastal region to the west of Yamḥad and Qatna, as seen in the Late Bronze kingdom by that name that lies south of Ugarit. Together, these places describe a zone that is indeed roughly south of the Sim'alites' primary pasturage. The geographic scope of the north-south pair is regional, not local, covering a large part of modern Syria.³⁰⁴

Moreover, if tribal Israel could be seen along the north-south dichotomy, it is reasonable to assume that Benjamin is the southern component of the much larger Ephraim, the major Joseph tribe. However, if Benjamin is southern, it is from an Ephraimite perspective.³⁰⁵

Although the two groups are separated by many years, Benjamin and the Yaminites share not only a common meaning, deriving from tribal features, but a common Syrian heritage.

Perhaps what is most striking about the memory pertaining to Jacob's son Benjamin is the memory of Haran in Gen 28:10. The claim that Genesis makes in terms of the patriarchal homeland, namely North Syria, carries no personal interests for the Hebrew Bible outside of the Pentateuch. Indeed, the scribes who fashioned the patriarchal narratives, in particular the Jacob narrative, appear to have preserved an authentic and early memory, for Haran does not provide any persuasive explanation to an exilic or post-exilic audience.³⁰⁶ Van Seters argues for an exilic setting for Haran due to its being a major center for the moon god cult during exile.³⁰⁷ Yet this argument goes against a clear Israelite monotheistic setting during the exile.

304. *Ibid.*, 62.

305. *Ibid.*, 62-63. It should be noted that the relationship between Benjamin and Ephraim is remembered in terms of their common mother Rachel, although that relationship is contingent on the larger theme of the two competing wives. Fleming argues that Judges provides the core memory of an independent tribe of Benjamin. See *ibid.*, 64.

306. *Ibid.*, 68.

307. Van Seters, *Abraham*, 34.

It was during the reign of Zimri-lim that Haran rose to prominence. Haran was one of four towns that “constituted the coalition of Zalmaqum,” and it was also “the sacred site chosen for concluding a treaty between Zalmaqum and all the Yaminite tribes.”³⁰⁸ Since the reference to Haran may not be best understood in an exilic setting, it is possible to interpret it in light of an earlier period, perhaps the Middle to Late Bronze Age, though this is provisional. Genesis and Mari may be connected, though not perfectly since memory is complex and multi-layered in the sense that the identification of Haran with the Yaminites—the “most plausible ancestry of Benjamin”—and both their depictions of tribal pastoralists match quite well.³⁰⁹ Placing Jacob and his family in Haran, certain Israelite scribes exhibit an early memory of possible Bronze Age roots. In another important work by Fleming, he has the following to say about Israel’s north Syrian roots:

Genesis offers the first biblical account of Israel’s origins, and the book locates them in northern Syria and eventually southeastern Mesopotamia, through the specific cities of Harran and Ur. This ancient family origin contrasts with Israel’s later departure from Egypt and entry into the land through Moab in the Transjordan. We thus have three separate geographical associations for Israelite roots. The Syrian tradition in Genesis is the one that is most directly related to the social framework of mobile pastoralism that is associated with West Semitic speakers in various sources and is displayed in great detail in the Mari archives. This northern connection appears only in the central section of Genesis, the section devoted to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.³¹⁰

To be sure, Jacob was born in Canaan, though the Jacob cycle as a whole is structured around his flight to and return from Haran. Jacob acquires his two wives in the north and

308. Fleming, “Mari and the Possibilities of Biblical Memory,” 69.

309. *Ibid.*, 71.

310. Fleming, “Genesis in History and Tradition: The Syrian Background of Israel’s Ancestors, Reprise,” in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Alan Millard (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 209; see also *idem*, *Democracy’s Ancient Ancestors: Mari and Early Collective Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

their servants Zilpha and Bilhah, and in terms of origin, both Jacob and Esau have Syrian roots in their mother Rebekah.

The prestige that Haran provided for the Yaminites, the “pastoralist assumptions of the ancestor tales,”³¹¹ and the possible ancestral relationship between Benjamin and the Yaminites, may supply a better understanding of Gen 28:10-22. Such pastoral nomadism, though, continued into the Iron Age. Yet the important point to realize is that the authors of Genesis portray the patriarchs as living according to an old way of life that no longer related to an Iron Age community.³¹² To be certain, those scribes responsible for writing the Jacob narrative wrote from the perspective of the Iron Age, readily apparent from the references to “Aram.”³¹³

As mentioned previously, analyses seeking to prove or disprove the historicity of the patriarchal narratives are somewhat misguided. The information drawn on to construct such prose narrative accounts of a distant past descend from various eras in time and were shaped by changing landscapes and ideologies in the southern Levant. For those narratives connected to Bethel, allusions to Jacob’s encounter with an old Canaanite site find a home in an early Iron I/IIC context. The varied nature of memory innate in oral sources produced a historical mosaic for Iron Age Israelite scribes. The story surrounding the Bethel narrative in Gen 28:10-22 indicates that the biblical writings about the Canaanite city were informed by source material that originated in the early Iron Age. In addition, the

311. Ibid., 228.

312. Ibid., 228-32.

313. Aram Naharayim (Gen 24:10); Paddan Aram (Gen 25:20; 28:2, 5, 6, 7; 31:18; 33:18; 35:9, 26; 46:15); Aramean (Gen 28:5; 31:20, 24). See Fleming, “Genesis,” 229-32.

information contained in the source material exhibits a particular “resiliency”³¹⁴ to the trappings of revision and forgetting so customary to the volatile nature of cultural memory found in ancient and modern cultures.

A number of early features pertaining to early Bethel seem to have endured for a number of years, so much so that Judean scribes were forced to reckon with them.

Rendered in their own uniform way, southern scribes were handed what was already an ancient tradition and morphed it into something new for its own contemporary setting.

Given the meager evidence scholars possess of oral tradition, it is a historical treasure that the Hebrew Bible possesses older memories concerning Bethel, and more broadly, the Jacob tradition.

To summarize the above analysis, biblical scribes have fashioned a memory of the patriarchal homeland, where Jacob must travel to find a wife. The location to which Jacob was told to journey was Haran (verse 10 [non-P]; cf. verse 2 [P]) since it was here that Jacob could marry within his tribe. During the Middle Bronze Age, Haran was an important place where the Yaminites would meet. Sacred treaties between a confederation of tribes were also completed at this location. Yet it has been argued that the references to Haran stem from the exilic or post exilic era, placing Gen 28 in a much later time period. However, based on other references to tribal homelands in the Hebrew Bible,³¹⁵ Gen 28 may preserve an authentic memory. Indeed, Jacob’s journey to Haran may preserve vestiges of ancient tribal memories that harken back to the Amorite tribal culture of the early second millennium.

314. Pioske, *Memory*, 125.

315. Am 9:7 seems to be aware that the Philistines originated from Crete (Caphtor).

Yet during the Late Bronze Age, the major vicinities surrounding Haran were largely abandoned. Near the end of this era, the major areas witnessed the influx of the Arameans. In the Hebrew Bible, the Arameans are typically depicted as Israel's enemies, and this is clear in Jacob's encounter with Laban, "the Aramean." This mistrust and rivalry between the two groups stems from the Iron Age, when Aramean kings captured various Israelite territories in the ninth century.³¹⁶ In striking contrast, the Hebrew Bible calls Jacob a "wandering Aramean" (Deut 26:5), which contradicts a Late Bronze Age setting. In this sense, the Israelite enemy is also a friend.

In spite of this historical enigma, cultural memory has transformed this story and morphed it into something new for an Iron Age audience. In reality, the scribes behind the Jacob narrative have overlaid Aramean features on older tribal memories. In the words of Ronald Hendel, "By this confluence of cultural memory and contemporary revision, the second millennium homeland takes on a first-millennium ethnic coloring."³¹⁷ Indeed, this sort of historical fashioning is exemplified throughout the Jacob narrative, and it is my aim to demonstrate such scribal practices. In essence, this is an example of how the Jacob narrative reflects the literary presentation of cultural memory.

Nevertheless, this phenomenon is not unique to the patriarchal narratives; Daniel Pioske offers key insights to the entanglements of remembered geographical locations:

The residue of a more remote past is found, in fact, within a number of biblical texts that were developed by Hebrew scribes at periods later in time. Examples are not restricted to a particular time and place, but rather stem from a wide chronological horizon and geographical region. These include faint Bronze Age allusions to geography and cult within the certain texts now found in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis and stories surrounding Shechem in the Book of Judges, but also Iron Age references to Hazor's destruction (Josh. II) and the great temple once located at Shechem (Judg 9:46, 49), both attested to by archaeological evidence, and later Iron

316. 1 Kgs 20, 22; 2 Kgs 8-13.

317. Hendel, *Cultural Memory*, 42.

I reflections to sites in the Jezreel Valley (Taanach, Megiddo, Beth-shean) that remained Canaanite throughout this period in time (Josh 13:2-6; Judg 1:27-35).³¹⁸

Pioske's remarks strike an epistemological chord. His erudite analysis of places in the Deuteronomistic material sheds light on the vast number of references to geographic locations in the patriarchal narratives, for his purpose in drawing attention to the aforementioned places is not intended to verify the historicity of such narratives but rather to illuminate the nature of the source material Iron Age scribes employed to craft their narratives about an early Iron Age past.³¹⁹

The materiality inherent in places enable past recollections in distinct ways. In Janet Donohoe's phenomenological study of memory, she suggests that an individual's memory of an event is related to and contingent on a particular location in which the event took place: "It is impossible to remember an event from one's own past without realizing that the event happened in a place however hazy the memory of that place might be."³²⁰ Edward Casey offers a similar remark with regards to remembering, "through the stolid concreteness of things set within pathways and horizons—place acts to contain time itself."³²¹ Interestingly, an individual's ability to remember an event will also supply a

318. Pioske, *Memory*, 127. Pioske also notes that such historical and geographical memories are not unique to Israel. In fact, Homeric epic material is filled with historical references connected to the Late Bronze Age period, even though "Homer" did not compose his writings until five centuries later. Perhaps the best example is the location of Troy and its relation to Alexander as its leader and the god Apollo having a connection with the city itself. Moreover, Thucydides is apt to recount older traditions that have been passed down to him through oral tradition. An example from his work would be references to the city of Corinth as the first Greek center to build the *trireme* ship in an era that preceded Thucydides by at least three centuries. His remarks have proven to be somewhat historically reliable. Pioske, *Memory*, 129.

319. *Ibid.*, 124.

320. Janet Donohoe, *Remembering Places: A Phenomenological Study of the Relationship between Memory and Place* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 1.

321. Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 214.

general timeframe for the event. Consequently, there is a “dual intentionality” that focuses on the thing remembered and on the memory’s position in the “flow of time.”³²² Paul Ricœur suggests a similar outlook concerning memory and places when he argues that “it is on the surface of the habitable earth that we remember having traveled and visited memorable sites. In this way, the ‘things’ remembered are intrinsically associated with places.”³²³

Places tend to offer aid to the fragility of memory. This notion of the fragility of memory is especially important for the Bethel narrative. Indeed, many nomadic herdsmen traversed the southern Levant throughout the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age—Jacob was not the only one. However, the tithes that Jacob offers to pay to the purported temple or shrine at Bethel are resolute with late features that need to be explained by memory’s dynamic nature. In this sense, later Israelite scribes drew from oral precursors or short-written literary texts that were wedded to a type of knowledge susceptible to revision and preservation. However, the location of Bethel itself provides a historical anchor, so to speak, for tradents of the Jacob narrative. In the words of Ricœur, “These memory places function for the most part after the manner of reminders, offering in turn a support for failing memory, a struggle in the war against forgetting, even the slight plea of dead memory.”³²⁴ While it is certainly true that different characters can be remembered as visiting or participating at the same location,³²⁵ it remains the case that locations are

322. Donohoe, *Remembering Places*, 1-2; Casey, *Remembering*, 214-15.

323. Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 41.

324. *Ibid.*, 41.

325. Perhaps the most well-known examples of this are the stories of the endangered matriarchs in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis.

stronger links to authentic memories. Even a cursory glance at Genesis and the Deuteronomistic History suffices to show the endurance of places in the memories of individuals (e.g., Bethel, Shechem, Beersheba).

Memories of locations are also vulnerable to “the transformation that places undergo.”³²⁶ According to Maurice Halbwachs,³²⁷ as geographic places undergo change, so too does memory. The transformation that places undergo, “whether in the appearance of new built environments, the slow decay of landscape, or the destruction and reconstruction of civic spaces and structures,” are “seldom uniform, nor are the modes of remembering that accompany them.”³²⁸ Pioske’s remarks are important once again:

Yet it is a distinct feature of places in the ancient Near East that some sites endured over great lengths of time. For this reason, the historian must be sensitive to the *possibility* that memories from former times endured alongside the places to which they referred, supported and reinforced by the landscape to which these memories had become embedded. For every Mount Zion, misidentified in antiquity through memories that had become detached from the actual locations sought, there is also a Karbala or Kosovo Field where memories of a past and the historian’s object of study more closely coincide.³²⁹

In terms of geographic locations, northern refugees who may have fled south after the collapse of the Northern Kingdom brought with them sources that contained knowledge wedded to earlier periods in history, that, however, were altered and remembered differently by southern scribes.

326. Pioske, *Memory*, 89.

327. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 183.

328. Pioske, *Memory*, 89.

329. *Ibid.*, 90. Italics original.

Donohoe, though, contends that memory can be “reawakened” if individuals return to those places steeped in a former time period.³³⁰ This is the case, perhaps, because individuals take up space and “we inhabit a place through and in our lived bodies.”³³¹ Similar to a house or an inhabitable place shared with others, places tend to function as an area for growth in terms of character. Places shape character but also relations with other peoples. Hence, as individuals, we generally establish common practices and rituals at specific locations, rooted in a particular cultural milieu, that will enable memory’s endurance.³³² In terms of Gen 28:10-22, it is possible to see a type of fusion in which traditions surrounding Jacob were melded to those of Abraham (28:13-16). The divine promise granted to Abraham, the patriarch from the south, was transferred to Jacob, a northern patriarch. Furthermore, Jacob’s journey from Mesopotamia back to Canaan (34-35) resembles Abraham’s journeys as well. Both figures are remembered as having set up shrines to Yahweh/El; both figures are remembered fleeing from their homeland but promised protection and guidance from the deity; and both patriarchs are remembered as having visited Bethel although Abraham’s journey to this location (Gen 13:3) may have been introduced later into the narrative to connect him to Jacob.

The Dynamics between Memory and History

In spite of this historical enigma, cultural memory has transformed this story and molded it into something new for an Iron Age audience. In reality, the scribes behind the Jacob narrative have overlaid Aramean features onto older tribal memories. In the words of

330. Donohoe, *Remembering Places*, 3.

331. *Ibid.*, 4.

332. *Ibid.*, 4-7.

Ronald Hendel, “By this confluence of cultural memory and contemporary revision, the second-millennium homeland takes on a first-millennium ethnic coloring.”³³³ Indeed, this sort of historical fashioning is exemplified throughout the Jacob narrative, and as such, this is an example of how the Jacob narrative reflects the literary presentation of cultural memory.

Nevertheless, what is the nature of memory as it is portrayed in Gen 28:10-22? This question appears to be simple at first glance; but after engaging the Jacob narrative more thoroughly, it appears to be the case that we are left with more than just history or fiction. Indeed, memory’s trappings do not allow for such labels, at least in the modern sense of conceiving history and nonhistory. At its most basic level, Jacob’s encounter at Bethel contains multiple layers of redaction (P and non-P). On another note, it is a narrative that is characterized by preservation, revision, remembering, and forgetting. What we have is a story about a prominent figure in Israel and a description of his itinerary.

Moreover, questions relating to the story’s historical accuracy may be a secondary question in relation to the primary nature of the narrative itself. Assigning a date to any text in the Hebrew Bible always precipitates debate. The patriarchal narratives are no different, and they may be much more difficult to date with certainty. However, this thesis has sought to place memory’s referential claims alongside a constellation of other ancient references, textual and material, that may help provide a provisional timeframe for the Bethel narrative. Once again, this is highly conjectural, but I believe this study has argued for a fresher look at the Jacob narrative, paying much more attention to memory’s trappings and dynamic relationship with history.

333. Hendel, *Cultural Memory*, 42.

The site of Bethel provides readers with an historical anchor since that is what locations tend to do. Indeed, Am 9:7 appears to remember the Philistines as originating in Crete (Caphtor). It is not difficult to suppose, then, that ancient Israelites were able to recall authentic memories based on Jacob's encounter at Bethel. The site itself, however, was wedded to different historical periods, causing traditions of the Jacob narrative to remember the story through diverse lenses. In this case, the Bethel narrative is cumulative as it pertains to knowledge, that is, as the story was passed down to subsequent generations, historical details were updated and adapted to contemporary settings (e.g., Middle Bronze Age and Iron Age features). In short, Gen 28:10-22 may have at one point in time spoken to much older communities; yet when handed down by word of mouth, the memory itself was susceptible to alterations among newer generations.

During the period of scribal activity, Gen 28:10-22 was remembered in the form of mnemohistory. For instance, Bethel became a prominent cultic site when the Northern Kingdom of Israel parted ways from its Southern half (1 Kgs 12). The sin of Jeroboam's installation of the two golden calves, one in Bethel and one in Dan (both northern sites). At that point in Israel's history (eight century BCE), the traditions surrounding the northern patriarchal figure Jacob and the cultic site Bethel were remembered in such a way as to speak to the present. In other words, the Israelite scribes remembered this story with their present community in mind. For example, it has been argued that the Jacob tradition at Bethel is a northern tradition, with parts of it possibly composed at Bethel. Hosea, a northern prophet placed in the eighth century, also remembers Jacob at Bethel at home in

the north.³³⁴ Furthermore, after the fall of the Northern Kingdom, many refugees may have fled to Jerusalem, bringing their own traditions and written texts with them. The result of all of this may have led southern scribes to add their own traditions to the Jacob tradition.³³⁵ Certain historical and literary features may speak to this. For example, as pointed out above in our literary discussion, the addition of 28:13-15 possibly bears signs of not being original to the story. It in fact “makes the remembered past point forward to the present.”³³⁶ Additionally, verse 22 seems to be indicative of a time when there was a temple standing.³³⁷ Finally, there may be hints of what Mark Smith labels “cultural amnesia” when remembering the divine in the Jacob tradition.³³⁸ The scribes updated the story through the lens of their present religious identity. By placing Yahweh in 28:13-15, the narrator effectively merges him with El. Remnants of Canaanite polytheism have been merged with later Israelite religion to form a monotheistic coloring to our story. In essence, “cultural amnesia seems to result from long tradition, which included a process of interpreting older traditions no longer fully understood.”³³⁹ Indeed, the narrator updated his text with religious categories of his time in order to resonate with his current audience.

334. Hosea 12 remembers the birth of Jacob, his fight with the angel, his encounter at Bethel, and service for a wife. See also Steven L. McKenzie, “The Jacob Tradition in Hosea XII 4-5,” *VT* 36 (1986): 311.

335. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible*, 72-77; Sweeney “The Jacob Narratives,” 236-55.

336. Hendel, *Cultural Memory*, 37.

337. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 313; Am 7:13.

338. Smith, *Memoirs of God*, 153-58.

339. *Ibid.*, 153.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SYNTHESIS

The foregoing chapters have attempted to shed light on how memory informed stories about the formidable patriarch Jacob. Setting Hebrew narrative prose against its appropriate historical context, this study sought to situate a provisional time period for the impetus of such writing—the Iron Age. Placing the birth of Hebrew prose against the background of the Iron Age allowed us to view what kind of knowledge was available to Iron Age scribes. Antecedent to lengthy literary texts, Hebrew scribes drew upon oral and written sources, and the knowledge available to those scribes responsible for the composition of the Jacob narrative is one that is wedded to various historical eras, susceptible to change and preservation. Moreover, this study attempted to situate the Jacob narrative’s historical claims alongside other ancient historical referential claims of the time, namely the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age, and to scrutinize each referent for historical clarity. In other words, to “historicize the past knowledge that helped shape the tales the biblical writers decided to tell”¹ has been one of the primary objectives of this study.

Perhaps a plea for a paradigm shift in the realm of biblical historiography and memory is appropriate. That is to say, the epistemological tension between memory and modern historiography should caution scholars to reconsider the nature of ancient

1. Pioske, *Memory*, 226.

Israelite history. Writing accounts of the distant past, biblical scribes depended on sources that were passed on by word of mouth and only rarely written on perishable materials, resulting in elusive accounts of Jacob's journey to Bethel, characterized by both "affinity and disconnect."² The epistemological underpinnings of memory are not concerned with modern historical-critical sensibilities, that is, whether an account of the past is historically accurate. The rationale behind early oral and written sources was wed to the "faculty of remembrance."³

Accordingly, the patriarchal narratives, in particular, the Jacob narrative, must be judged alongside means other than a strict dichotomy of history and fiction. The task of the historian, in other words, must be to sift through each claim the biblical narratives makes and see what type of knowledge is being conveyed. Moreover, after such a task is completed, the historian then must see whether a particular claim can be placed alongside ancient historical referents. Finally, the epistemological foundation of memory must be attended to since this study has sought to display that memory is susceptible to change and preservation.

Similar to an archaeologist, the historian of the biblical material must mine each narrative for historical clues that can be shown to contain allusions to a past remembered by biblical scribes. However, one must be careful not to throw out the biblical stories if there are traces of historical inaccuracies or anachronisms. Just like archaeology, Hebrew prose contains strata of historical knowledge that need to be judged appropriately, in a way that situates each claim the narrative might make in accordance with its provisional

2. Ibid., 226.

3. Ibid., 227.

historical setting. Yet this will also entail historical overlap, for a narrative is the product of a confluence of material, some late, some early. Such enigmatic results are the byproduct of a remembered past that has as its foundation a dynamic relationship between memory and history.

The Jacob narrative, as this study sought to display, is the result of a layering of knowledge, knowledge wedded to an early past yet susceptible to late Iron Age features. Jacob's journey to Bethel presents historians with a story purporting to describe a distant past yet colored with late features. This is the entanglement of memory, so to speak. Such a narrative remembered Jacob journeying to Bethel—an ancient Canaanite settlement—and paying homage to the deities El and Yahweh. It is here where Jacob offers to pay tithes, betraying a time when a sanctuary once stood at Bethel.

The scribes who fashioned such a narrative were certainly not concerned with describing the past as such,⁴ but more so with a way of remembering the past in order to speak to the present. This is evident in the late features of Gen 28:10-22, namely the insertion of verses 13-16, the archaeology of Bethel (modern Bēṭīn), and the date of the narrative's composition. The final form of the narrative, though, is a confluence of early and late material, displaying memory's epistemological awareness of the past and the present.

The Iron Age scribes responsible for the Jacob narrative were aware of a distant past when their early tribal ancestors journeyed from Syria, as seen in the possible relations to the Mari material, and set up cultic establishments, calling on the name of the ancient Canaanite deity ֵל. Yet they expanded upon the story even further with late

4. See Van Seter's account of ancient historiography in Van Seters, *In Search of History*.

features, for this is the task of memory—to describe a story in such a way that resonates with the current audience. Memory’s trappings are inherently social, that is to say, traditions of memory tend to describe their past through an acceptable social and cultural framework, an assemblage of historical and linguistic factors. Jacob’s journey to Bethel was meant to be made alive, as it were, for subsequent generations of ancient Israelites. The only way to do so was to retell and rewrite it in contemporary terms, allowing the past to speak to later Israelite sensibilities.

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi describes the relationship between memory and modern historiography succinctly:

Memory and modern historiography stand, by their very nature, in radically different relations to the past. The latter represents, not an attempt at a restoration of memory, but a truly new kind of recollection. In its quest for understanding it brings to the fore texts, events, processes, that never really became part of Jewish group memory even when it was at its most vigorous. With unprecedented energy it continually recreates an ever more detailed past whose shapes and textures memory does not recognize. But that is not all. The historian does not simply come in to replenish the gaps of memory. He constantly challenges even those memories that have survived intact. Moreover, in common with historians in all fields of inquiry, he seeks ultimately to recover a total past—in this case the entire Jewish past—even if he is directly concerned with only a segment of it. No subject is potentially unworthy of his interest, no document, no artifact, beneath his attention. We understand the rationales for this. The point is that all these features cut against the grain of collective memory which, as we have remarked, is drastically selective. Certain memories live on; the rest are winnowed out, repressed, or simply discarded by a process of natural selection which the historian, uninvited, disturbs and reverses. The question remains whether, as a result, some genuine catharsis or reintegration is foreseeable.⁵

Both memory and history, in other words, stand at opposite ends of the historical spectrum. However, both have similar intents of “re-presenting former phenomena,”

5. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 94-95.

though they may do so “through quite disparate means.”⁶ Pioske’s remarks pertaining to memory and history are also appropriate:

For cultural memory, a past is disclosed through the cultural practices and frameworks of a collective remembering: the transmission of stories from generation to generation through oral tales and shared texts, participation in ritual acts of commemoration, the common experience of sacred places, the mutual encounter with past symbols, the veneration of familiar monuments. Cultural memory is in this sense participatory and selective, communal and self-enclosed, and as such exhibits little interest in the historian’s individual, critical examination of evidence in an effort to render a historically accurate account of a given occurrence.⁷

In contrast to modern historical-critical reconstructions of the past based upon what constitutes evidence, what is displayed in cultural memory is contingent upon mimesis, an activity found in particular communities that constantly reshape and preserve a distant past. Thus memory finds its “counterpart” in modern historiography.⁸

“The chasm between history and memory is hollowed out,” Ricœur stresses, “in the explanatory phase, in which the available uses of the connector ‘between...’ are tested.”⁹ This statement by Ricœur is an essential recognition of memory’s perplexing refusal to submit to a modern understanding of history. What is more, as a critical epistemological methodology, the historian’s historical reconstruction cannot affirm memory’s claims of the past “on faith.”¹⁰ To be sure, it is difficult to bridge the gap between memory and modern historiography; yet there may be a means to provide a way

6. Pioske, “Retracing a Remembered Past,” 12.

7. Ibid., 12.

8. Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 398.

9. Ibid., 497.

10. Pioske, “Retracing a Remembered Past,” 12.

forward, opening up new vistas for viewing the biblical material, especially the Jacob narrative, through a modern historical-critical perspective. Daniel Pioske offers three methodological remarks, hermeneutical in nature, with regard to viewing the relationship between memory and history moving forward.

First, the tension between memory and history should not be dissolved by melding together the referential claims of memory with the modern historian's critical reconstruction of the past. Ricœur's statement that memory is the "womb"¹¹ of historical knowledge should not be interpreted as the historian simply reproducing the biblical material uncritically. In other words, the appeal to memory for an understanding of the past must not be employed as a "safeguard" to the historical value of the biblical texts' historical claims.¹²

Second, the chasm between memory and history should not be cited as a means to dismiss *a priori* a remembered past. Memory deals with content that is inherently wedded to some form of the past; thus it should not be discounted from the beginning stages of modern historical reconstructions of a distant past. Though the past handed down through memory's epistemological framework is susceptible to change and modification that "weakens its ties to the reality of a historical past, the break between the past claimed by memory and history cannot be assumed." It must be confirmed through the historian's reconstruction.¹³

11. Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 276.

12. Pioske, "Retracing a Remembered Past," 14-15.

13. *Ibid.*, 15.

Third, the referential claims of memory must not be set aside permanently within the modern historian's reconstruction. The "genealogy" of memories and the past embedded within them must be confronted at some point in the work of the historian.¹⁴ This is perhaps heightened when considering memory's origin in eyewitness testimony rather than in writing. To be sure, historical documents are considered essential when reconstructing the past,¹⁵ yet when analyzing ancient Israelite scribal practices, oral and written sources must be taken seriously.¹⁶

Pioske's methodological considerations point to a hermeneutical awareness of the limitations of modern historiography.¹⁷ Indeed, modern history's task of seeking independent attestation for historical verification is better accounted for through a "triangulation of a disparate collection of past referents, textual and material, that attest to that place and time being remembered."¹⁸ What is sought, then, through a critical reconstruction of a remembered past is not history or nonhistory, but rather "plausibility" or "implausibility" of a memory's claim concerning the past, based upon its relation to other ancient referential claims of a distant past, "in order to determine if the past represented through it is commensurate with these other material and textual traces."¹⁹

14. Ibid., 15-16.

15. For a much fuller treatment on modern historical-critical historiography, see Shafer, *Historical Method*.

16. An excellent resource pertaining to Israelite scribal culture is van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*.

17. For a discussion of the limitations of modern history, see Brettler, *Creation of History*.

18. Pioske, "Retracing a Remembered Past," 16.

19. Ibid., 16-17.

Thus in returning to Hebrew prose, the story surrounding Bethel proves to be instructive for an appropriate understanding of memory's epistemological foundation. It is here where "the second-millennium homeland takes on a first-millennium ethnic coloring."²⁰ Archaeologically speaking, Bethel was once an ancient Canaanite settlement, characterized by worship to the head of the pantheon, El. Bethel bears the marks of Late Bronze Age features, with possible continuous occupation throughout the Iron Age. Moreover, the mention of Haran in combination with the Yaminites from the Mari texts bears resemblances with the tribal features of Jacob and his family. It was in Haran where the Yaminites partook of certain tribal activities.²¹ Certainly, this narrative betrays a period in which a sanctuary at Bethel once stood, perhaps during the reigns of Jeroboam I/II.²² The narrative itself, as was pointed out briefly, displays early northern features yet colored with late southern attributes. This is clear when considering the destruction of the Northern Kingdom followed by southern scribes editing the Jacob narratives to shape a later Israelite identity and make them their own.

In conclusion, the Jacob narratives provide a window into how memory in ancient Israel was constructed, and how past accounts of Jacob were remembered and forgotten. In essence, the trappings of memory exhibit a tendency to reshape, adapt, and preserve accounts of a distant past. In turn, this speaks to the dynamic interplay between memory and history

20. See above, 79n208.

21..Ibid., 102-107.

22. Ibid., 95-99.

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