ANCIENT FICTIONALITY: ABRAHAM: PART 1

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Abraham and Isaac: an attack on human sacrifice?

Note: *While this paper acknowledges that Abraham’s name was originally Abram, and Sarah Sarai I have chosen to use Abraham and Sarah from the outset.*

This paper will consider the problem with Abraham: was he real despite the many historical discrepancies within the narrative; is he a marchent figure (fairy tale), part of a literary construct by the Holy School; a post-Exilic attempt to create a Hebrew identity focused on the past, especially to when even the Hebrew peoples were unlikely to have existed? During the Bronze Age, only gods and rulers received biographies and these were written in stone or painted on tombs to ensure remembrance. These functioned upon great deeds and achievements, but except as an icon of procreation Abraham really did neither. His intervention in a war and humbling of the Egyptian king has whiffs of make-believe and is not mentioned by the respective enemies, and the former seems the adventures of Ahab with Assyrian armies. If the argument is that he was chosen by god, then clearly evidence for gods is thereby required, and by itself adds to the problems, not clear them up. Although considered a prophet, especially in Islam, when exactly did he act according to the requirements of a prophet? So was he an actual historical figure and if so how was his life recorded. His adventures occurred, by most commentators’ understanding, at a time when the Hebrew language did not exist, certainly in its written form, so how likely was an oral remembrance created and by whom? Finally, the wanderings of the Patriarchs, the supposed founders of Israel/Judah, including Abraham, bear a strong similarity to Ancient Greek origin stories, and as Guy Darshan notes[[1]](#footnote-1) it is difficult to find such stories elsewhere in the Near East at this period.

These questions have to be posed as Abraham forms an ideal of messianic character and exemplar of faith and the correct relationship to god. This is particularly so in Islam where Muhammed claimed descent from Abraham and that Abraham’s mission represents Islam in its purest form. This claim throws considerable light on Islam and will be viewed later.[[2]](#footnote-2) The authenticity of all three Abrahamic religions is dependent on the truth of Abraham’s existence, particularly Islam. The monotheism of Abraham is not clear, nor is there any indication within Genesis, where Abraham first appears, that he is iconoclastic, although these appear to be the principal lessons taken from the narrative. He is viewed as the original champion of monotheism although others would point to Moses. For Muslims he represents monotheism, iconoclastic prejudices, archetypal faith and obedience.[[3]](#footnote-3) Both Christianity and Islam insist, rather oddly given Abraham’s behaviour, that good followers of both religions should act like him (Firestone: 2015:8), but of course each concentrates on his faith. In consideration of Abraham, in Christianity faith is considered of greater importance than obedience and spirit than law-Abraham precedes the law (Firestone:2015: 8). Islam tends not encourage such views. These concepts will be discussed later, although Islam’s variability is taken into account. Islam forcibly argues on the primacy and priority of Abraham through the primacy of the connection between Islam and Abraham, notwithstanding difference in time, which Muhammed structured afresh (3.65-67). Both Christianity and Islam idiosyncratically place Abraham in time in order to qualify their separate beliefs, while Judaism reshapes Abraham into a rabbinic construction (Firestone: 2015: 17-18).

These papers on Abraham will locate the composition of the story within the exile’s return, and paradigms of power and obedience associated with their roles as representatives of the Persian king, their probable otherness to the Hebrews who stayed in the hill-country, and possible changes to the religion as a consequence of reading and learning Mesopotamian religions.

**A plausible basis?**

Historically, there seems no plausible basis for Abraham's existence. As will be seen, the story was written down over a millennium after his supposed career, and as will also be seen Jacob/Israel is likely to have been the earliest identified progenitor of the Hebrew people, or at least its later state formations. Finkelstein and Romer[[4]](#footnote-4) authoritatively claim that Jacob/Israel was the first progenitor in the state of Israel and Abraham in Judah, and that the present focus on Abraham in that role is simply due to the prevailing literature coming from Judah. The competitive element between the two putative states also surely came into it? Abraham fits, where it is possible to fit him in at all, within a folk-tale, oral tradition, one occupied by a host of legendary figures. Such genres impress a liminal existence on their characters, between earthbound and supernatural resonances, with supernatural characters employing magic. While some of these legendary personalities did exist, employing more down to earth characteristics, many did not and are now considered to occupy fictional niches usually involving group identity. The notion that un unknown chieftain in the Middle Bronze Age, the period in which Abraham is placed in order to conform with the idea that the world is little more than 4000 years old, who cannot have made any impact on his times-his biography in fact shows Abraham as both completely politically insignificant and on the other hand leading an important fighting force, see above, confirming that at least two different literary types are referenced within one character. An apparently composite character, like many legends, he carries within him the deeds of King Ahab, with the fixed ideologies of faith. That Abraham had no children with Sarah his wife until helped by god at an impossibly old age, indicating that at one time the god in question had been a fertility god, yet sired through his limited number of descendants, several of which also needed god’s help to procreate, hundreds of thousands and then millions, is contradictory, the stuff of fairy tales. The procreation, and therefore creation, of the Hebrew/Jewish ethnic group is thereby achieved through magic, overcoming all incentives towards reality. The Abrahamic religions were and are formed through ideals of magic.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Problem with naming:**

Most scholars hold that YHWH did not receive his true name until late, reflecting again too much confidence in the Bible's authenticity. The theory of *'progressive revelation'* determines that the identity of YHWH developed slowly as in the Pentateuch it alternates between YHWH and Elohim.[[6]](#footnote-6) Some commentators, like myself, hold that this, with other evidence, shows the presence of El,[[7]](#footnote-7) the ancient Semitic head god, whose worship disappeared in Palestine by the 10th century. These papers suggest that it nonetheless continued in Mesopotamia and Arabia for considerably longer. As Abraham appears to journey around Palestine in a similar fashion to El, these papers also suggest that Abraham is, apart from his other guises, a transmuted El. The trees surrounding Abraham’s altars was the Asherim, associated with Asherah, El’s, and probably YHWH’s, wife. Later, in Deuteronomy 16:21 and elsewhere trees around altars are denounced as abominations, evidence of Asherah worship. The idea that Abraham was originally connected thereby to *pagan* worship is not far-fetched.

The processes of identity tended to be complex and subject to continuous change as the result of changing customs, ethnic groups and power groups. The above idea tends to agree with the view that YHWH´s name was first revealed to Moses so the Biblical scribes had to be careful with what he was called before that event.

YHWH's disclosure to Moses *´I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El-Shadday, but as for my name YHWH, I had not made myself known to them'* (Exod. 6, 2-3) seems to indicate a transition in religious ideas, as well as the god revealing his true self through his name. His true self is a ruthless warrior probably copying Ba’al. Until the revelation to Abraham, the YHWH appendage is rarely used. While this may simply be preference on the scribe's or scribal group's behalf, it also may indicate instability of worship in the national god's name and nature was still uncertain, and remained one concerned with possession, power, and obedience. While the use of Elohim may be just an alternative, the nature of naming in the ancient world is equally suggestive of the supernatural traits of a different god from YHWH, hinting at ongoing syncretism. The epigrammatic approach of inscribing on papyrus YHWH's actions and instructions gives it all a timeless gravity and distracts from the constant contradictions.

While it’s possible that the different names employed might be down to the different perspectives of the scribes, J, P, E (see previous papers), the development of a religion involves change and degrees of popularity. Certainly, it does not actually look like the same religion as in Judges for example there is virtually no reference to Abraham nor other patriarchs-curious in that it is present as a period of religious and ethnic crisis. YHWH’s eventual declaration of his name (Firestone: 2015:2) may in fact have been to do with the religious conversion these papers will deal with later explaining the changing nature of the Hebrew god (Henlen:2005). Abraham’s narrative signifies points of conversion. Here, it leads towards Abraham as a follower of El, and certainly not monotheistic. As the Bible often leaves details out, thereby giving it its power, others have promptly filled in the gaps making an idol merchant of Terah to explain Abraham’s leaving (at 70 after knowing this for so long?) and introducing the concept of iconography. The notion that Lot left also for the same reason is proffered, while clearly the death of his father, Haran, is the narrative device used.

**More to consider: Problem with time:**

Although, for example, the Bible conveys the notion that YHWH goes back to at least the 12th century BCE there is no archaeological evidence for that, and certainly not for YHWH referencing the hypothesized 18th century BCE. The identification of Israel, if correct, in the Merneptah text should not then encourage the belief that it represented the same group of almost four centuries later.[[8]](#footnote-8) Normative behaviour is not evidence of shared ethnicity as Nestor (2015) wisely shows, pointing to such a position as Hegelian, that is large groups of people form a behavioral block, acting and thinking in a similar fashion. Even if the translations can be successfully challenged (Nestor: 2015). Although circumcision and absence from eating pork were later identified with Hebrews, it was common enough cultural behaviour of the area practised by many if not all the groups there and certainly circumcision had been practised for several millennium (Henlen: 2005: 21). In North Africa and the Near East, all the inhabitants practised circumcision except for the Philistines, encouraging the view that Hebrew identity and exclusivity was framed through their conflict with them.[[9]](#footnote-9) Along with covenants, not eating pork and circumcision were appropriated from Canaanite and Syrian cultures by the Hebrews, and declared to be exclusively their own. Henlen’s belief that the exclusivity of their religion expressed as the Chosen People sets them apart is not borne out by an examination of cultures such as Egypt, Hittites and Assyrians, but he seems to mistake history with scribal inventiveness and eloquence.

Archaeologically there is almost no evidence of YHWH in the hill-country before the 9th century (*Ancient Fictionality: state development: Myth of the Two United Kingdoms Israel and Judah[[10]](#footnote-10)*) and he may simply have grown out of royal competition within Israel.[[11]](#footnote-11) The considerable importance of the Ba'al cult in the region may show the growing influence of Phoenicia and the Judah elite's attempt to block it, pointed to in the story of Ahab, the Israelite king. Given that, it seems more likely that the god was El and the Abraham story originated from another culture, Abraham structured as the romantic idea of a nomad. The mention of the Negev indicates that he may have been, if he existed at all, a trusted chieftain who became rich through trade throughout the hill-country and Egypt. YHWH anyway appears to have been an urban god, with no particular sympathy for nomad existence.

Time and the Past were very important for the Biblical compilers, both measured through genealogical paradigms expressed as the coming together of a long-distance plan that by creating more worshippers for YHWH increased his importance or the importance of his followers. In the Bible, the past is the dynamo for present and future, never a completed entity but one filled with purpose. Equally YHWH subsisted as an invisible god, known only through important followers, as although he created humankind no other group in history, besides the Hebrews, really knew of him. Historically, knowledge of YHWH outside of Judah, certainly in the wider world, came late and the Mesha stele assigns him to an afterthought. The Abraham story creates a dominant relationship with the Egyptian king and makes Abraham a warlord, showing both Abraham’s eventual importance and the universality of YHWH. The Philistines pay homage to YHWH, an unlikely scenario. This looks strikingly like wishful thinking. This is equally achieved on the Mesha stele found in Moab describing Kermosh’s, the Moab god, dominance of virtually the known world. And in reality, YHWH is really the god of Abraham and his progeny (Firestone: 2015:5), extrapolated into a nation, a source of narcissism, abiding feelings of superiority without genuine achievement.

In reality, YHWH was a god without it seems substance or power except that bestowed by later scribes. Of course, everything was bestowed by scribes, brilliant, talented individuals, who for a variety of political, spiritual and religious reasons created another reality from words that over one and a half thousand years were intricately woven into apparently genuine events and individuals. It is history of the imagined. In doing so they simplified existence filling up every second of the day with thoughts on one subject rather than negotiating constant insecurity and fear. Without their insistence on his ultimate powers, a brief reading of the text reveals he had believers in him of one, with only his affirmation that there would be millions more. Although Genesis introduces a creator god of supreme power, for the next successive millenniums he walks everywhere. Far better to believe that if there was any substance to Abraham’s story, as a foreigner he was a new recruit to an existing cult. Lack of justification in the story for motive or inclination, is usually filled by supernatural magic.

From the beginning, the Bible presents YHWH as in competition with his rivals, not engaging in any kind of syncretism. Although the latter is not true, as clearly the cult absorbed Ba’al, symbolising the syncretism through journeys and change, presented along with the idea of autochthonism. YHWH was opposed by Ashur, the Assyrian god, whose armies overwhelmed Judah. Nevertheless, the YHWH religion was one of possession, of the possession of a land and a people, clearly defined within cult rules bearing a plagiaristic similarity to Mesopotamian law codes. Relationships between the god and his people were subject to contract whereby for future power over all others and wealth, shown through Abraham’s successful life as the reward for being a firm believer, the Hebrews volunteered to keep YHWH’s memory alive.

A religion of declared exclusivity, it promised people involvement with a particularly possessive god, one that solely identified with them. This was not an unusual position, as before them the Hittite's had taken the same position, and Mesopotamian cities tended to identify with one specific god who effectively owned the city. Such hyperbole seems to have therefore been an extension of already established behaviour. It is possible that this attitude arrived with Assyrian armies, a military state identified with Ashur. Certainly, much of the Pentateuch was concerned with presenting the doubtful view that the hill-country inhabitants had a single identity.

In later papers monotheism will be correctly analysed for its xenophobic and colonial intentions, the sense of superiority it conveys and constructs of completion. It will be viewed not as an aspect of religion but of a drive towards political hegemony[[12]](#footnote-12)created upon the Yehuda populations ongoing relationship with the omniscient Persian kings and the need to obey in order to survive.

**Folk tales:**

Hendel posits the folk-tale as a family affair that gets passed down from parent to child, or horizontally between groups.

Great Grand Parents

Parents

Children

Grand Children

Great Grand Children

Elite group+advisers+military captains+shopkeepers+merchants

In order for folk tales to continue through time they must be projected into objects or signifiers or embedded into narratives that become forms of art or written records. The inscriptions on Egyptian tombs (previous papers) provide individual life-stories to impress the gods in order to ensure an afterlife, stories like Abraham and Joseph play a larger, community based tweaking with the truth. It is not just the literary fabrication of the individual but the more skilled fabrications of an elite religious group.

The story in the Hebrew view was passed down via an unlikely link to related people, there being no apparent break in the lineage, as if words could be recorded by blood or genes. Islam enjoys the same view, believing that Muhammad was an ancestor of Abraham through Ishmael. The complete implausibility of such connections seems lost on most worshippers. The usual methods of remembering Abraham over the usually proposed millennium, such as memorials, stone imagery, engravings and art, are absent. Believers hold that the various books are the record, and again implausibly, that each, although different in many respects, are equally accurate. Each somehow, in their own fashion, gets around the problem of being written long after Abraham was supposed to have existed by using specific stratagems, such as claiming oral remembering, as above, or visions.

As in many tribal societies, which the early hill country appears to have been, relationships tend to be conducted through the ‘*idiom of genealogy’,* whereby tights and responsibilities are determined by kinship within the genealogical system, nephews subservient to uncles, grandchildren to grandparents.[[13]](#footnote-13) This simple process acts as a way of keeping the community ordered and together. It tends also to be permission based, where the right of a grandchild to act or plan actions is determined by say grandparents. Such societies often require descent from ancestral figures, in this case Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. According to Karel van der Toorn[[14]](#footnote-14) patrilineal involve a common religious devotion and combined with the accompanying genealogy strictures community law and religious law are one. This can still be seen in Islamic societies in the Near East, who along with earlier Hebraic societies considered themselves part of Abraham’s extended family. This provided a view of time that made, see earlier, the past and the present as the same therefore fundamentalists reference to the past at every opportunity is a realistic approach to the present, it is an approach where distant ancestors affect the present.

The Abrahamic narrative is perceived of as anecdotal with context altered over time, even brief time. Like the Joseph story, Abraham's biography fits in more with fictional accounts, carefully written with identifiable literary tropes such as formulaic phrases in the manner of the Iliad, dealing with issues pertinent to the post-Exilic period. One word about the credibility of folk tales or oral tradition on the authenticity of distant religious figures: few folk tales on known historical personalities can be traced back more than a few centuries unless something else conveys their memory, that is art or writing, and even then, there is no certainty that particular actions can faithfully be attributed to particular figures, especially within thematic books like the Bible. The Bible was constructed to persuade and convince, not testify to provable history. Its important figures, such as Abraham and Moses, are techniques of remembering in terms of the public identity of the past, shaped by elite groups within power contexts (Hendel).[[15]](#footnote-15). Nevertheless, the poetic presentation of the Pentateuch does not, as claimed by de Wette the German religious historian, mean it is completely unreliable as history. Although it must be viewed in Hendel's words: '*the past in the Bible is the represented past, not the past itself.'*

As Guy Danston[[16]](#footnote-16) asserts, the Hebrew stories of their arrival in Canaan fit two substantial genres. Abraham fits the founding father model. In this kind of founding narrative the founder arrives from a more sophisticated culture as an immigrant, acquiring legal status in his new land by raising altars, as Abraham does, or buying land with money or military assistance, which he also does. He helps his neighbours fight off an invasion from his own purported homeland, succeeding in beating off several armies with a tiny number of warriors. Muhammad’s story bears certain similarities. Their victorious are considered evidence of their righteousness-that is faith. The word describes piety, but not deeds, and the upholding of community values such as hospitality and upholding religious rites. As the relationship to the god is mainly focused on, morality is only considered within that relationship. Rape and murder can thereby, if done within the rules of the religion, be considered moral. In this genre the founder becomes accepted as the progenitor of the group he belongs to. Abraham arrives either from Ur or Haran into Canaan, so his origins can be attributed to either. Abraham purchases the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron, his wanderings establishing the borders of Israel-Shecham, Beth-el and Ai, and towards Negeb and Beesheba. He places an altar in each as a kind of territorial marker. The nature of the altars indicates an early stage in the YHWH religion, or more probably were sanctuaries intended for El. They appear to contain symbols, even possibly idols.

Guy proffers a similar account related to Xuthus, son of Hellen. According to the Catalogue of Women and other Greek genealogical traditions, Xuthus was the founder of both the Ionians and Achaeans, named after his sons. Xuthus first arrives in Athens, a foreigner in a foreign land as described by Euripides and provides military assistance to the Athenians thereby gaining the hand of the king's daughter. He eventually becomes king. The story is paralleled in the narrative of Danaus' settlement of Argos, leaving Egypt with his family and wandering across the sea. Danaus erects altars throughout the new land eventually becoming king. In both instances, the indigenous population is displaced.

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Would his genre have originally come from the Sea Peoples, many of whom were probably Mycenean, in other words from the Philistines or Dan? Its logical sequence based upon genealogy might have seemed attractive to the early hill-country population as they formed into larger groups. These papers have several times indicated that a number of Hebrew stories appear to have originated amongst the Philistines.

This kind of narrative also fits Jacob’s narrative, considered the original progenitor, who fled Canaan to , on his return, be regarded as, according to Guy, a Syro-Canaanite refugee. In this case, as in the later case of his son Joseph, Egypt was the incubator of the Hebrew nations. In fact, the Abraham/Isaac story appears to have developed independently and been inserted into the texts later.

**Literary Licence:**

In these papers, it can be seen that there is no evidence for the Two United Kingdoms and therefore it exists as a fabrication. Israel may have been a military power in the 9th century, but Judah probably was not. The United Kingdom testified to the power of words and stories over public and individual memory. The written word is representative not conclusive. Frank H. Polak[[17]](#footnote-17) places the Abraham story within the North-West Semitic epic tradition represented by Ugarit literature, but the tight structure positions that within the influences of Mesopotamian literature. Polak's connecting it to themes within Ugarit poetry, such as the inability of women to conceive, merely, it seems, establishes that such themes were common; shared throughout the region amongst groups for whom generation was a crucial issue connected to status, masculinity and survival. Although Polak determines that the language used argues in part for oral construction, in line with Ugarit literature,

Although Hendel for example believes that Hebrew writing began in the 12th century BCE, it is unlikely as the script did not develop until the 9th, before then it was under Phoenician influence. While the Gezer Calendar appears to challenge this, it is considered Hebrew because the Bible, quite falsely, claims Gezer as part of a Solomonic Empire. Early dates proffered for Pentateuchal writings must be treated with extreme caution, although early narratives can be accounted for by disposing of the conviction that the Bible was only a Hebrew affair-especially as the Hebrews themselves were a mixed ethnic group. Perceiving Biblical literature as a compendium of stories and influences from the region, enveloping Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Africa makes more sense. The Crime of Gilead referenced previously, although located in the hill-country, inhabits a tribal environment that could easily have emerged from elsewhere in the widespread, and shared common culture of the area. Its cautionary tale of mutual suspicion, and separation may indeed reflect conditions in the region where dialects were very distinct in the Yehud period when central control was again being imposed.

**What of Abraham? Themes:**

The story is one of improbables: when Abraham separates from his father´s clan, in the Bible no reason is given, Abraham heads towards Canaan at over seventy. Sarai his wife and half-sister is sterile, suggesting the habit of marrying close relatives. As the marriages discussed within the story appear to be largely monogamous, this again indicates its late composition[[18]](#footnote-18). Separation in order to ensure new beginnings, or indicate changes in narrative, is a theme within the story, and throughout the Bible as a whole. Abraham separates from his father’s clan, soon from his wife, from his nephew Lot, each time creating another beginning.

As can be seen, Abraham’s biography functions as a literary device rather than historical record. Although as a literary format it borrows from Ugarit epics, it uses an Egyptian biographical format listing the main aspects and achievements of his life rather than thoughts, feelings, or any inner life. Abraham does not fail. His biography serves to establish a hero, not necessarily an individual. Quite often, a patriarch, for example, will separate from his own father or family/clan in order to establish change and emphasis his relationship with the god. One ensuring difficulty in the overall understanding of the time, is that this constant separating prevents the populating of any land, let alone Canaan. Thereby, a solution was found.

Within the Bible, Abraham is unattached except to god and Sarai, whichever god that may be, although this is probably a literary device to emphasise his autochthonic role, given focus by later stories detailing Terah’s idolatry. Sarah is only loosely described, with emphasis placed on her physical appearance. Abraham is, like god in the creation story, a beginning therefore he must be alone, that is leave his father’s clan behind, starting again. Crossing into Canaan is therefore taking on a new identity. Abraham´s arrival in Canaan is a rebirth, symbolising adherence to another god or religious viewpoint, and at the same time replicating Moses' arrival. The two men's shifts in identity also reflects on the similarities of their stories. One other literary function of Abraham’s separation from Terah concerns the exile’s return from Mesopotamia, their strangeness or otherness to the people still there. In effect they were migrants bringing with them Persian rule and a new religion into the hill country. Abraham’s concern with obedience, when to obey and when to advise, concerns the exile’s relationship with an extremely powerful foreign king.

**Iconoclasm/Monotheism:**

Although the Bible says nothing on this, as usual the epigrammatic style mainly employed is concerned with action, there is nothing elsewhere on this matter and setting up trees at each altar suggests the opposite. Trees appear in the Adam and Eve story, itself a Mesopotamian invention, representing Mesopotamian notions of fertility and longevity. They convey motifs of Mesopotamian deities as well as references to Asherah, the wife of El/YHWH. The apparent concentration on couples in Genesis suggests again El.

Narratives of Abraham’s rejection of idols come much later in books that do not belong to the accepted canon. These include *The Book of Jubilees*, also called the Lesser Genesis considered canonical in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and probably where Muhammad or his followers got to know of the story. It was written down about 100 BCE. It appears to be the first known statement of Abraham’s iconoclasm: *The Apocalypse of Abraham* was written in the early Christian Period, according to Andrei Orlo,[[19]](#footnote-19) but the remarks on iconography are kept restrained:[[20]](#footnote-20) *Genesis Rabba,* a Jewish midrash was written as late as 300-500 BCE, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* and *Qur’an*. Because the Biblical text provides no reasons for certain actions, later writers, at times of cultural stress, have imposed an interpretation. The concept of idolatry may have emerged with the exiles, mainly on their return to Judah, and been additionally sparked by Greek and Roman conquests. This will be referenced at greater length later. In historical terms, not exactly convincing with regard to actions perhaps over a thousand years before, and no belief in oral traditions can really provide authenticity.

Abraham’s monotheism is not declared in Genesis, only that a god chose him to develop a particular property in the Middle East. At no point is it declared that the god is the only one, but merely a powerful one. Indeed, YHWH or El is presented as a personal god who engages Abraham for mutual benefit. Magic is included with the contract/deal or covenant binding through successive generations in a family arrangement. Later the god tells Abraham his descendants will acquire an empire, competing therefore with the powerful empires that harassed Palestine.

**El**

There are two stories on Abraham's arrival in Canaan: one is peaceful and the other violent, stressing conquest. God’s allocation of Canaan to Abraham resembles the exile’s return after their sojourn in Mesopotamia, where Abraham was meant to originate. There is nothing it seems on his progress through Syria, but much of the narrative centres on the Transjordan, emphasising a nomadic lifestyle in contrast to the urban existence of the family he has left behind. Although *Sinuhe* shows examples of nomadic lifestyles in the same period, these seem located in Palestine and Transjordan, it is rare but not unusual for city dwellers to then embrace nomadic lifestyles, which, by their nature, were traditional. Nevertheless, many groups did engage in both lifestyles but were not worshippers of YHWH. The relationship evidenced within the narrative between Abraham and his group and the cities they briefly enter is invested with ideology and prejudice-of which Sodom and Gomorrah is an example. Whether this corresponds to the urban/country-nomad dichotomy of Ba’al and YHWH this paper will later consider.

The separation of Lot and his family from Abraham is evidence of both differences in ideology and lifestyle, involving religious preferences. Although it is impossible to know, those differences might, and certainly appear to, reflect differences between El and Ba'al considered at length in an earlier paper, with El the god of nomads and Ba'al a city god. In these sections of the story, Abraham may represent El. Abraham´s marriage to Sarai seems to resemble or replicate El and YHWH's marriage to Asherah, often expressed in terms of equality. YHWH´s endorsement of Sarai may thereby be confirmation of that earlier supernatural union.

Abraham's journey from Ur (if that was his origins) to Canaan replicates the area covered by El, who like Abraham employs a number of guises. El of the mountain, where we can with some justification place Harran as this aspect of the ancient god was in the vicinity, El who lived within a tent and open spaces where we can place Abraham the nomad chief. What we may thereby have here is a composite, not only devised by J and E, but from numerous other sources (Henlen: 2005).

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