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Nuzi and the Bible: A Retrospective

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Ever since their publication sixty years ago,[1] the Nuzi tablets have occupied a prominent place in the comparative study of the Bible for the purpose of both biblical exegesis and historical inquiry. Yet in recent years, the importance and usefulness of the Nuzi tablets for biblical research have been called into question by some scholars[2] and have been severely challenged by others.[3] Before addressing the current status of Nuzi and biblical studies, however, it would be helpful to gain a historical perspective on the nature of Nuzi-biblical research. This may be accomplished by reflecting upon the intellectual climate which fostered this research and by appreciating the role of Nuzi in the evolving awareness of the Hurrian factor in ancient Near Eastern history.

Let us begin with the state of biblical scholarship just prior to the time of the publication of the Nuzi tablets. By the end of World War I, there was widespread recognition in biblical circles that the very foundations of Wellhausen's classical interpretation of the evolutionary development of the literature and religion of Israel were beginning to crumble. Wellhausen's basic premise that the materials found in a particular literary strand are to be dated to the

1. The substance of this paper was presented at the "ASOR Nuzi Symposium" held on December 6, 1987 in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. The theme of the symposium was "Sixty Years of Nuzi Studies," commemorating the anniversary of ASOR's publication of the first volume of Nuzi texts, Joint Expedition with the Iraq Museum at Nuzi, by E. Chiera in 1927. This retrospective is dedicated with great esteem and fondness to a dear colleague who by his own admission spent many years studying the Old Testament but nevertheless reads biblical articles with the eyes of an Assyriologist ("Eve and the Chameleon," In the Shelter of Elyon, eds., W.B. Barrick and J.R. Spencer, 217).

2. R. de Vaux was among the first to question the relevancy of some of the Nuzi socio-legal customs to the patriarchal narratives ("Les patriarches Hébreux et les découvertes modernes," Revue Biblique 56 [1949] 34-35). In the 1960's, more direct challenges to specific Nuzi-biblical parallels began to appear, including M. Greenberg, "Another Look at Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim," JBL 81 (1962) 239-48; J. van Seters, "The Problem of Childlessness in Near Eastern Law and the Patriarchs of Israel," JBL 87 (1968) 401-408; J. van Seters, "Jacob's Marriages and Ancient Near Eastern Customs: A Reexamination," Harvard Theological Review 62 (1969) 377-95; C.J. Mullo-Weir, "The Alleged Hurrian Wife-Sister Motif in Genesis," Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society 22 (1967-68 [1970]) 14-25. This scholarship resulted in a more cautious approach to the use of Nuzi texts in biblical research. Cf. R. de Vaux, The Early History of Israel (Histoire ancienne d'Israël: I. Des origines à l'installation en Canaan, II. La période des Juges (Paris: J. Gabalda & Cie, 1971, 1973), translated by David Smith (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978) 241-56.

3. T.L. Thompson, The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives, BZAW 133 (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1974) 196-297; J. van Seters, Abraham in History and Tradition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1975) 65-103.

time of the composition of that strand was widely felt to be no longer tenable. Therefore, the literary strands of the Bible could no longer serve as the sole basis for the reconstruction of Israelite history and religion. In the early 1920's, R. Kittel and H. Gressmann were advocating that the Bible no longer be studied in isolation and that biblical scholars must utilize the new methods and data gleaned from archaeology and the study of Ancient Near Eastern cultures.[4] With each succeeding new archaeological discovery, the acceptance of this advocacy intensified. It is against this backdrop that we must place Nuzi scholarship and the unfolding of our knowledge of Hurrian participation in the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine.

Prior to the discovery of the Nuzi documents, little was known of the Hurrians. At that time, there was no known native Hurrian documentation, aside from the Hurrian Amarna letter of Tushratta unearthed in 1887, and some Hurrian material found in the Hittite texts, recovered from the excavations of Boghazkoy in 1906 and subsequent years.[5] Indeed this scant Hurrian documentation was not very illuminating since research on the Hurrian language was only in its infancy.[6] With the publication of the Kirkuk and Nuzi texts, scholars were suddenly in possession of an abundance of intelligible documentation written in an Akkadian patois, reflecting the native Hurrian background of the scribes.[7] Based on the extensive body of Hurrian personal names, geographic names, terms, and expressions found in the Nuzi texts, Assyriologists began to become more fully aware of this recently discovered ethnic factor in the history of the ancient Near East.

Subsequent study of the Nuzi corpus revealed that some of the tablets were originally part of the official archives of the palace, including administrative lists, receipts, inventories and letters. Most, however, stemmed from the private archives of wealthy influential Nuzi families. The varied document-types, found in these private archives, reflected commercial law involving real estate, loans, and servitude, as well as family law relating to marriage, adoption and property settlement. The Nuzi texts were thus heralded as the primary source for the knowledge of Hurrian socio-economic legal practices and customs, dating to the second half of the fifteenth century B.C.E.[8] In the 1930's, as scholars began a more extensive study of the many contracts, declarations, court proceedings, and litigations, all replete with Hurrian personal names and Hurrian terms, certain affinities with biblical customs became apparent. The contractual stipulation that a barren woman give a slavegirl to her husband as wife, the ranking of heirs and the preferential treatment of the designated eldest, the association of house gods with the disposition of family property, the conditional sale into slavery of freeborn daughters, and the

4. R. Kittel, "Die Zukunft der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 39 (1921) 84-99; H. Gressmann, "Die Aufgaben der alttestamentlichen Forschung," ZAW 42 (1924) 1-33, esp. pp. 8ff.

5. The Mitanni letter was published in 1915 by O. Schroeder in Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der königlichen Museen zu Berlin 12, No. 200, with collations in J.A. Knudtzon, Die El-Amarna Tafeln, VAB 2, No. 24. The Hurrian Hittite material began to be published in the 1920's in the principal publication series of the Hittite texts, Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi and Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi. For this Hurrian material, see E. Laroche, Catalogue des textes hittites, Études et Commentaires 75 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971) 139-143, nos. 774-91.

6. L. Messerschmidt, Mitanni-Studien, MVAG 4/4 (1899); and F. Bork, Die Mitannisprache, MVAG 14/1-2 (1909).

7. For the nature of Hurrian influence on the Akkadian dialect of Nuzi, see E.A. Speiser, "The Linguistic Substratum at Nuzi," in AASOR 16 (1935-36) 136-42; M. Berkooz, The Nuzi Dialect of Akkadian: Orthography and Phonology, Language Dissertations 23 (Philadelphia: Linguistic Society of America, 1937); C.H. Gordon, "The Dialect of the Nuzi Tablets," OrNS 7 (1938) 32-63, 215-32; and G. Wilhelm, Untersuchungen zum Hurro-Akkadischen von Nuzi, AOAT 9 (1970).

8. For a discussion of the dating of the Nuzi documents, see B.L. Eichler, Indenture at Nuzi, YNER 5 (1973), 2 n. 7.

institution of *ḫābiru*-servitude, were just some of the Nuzi Hurrian practices which attracted the attention of biblical scholars.[9]

At the same time, during the late 1920's and continuing into the 1930's, the site of Ras Shamra yielded Hurrian religious documents and Hurrian bilingual vocabularies and texts also dating to the fifteenth century B.C.E.[10] This evidence of Hurrian penetration to the Syrian coast as well as other evidence of Hurrian penetration into central Palestine[11] clearly indicated that by the middle of the second millennium Hurrian influence extended from Arrapha and Nuzi in the East to coastal Syria and Palestine in the West. Knowledge of the existence of a substantial Hurrian presence in Aram-Naharayim, the patriarchal homeland in the Middle Euphrates valley, as well as in Canaan, coalesced with the rapidly growing impression that early biblical traditions revealed strong signs of Hurrian influence. Since no pertinent epigraphic material had come to light from the West, scholars looked to the Nuzi Hurrian material from east of the Tigris to substantiate this impression, assuming the data to be valid by extension for the Hurrian area of Haran and Nahor in the Middle Euphrates valley. Furthermore, the Nuzi data taken in conjunction with evidence from Ras Shamra and Amarna of Hurrian penetration into Syria and Palestine seemed to point to a mid-second millennium dating for the biblical Patriarchal Period.[12]

The next major development in the unfolding of a Hurrian presence in the ancient Near East came with the discovery of the ancient site of Mari and the publication of its Old Babylonian archives, which began in the late 1930's and

9. S. Smith, "What Were the Teraphim?" Journal of Theological Studies 33 (1932) 33-36 (cf. already RA 23 [1926] 127); E. Chiera, "Habiru and Hebrews," AJSL 49 (1932-33) 115-124; H.L. Ginsberg and B. Maisler, "Semitised Hurrians in Syria and Palestine," Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society 13 (1933) 243-67; I. Mendelsohn, "The Conditional Sale into Slavery of Free-born Daughters in Nuzi and the Law of Ex. 21:7-11," JAOS 55 (1935) 190-95; C.H. Gordon, "A New Akkadian Parallel to Deuteronomy 25:1-12," Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society 15 (1935) 29-34; "ʾlhim in its Reputed Meaning of Rulers, Judges," Journal of Biblical Literature 54 (1935) 139-44; "Fratriarchy in the Old Testament," JBL 54 (1935) 223-31; "Parallèles nouziens aux lois et coutumes de l'Ancien Testament," Revue Biblique 44 (1935) 34-41; "An Akkadian Parallel to Deuteronomy 21:1ff.," RA 33 (1936) 1-6; L. Wooley, Abraham: Recent Discoveries and Hebrew Origins (London, 1936); M. Burrows, "The Complaint of Laban's Daughters," JAOS 57 (1937) 259-76; C.H. Gordon, "The Story of Jacob and Laban in the Light of the Nuzi Tablets," BASOR 66 (1937) 25-27; J. Lewy, "Influences hurrites sur Israël," Revue des études sémitiques, 1938, 49-75; E.A. Speiser, "The Nuzi Tablets Solve a Puzzle in the Books of Samuel," BASOR 72 (1938) 15-17; J. Lewy, Habiru and Hebrews," HUCA 14 (1939) 587-623; M. Burrows, "The Ancient Oriental Background of the Hebrew Levirate Marriage," BASOR 77 (1940) 1-15; C.H. Gordon, "Biblical Customs and the Nuzi Tablets," BibArch 3 (1940) 1-12; J. Lewy, "A New Parallel Between Habiru and Hebrews," HUCA 15 (1940) 47-58; and E.A. Speiser, "Of Shoes and Shekels (I Samuel 12:3; 13:21)," BASOR 77 (1940) 15-20.

10. The Hurrian religious texts from Ras Shamra were written in alphabetic cuneiform. The longest connected text, containing 62 lines, was published by C. Virolleaud, "Les inscriptions cunéiformes de Ras Shamra," Syria 10 (1929) pl. 64 tablet 4. The first Sumero-Hurrian vocabulary, written in syllabic cuneiform, was published by Thureau-Dangin, "Vocabulaires de Ras Shamra," Syria 12 (1931) 234-49, No. 8 (pl. 50-52). For additional Hurrian texts from Ras Shamra which were published in the 1930's, see AnOr 12, 128ff. and Syria 20 (1939) 127.

11. Hurrian diffusion into Palestine was discerned from the attestation of Hurrian terms, personal names, and god names in the Amarna letters (J.A. Knutzon, Die El-Amarna-Tafeln, 1551-71, 1582-83) and from the occurrence of Hurrian personal names in the tablets excavated at Tell Taʾannek (A. Gustavs, "Die Personennamen in den Tontafeln von Tell Taʾannek," Zeitschrift des deutschen Palaestina-Vereins 50 [1927] 1-18; 51 [1928] 169-218; B. Maisler, "The Taanach Tablets," [in Hebrew] Sefer Klausner [Joseph N. Klausner Anniversary Volume], edited by N.H. Tur-Sinai [1937] 44-66).

12. For example, see C.H. Gordon, "Biblical Customs and the Nuzi Tablets," BibArch 3 (1940) 2. Gordon continued to advocate a mid-second millennium dating for the Patriarchal Age which he maintained until a short time ago (Introduction to Old Testament Times [Ventnor: Ventnor Publishers, 1953]; "The Patriarchal Narratives," JNES 13 [1954] 56-59). Note, however, his most recent statement in "*Erēbu* Marriage," Studies in the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians in Honor of Ernest R. Lacheman, 157.

continued after World War II.[13] These Mari texts, dating from circa 1800-1750 B.C.E., most notably revealed the nature of the West Semitic population of the Middle Euphrates Valley during the Old Babylonian Period. The West Semitic Amorites of Mari were not a unified whole but rather consisted of various groups in different stages of transition from the desert to the sown.[14] On the one extreme were the Amorite semi-nomadic tribes who not only remained untouched by Mesopotamian civilization but were outrightly hostile to it. On the other extreme were the ruling Amorite kings of Mesopotamia who remained Amorite only in name. Between these two extremes were the Amorite Haneans who had accepted the authority of the Mesopotamianized kings but retained many of the customs and ways of the Amorites. In recording the activities of all these Amorites, the Mari archives provided scholars with much documentation of West Semitic personal names, tribal groupings, terminology, and practices, such as covenant-making an census-taking.[15] Indeed, some biblical scholar began to place the Patriarchal Period withi this West Semitic context, dating the patriarcha traditions to the first half of the second millen nium.[16]

The Old Babylonian Mari archives, howeve not only furnished data on the West Semiti ethnic groups but also cast new light upon th extent of Hurrian ethnic movement into Meso potamia in the first half of the second millen nium. The occurrences of the gentilic tern "Nuzian" in the Mari archives clearly supporte a Hurrian settlement in Nuzi as far back as th Old Babylonian period since Nuzi is the Hurrian name of the Akkadian GA.SUR.[17] The discovery of a number of Hurrian religious texts at Mar and the appearance of Hurrian personal name within the Mari archives[18] also furnished evidence for Hurrian penetration into the middle Euphrates valley during the Old Babylonian period. Tablets from the Syrian site of Alalakh,

13. The French began to excavate Tell Hariri in 1933 under the direction of A. Parrot. Although the systematic publication of the Mari tablets began in 1946 with the appearance of Archives royale de Mari, TCL 22, G. Dossin, C.-F. Jean, and F. Thureau-Dangin had published a number of tablets from 1934-1939. For a listing of these texts as well as others which were not originally published in the ARM series, see H.B. Huffmon, "Appendix I. Extraneous Publications of Akkadian Texts of the Old Babylonian Period from Mari," Amorite Personal Names in the Mari Texts: A Structural and Lexical Study (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 274-77.

14. Cf. J.-R. Kupper, Les nomades en Mésopotamie au temps des rois de Mari, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège 142 (Paris: 1957). For a study of the interaction between the nomadic tribe and the city-state in Mari in light of modern anthropological research, see M.B. Rowton, "Autonomy and Nomadism in Western Asia," OrNS 42 (1973) 247-58; "Urban Autonomy in a Nomadic Environment," JNES 32 (1973) 201-15; and "Enclosed Nomadism," JESHO 17 (1974) 1-30.

15. G. Dossin's article, "Benjaminaites dans les textes de Mari," Mélanges syriens offerts à M. René Dussaud 2, 981-96, was one of the first to draw attention to a possible relationship between the Mari texts and the Bible. A steady stream of publications followed after the end of World War II which continued to highlight the significance of the Mari archives for biblical research. Much of this extensive literature is cited in A. Spycket, "Bibliographie de Mari," Studia Mariana, Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui 4 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1950) 127-38, and in selected bibliographies appearing in H.B. Huffmon, Amorite Personal Names in the Mari Texts (1965), pp. 281-99, and A. Malamat, "Mari," BibArch 34 (1971) 22. For a recent survey and evaluation of the relevancy of Mari to biblical studies, see A. Lemaire, "Mari, la Bible et le monde nord-ouest sémitique," MARI 4 (1983) 549-558.

16. Among others, see W.F. Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity, 200; G.E. Mendenhall, "Mari," BibArch 11 (1948) 15ff.; R.T. O'Callaghan, Aram Naharaim, AnOr 26, 27-32, and H.H. Rowley, "Recent Discovery and the Patriarchal Age," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 32 (1949-50) 78f.

17. See Eichler Indenture at Nuzi 2 n. 5.

18. The Hurrian religious texts from Mari have been published by F. Thureau-Dangin, "Tablettes hurrites provenant de Mari," RA 36 (1939) 1-28. A fragment of a royal correspondence has been published by E. Laroche, "Fragment hourrite provenant de Mari," RA 51 (1957) 104-106, for which now see M. Salvini, "Un texte hourrite nommant Zimrilim," RA 82 (1988) 59-69.

Hurrian names appearing in the Mari texts have been collected by J.M. Sasson, "Hurrians and Hurrian Names in the Mari Texts," UF 6 (1974) 353-400. A Hurrian presence in the Habur region was also evident from the occurrence of Hurrian personal names and deities in C.J. Gadd, "Tablets from Chagar Bazar, 1936," Iraq 4 (1937) 178-83, esp. pp. 181-83, and "Tablets from Chagar Bazar and Tell Braq, 1937-38," Iraq 7 (1940) 22-67, esp. pp. 26-28, 34-43.

published in 1953,[19] further corroborated the steady westward infiltration of Hurrians during this period. A study of the Alalah onomastica from Level VII texts revealed that Hurrians comprised over thirty percent of the Old Babylonian population of Alalah, about two generations after the end of the Mari archives.[20] Although both Mari and Alalah did attest to a substantial Hurrian presence in the patriarchal homeland of Aram-Naharayim during the Old Babylonian period, neither the royal archives at Mari nor the Alalah tablets from Level VII and Level IV yielded the rich and varied documentation of socio-legal practices which had been found at Nuzi. Thus the Nuzi documents continued to serve as the primary source for Hurrian law and custom.

For those biblical scholars who dated the Patriarchal Period to the first half of the second millennium and yet wished to utilize the Nuzi data in interpreting the patriarchal narratives, an additional assumption had to be set forth. Not only did these scholars assume that the Hurrian practices attested in Nuzi from east of the Tigris were valid by extension to Hurrian practices in the west, but they also had to assume that these Hurrian practices of mid-second millennium Nuzi were identical with Hurrian practices of the first half of the second millennium.

To assume that the Nuzi documentation reflects a conservative social practice which did not change in the course of three hundred years and which was common to all Hurrians is not unreasonable, especially in the realm of family law. These very assumptions, however, negate the possibility of utilizing the Nuzi material as cogent proof for dating the patriarchal narratives to a specific historical period. Roland de Vaux, in his essay on "Method in the Study of Early Hebrew History,"[21] was among the first to note that if a practice reflected in the Nuzi tablets is limited to the area of Nuzi and to its historical period, there would be no direct connection between it and the activities of the patriarchs who never lived east of the Tigris. And conversely, if the practice is not limited to the area of Nuzi and to its historical period, but rather represents common Hurrian practice, then the practice cannot be used to date patriarchal activities to a specific historical period. Thus the Nuzi tablets cannot be useful in determining biblical issues of specific historical inquiry since the Nuzi customs reflected in the biblical texts could have been in practice any time within the entire span of existence of a Hurro-Semitic milieu in the West.

Despite this new awareness of the inability of the Nuzi tablets to provide answers in matters of biblical historical inquiry, scholars continued to view them as important sources for illuminating the Hurrian background of certain biblical narratives and practices. Thus a consensus of scholarly opinion still maintained that the Nuzi tablets could attest to the general historicity of biblical traditions and could contribute to the proper exegesis of pertinent biblical passages.[22]

During the last twenty-five years, a re-evaluation of the conclusions reached by the exegetical application of the Nuzi data to the

19. D.J. Wiseman, The Alalakh Tablets, Occasional Publications of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara 2. Other texts from Tell Atchana were published by Wiseman in "Supplementary Copies of Alalakh Tablets," JCS 8 (1954) 1-30; "Abban and Alalah," JCS 12 (1958) 124-29; and "Ration Lists from Alalakh VII and IV," JCS 13 (1959) 19-33, 50-62. The Hurrian presence in the Alalah corpus was already evident in 1939, with the publication of S. Smith, "A Preliminary Account of the Tablets from Atchana," Antiquaries Journal 19 (1939) 38-48, and his subsequent publication, in 1949, of The Statue of Idrimi, Occasional Publications of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara 1.

20. A. Draffkorn, Hurrians and Hurrian at Alalah: An Ethno-Linguistic Analysis (unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1959), esp. pp. 117-20, 214-17.

21. J.P. Hyatt, ed., The Bible in Modern Scholarship (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965) 15-29, esp. pp. 26f.

22. For example, see A. Parrot, Abraham et son temps (Neuchatel: Delachaux, 1962) 90-94; J. Bright, A History of Israel (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972 [2nd edition]) 78ff.; K.A. Kitchen, Ancient Orient and Old Testament (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1966) 43-53, esp. p. 51.

Bible has begun to take form. In examining the nature of this re-evaluation, it would be helpful to focus upon the three distinct aspects in which this re-evaluation has manifested itself.

The first aspect represents the testing of previously advanced interpretations of the Nuzi data. This re-evaluation coincided with and gained impetus from Lacheman's publication of a significant new volume of Nuzi tablets dealing with family law in 1962.[23] This publication closed an almost thirty year hiatus since the last previous publication of a major corpus of Nuzi documents relating to family law. Subsequent publication of Nuzi and Nuzi-type texts from the Louvre,[24] the Geneva Museum of Art and History,[25] the British Museum,[26] the Iraq Museum,[27] the Yale Babylonian Collection,[28] the Harvard Semitic Museum,[29] and smaller collections,[30] as well as from the excavations of Tell al-Faḫḫār,[31] has further stimulated this aspect of re-evaluation. A re-examination of old evidence in light of new data gleaned from the recently published texts has revealed that a few previously advanced interpretations of the Nuzi material can no longer be maintained with any degree of certainty. Hence the proposed application to biblical research of such invalidated interpretations must be rejected.

Two examples of this first aspect involve proposed Nuzi-biblical parallels which were heralded as parade examples of the ability of the Nuzi material to solve longstanding biblical cruxes, namely, the patriarchal references to their wives as sisters, and Rachel's theft of Laban's gods. E.A. Speiser's thesis of the existence of a wife-sister status in Nuzi was based on an interpretation of the first published sistership contract whereby a brother gave his sister to another in sistership for 40 shekels of silver.[32] Speiser's interpretation of the nature of the sistership arrangement was influenced by the fact that the parties appearing in this sistership contract also appeared in a marriage contract whereby the same brother gave his same sister in wifehood to the same third party for 40 shekels of silver.[33] Speiser posited the concurrent validity of both contracts and thus concluded that in Nuzi a woman may have the concurrent status of wife and sister.[34] Speiser viewed the four other known sistership documents in light of the first published document,

23. Family Law Documents, Excavations at Nuzi 8. In the previous year, N.B. Jankowska published "Legal Documents from Arrapha in the Collections of the U.S.S.R.," Peredneagiatskii Sbornik: Voprosi Hettologii i Hurritologii (Moscow, 1961) 424-580.

24. E.-M. Cassin, "Tablettes inédites de Nuzi," RA 56 (1962) 57-80. Cf. D. Arnaud, RA 68 (1974) 174-77 which includes collations of the Nuzi texts in TCL 9 and four new Nuzi fragments.

25. E.R. Lacheman, "Les tablettes de Kerkouk au Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Genève," Genava 15 (1967) 5-23.

26. C.B.F. Walker, CT 51, 1-14; and A.R. Millard, "Strays from a 'Nuzi' Archive," Studies Lacheman 434-39. For a description of the nearly 300 remaining unpublished texts from the British Museum, see M. Maidman, "The Nuzi Texts of the British Museum," ZA 76 (1986) 254-88.

27. E.R. Lacheman, "Tablets from Arrapḫa and Nuzi in the Iraq Museum," Sumer 32 (1976) 113-48.

28. E.R. Lacheman and D.I. Owen, "Texts from Arrapha and Nuzi in the Yale Babylonian Collection," in Studies Lacheman, 377-432.

29. E.R. Lacheman, D.I. Owen, and M.A. Morrison, "Excavations at Nuzi 9/1," in Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians 2, 357-702.

30. G.D. Young, "Nuzu Texts in the Free Library of Philadelphia," Orient and Occident: Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday, ed., H.A. Hoffner, Jr., Alter Orient und Altes Testament 22, 223-33; M. Müller, "Ein Prozess um einen Kreditkauf in Nuzi," and D.I. Owen, "Text Fragments from Arrapha in the Kelsey Museum of Art and Archaeology, The University of Michigan," in Studies Lacheman, 443-454, 455-468.

31. A Fadhil, Rechtsurkunden und Administrative Texte aus Kurruḫanni (M.A. thesis, Heidelberg, 1972); and "Ein frühes ṭuppi mārūti aus Tell al-Faḫḫār/Kurruḫanni," in Studies Lacheman, 363-376.

32. HSS 5, 69.

33. HSS 5, 80 which is to be read in conjunction with HSS 5, 25.

34. "The Wife-Sister Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives," Oriental and Biblical Studies: Collected Writings of E.A. Speiser, ed., J.J. Finkelstein and M. Greenberg, 62-82

with all five representing the corpus upon which he based his thesis.[35] Today, however, there are eleven published Nuzi sistership documents. An analysis of these texts reveals that the sistership contract involves the transferring of the privilege to negotiate the sister's marriage from her natural brother (or at times, from the woman herself) to the adoptive brother.[36] With this transfer, the adoptive brother either gained the right to share in her future marriage price or obtained the sole right to her marriage price, while the woman received the status of sister of her adoptive brother until her eventual marriage to another. In such cases, the woman and her natural brother must have been in immediate dire straits, for they thereby ceded her future marriage price to the adoptive brother. Furthermore, in none of these contracts does the adopted sister simultaneously receive the status of wife. Against this background, the first published Nuzi sistership contract, which formed the cornerstone of Speiser's thesis, remains atypical in its failure to mention the adoptive brother's right to negotiate the marriage of his adopted sister and his entitlement to her marriage price. In view of the entire corpus, however, it is clear that this atypical sistership document, even in conjunction with its associated marriage contract,[37] does not reasonably allow the assumption that in Nuzi a husband could have the concurrent status of brother by adopting his wife from her natural brother through a sistership transaction. Certainly, the equating of sistership with wifehood by asserting that in all sistership transactions the adoptive brother had the concurrent status of husband can no longer be maintained.

Similarly, the assertion that the Nuzi house gods functioned as tokens of the possessor's right to inherit ancestral property[38] has not been substantiated by more recently published documents. In fact, a re-examination of the original corpus of seven texts upon which the assertion was based had already raised serious questions concerning the validity of this interpretation.[39] The five newer documents,[40] of which four are wills concerning the disposition of property, confirmed that the Nuzi house gods were usually bequeathed to the chief heir, but at times they were also bequeathed to others.[41] Thus there is no evidence that the

35. The corpus consisted of the following texts: HSS 5, 26, 69, AASOR 16 (1936) 54, Gadd (RA 23 [1926]) 31, and JEN 78. C.J. Mullo-Weir was the first to assail Speiser's interpretation of these texts in his article, "The Alleged Hurrian Wife-Sister Motif in Genesis," Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society 22 (1967-68 [1970]) 14-25.

36. The subsequently published texts are HSS 19, 67, 68, 69, 70, 143, and Yale (Studies Lacheman) 12. For an analysis of the entire corpus, see B.L. Eichler, "Another Look at the Nuzi Sistership Contracts," Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of J.J. Finkelstein, ed., M. de J. Ellis, 45-59. Cf. S. Greengus, "Sisterhood Adoption at Nuzi and the 'Wife-Sister' in Genesis," HUCA 46 (1975 [1976]) 5-31.

37. For a discussion of the possible interpretations of the interrelationship between texts HSS 69, 80 and 25, see Eichler in Finkelstein Mem. Vol. 56f. Cf. Greengus, HUCA 46 (1975 [1976]) 24-26.

38. A.E. Draffkorn, "Ilāni/Elohim," JBL 76 (1957) 216-24.

39. The corpus consisted of two wills (Gadd [RA 23 (1926)] 5, HSS 14, 108), two sale-adoption contracts (JEN 89, 216), one real-adoption contract (Gadd [RA 23 (1926)] 51), one disinheritance declaration (JEN 478), and one litigation declaration (HSS 14, 8).

40. The subsequently published texts consisted of four wills (HSS 19, 4, 5, 7, Yale 6), and one disinheritance declaration (HSS 19, 27 with K. Deller, "Die Hausgötter der Familie Šukrija S. Ḫuja," in Studies Lacheman, 72). Based on the physical condition of the tablets and the difficult contexts, scholarly interpretations differ as to the relevancy of some of these texts to the *ilānu* corpus. See below, n. 41.

41. According to J. Paradise's reading of HSS 19, 5 (Nuzi Inheritance Practices [unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1972] 96ff.), the house gods are assigned to the secondary heir. However, Deller's reading of the text (Studies Lacheman 48ff.) allows for the assigning of the principal set of house gods to the chief heir, and the set of smaller gods to the secondary heir. Paradise and Deller also disagree on their reading of HSS 19, 4:15. According to Paradise (Nuzi Inheritance 94ff.), the house gods are willed to Hasib-tilla who is neither the chief nor the secondary heir. Deller (Studies Lacheman 56) emends the text, however, thereby eliminating any reference to the house gods.

house gods served to legitimate one's inheritance rights since they are not given exclusively to the chief heir nor are they consistently given to all the heirs. It is clear that the Nuzi gods were symbols of the unity of the household and the integrity of its membership.[42] The only explicit references to their function in the texts, however, remain closely associated with cultic matters.[43]

The second aspect of the re-evaluation represents the testing of previously advanced applications of validated Nuzi data to the Bible in an attempt to interpret the biblical passages on the basis of shared parallels. The difficulty in evaluating proposed Nuzi parallels to the Bible is that proponents of these parallels have admitted from the very outset that disparities do exist between the Nuzi evidence and the Bible. In their opinion, these disparities resulted from the biblical redactor's misunderstanding of ancient received traditions.[44] Another factor contributing to the difficulty in discerning valid parallels is the disparity due to the different nature of the compared subject matter. The biblical data are embedded in descriptive narratives and prescriptive l while the Nuzi data are documented in idio cratic legal contracts and court proceedi Neither of these sources allow for a c delineation of the socio-legal institutions, toms and practices which they reflect which scholars have attempted to compar Thus this aspect of the re-evaluation of N biblical parallels remains subjective, dep dent upon each scholar's tolerance for degree of disparity between the bibli account and the proposed Nuzi parallel.

An example of this second aspect is the of valid Nuzi practices, reflected in the N documents, in attempting to discern the und lying relationship between Jacob and Labar the patriarchal narratives. On the basis of N parallels, it has been suggested that Lab having only daughters at the time, adopt Jacob as his son.[46] The Nuzi documents att to a practice whereby the adopted son marri the daughter of his adoptive father.[47] In ord to ensure the status of their children as the sc legitimate heirs to their grandfather's estat the adopted son is forbidden to take anoth

42. HSS 19, 7 stipulates that the gods are to be given to the chief heir only upon the death of the testator's wife and the subsequent division of his property. As long as the sons remain united on the paternal estate, no son is granted sole possession of the gods. In HSS 19, 27, a father disinherits his son, barring him from the house gods and from the ancestral spirits.

43. In Yale 6, the testator wills his property to his three daughters whom he adopts as sons (cf. J.S. Paradise, "Daughters as 'Sons' at Nuzi," in Studies in the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians 2, 203-13). This will confirms the cultic function of the Nuzi house gods already evident in HSS 14, 108 by stating that whoever among his daughters retains the testator's real estate and remains in his household shall serve the gods and the ancestral spirits (cf. Deller, in Studies Lacheman, 73, 76). For a connection between the ancestral cult and the right to inherit, see A. Skaist, "The Ancestor Cult and Succession in Mesopotamia," Death in Mesopotamia, Mesopotamia 8, B. Alste ed., 123-28.

44. For example, see E.A. Speiser, Genesis, The Ancho Bible, xlii.

45. Cf. the remarks of T.L. Thompson, "A New At tempt to Date the Patriarchal Narratives," JAOS 98 (1978 78.

46. C.H. Gordon, "The Story of Jacob and Laban in th Light of the Nuzi Tablets," BASOR 66 (1937) 25-27, an "*Erēbu* Marriage," in Studies Lacheman, 157. For additiona bibliography, see Thompson, The Historicity of the Patri archal Narratives, 269 n. 315.

47. Gadd (RA 23 [1926]) 51 and HSS 5, 67, to which should be added HSS 19, 51. The adoption of a son to whom the daughter of the adoptive father is given in marriage is also attested in a recently published Old Babylonian contract, Arnaud Emar VI/3, No. 29.

wife.[48] Should his wife be barren, however, she is to provide her husband with a female servant who will bear children in her stead. The contract may name a female servant given by the father to his daughter. Should the adoptive father subsequently have natural sons, they would share the paternal estate with the adopted son. The Bible's late mention of Laban's natural sons as heirs to Laban's estate (Gen. 31:1) is taken to refer to sons who presumably had been born subsequent to Jacob's adoption. Such circumstances would explain the alienation felt by Jacob and his wives as well as the mounting tension between Laban's sons and Jacob. The final confrontation between Jacob and Laban during which time Laban declares "I have it in my power to do you harm (Gen. 31:29) . . . The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks; all that you see is mine! (Gen. 31:43)," is thus to be understood as the words of an adoptive father exerting his legal authority over an adopted son, his family and possessions.

This hypothesis, however, has been severely criticized by scholars[49] who point to descrepancies in the biblical narrative which contradict the assumption that the sonless Laban adopted Jacob and gave his daughters to him in marriage with the gift of female servants, in accordance with Nuzi practice. Laban's declaration that Jacob is his flesh and blood (Gen. 29:14) lacks the specificity of the adoption formula whereby the adopted party is designated as son. Jacob's assertion that his services are to be considered as the bride-price for his wives contradicts the adoption tablets which do not specify the payment of a bride-price. Furthermore, Jacob's intention to eventually return to his homeland and his concern with accumulating his own possessions run counter to an adopted son's desire to permanently remain in his adoptive father's household. Indeed, the Bible depicts Jacob's relationship to Laban as that of a hired herdsman. Laban offers him wages (Gen. 29:15; 30:28, 31) and is accused of changing the conditions of his hire time and again (Gen. 31:41). In fact, Jacob's countercharges against Laban (Gen. 31:38-42) and the underlying relationship between them has most recently been interpreted in light of Nuzi herding agreements.[50]

To be sure, neither explanation of the relationship seems to fully explicate the biblical text which reflects a tension between Laban's attempt to assert his authority over Jacob and his family and Jacob's attempt to achieve independence from Laban. This tension, however, may perhaps be understood in light of the various permutations of the adoption-marriage relationship, documented in the Nuzi texts. Not all adoptions with marriage attest to the

48. The contractual clause which limits the polygamous rights of the husband is not unique to this type of adoption-marriage. This clause also appears in marriage texts from Nuzi (cf. J. Paradise, "Marriage Contracts of Free Persons at Nuzi," JCS 39 [1987] 26-30) and in marriage contracts from other Mesopotamian sites, including those of the neo-babylonian period (M. Roth, Babylonian Marriage Agreements 7th-3rd Centuries B.C. [AOAT 222]), where divorce is the consequence of the husband's desire to take another wife. For a detailed discussion of polygamy in the Old Babylonian period, see R. Westbrook, Old Babylonian Marriage Law, AfO Beiheft 23, 103-111.

49. J. van Seters, Harvard Theological Review 62 (1969) 377-95; R. de Vaux, The Early History of Israel, 247-48; and T.L. Thompson, The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives, 273-77.

50. M.A. Morrison, "The Jacob and Laban Narrative in Light of Near Eastern Sources," BibArch 46 (1983) 156-160, with pertinent bibliography at end of article, p. 164. J.J. Finkelstein was the first to discuss Genesis 31:38f. in light of an Old Babylonian herding contract (JAOS 88 [1968] 30-36). For additional Old Babylonian herding contracts, see M. Stol, "Fragment of a Herding Contract," Miscellanea Babylonica: Mélanges offerts à Maurice Birot, eds. J.-M. Durand and J.-R. Kupper, 273-75; and S. Greengus, Studies in Ishchali Documents, Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 19, 132f.

adopted son's becoming a permanent member of the adoptive father's household. Although differing in details, there are Nuzi adoption contracts in which a man secures the services of another by adopting him as his son and providing him with a wife.[51] In return for his bride, the adopted son must serve in the household of the adoptive father during his lifetime. Upon the death of his adoptive father, the adopted son may take his wife and children and depart from his adoptive father's household.[52] Thus the Nuzi texts provide evidence of various permutations of adoption-marriage arrangements. The tensions between Jacob and Laban may perhaps have been rooted in the undefined nature of Jacob's marriages, with each party pressing for a type of arrangement which would be most beneficial to him. The biblical narrative relates that Laban, anxious to secure the long-term services of Jacob, took advantage of his request to marry Rachel. Even had it been apparent to all that Jacob served Laban seven years for his first wife,[53] Laban gave him a second wife prior to his beginning a second term of service. Thus the marriage could be interpreted as a type of adoption-marriage arrangement wherein Jacob's service would be in return for his bride and whereby Jacob would be attached to Laban's household and subject to his authority. Jacob, in order to maintain his independence, asserted that both terms of service represented payment of his wives' bride-price and that his status under Laban was that of an independent hired herdsman. The interpretation that Laban officially formalized and concluded Jacob's marriage arrangements, acknowledging his independent status, only at Gilead, some twenty years after his marriage to Leah[54] supports the hypothesis that the failure to come to terms and define the nature of Jacob's marriages and his resultant status gave rise to the tensions between Jacob and Laban. Needless to say, the above speculation remains unproven and unprovable. Nevertheless, the Nuzi marriage contracts, adoption-marriage arrangements, and herding agreements provide an important source of detailed and variegated data on the central themes of the Jacob and Laban narrative even though the biblical account does not plainly support the assumption of Jacob's adoption by Laban.

Another example of this second aspect of the re-evaluation of Nuzi-biblical parallels is the use of the Nuzi *ṭuppi martūti u kallatūti*, "document of daughtership or daughter-in-lawship," to clarify the nature of the biblical law of female slaves as set forth in Exodus 21:7-11.[55] The Nuzi documents attest to the father's privilege to arrange for his daughter's adoption into "daughtership or daughter-in-lawship" with provisions for her eventual mar-

51. S. Stohlman, Real Adoption at Nuzi (unpub. Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1972) 151ff.

52. HSS 19, 39, 40 and 45. Certain contracts specify that the adopted son is entitled to receive some of the deceased's property. HSS 19, 52 states that the adopted son is to receive one-tenth of the livestock; while HSS 19, 57 specifies a portion of land (cf. the provisions in Arnaud, Emar VI/3, No. 5). Note that none of these contracts specify that the bride is the daughter of the adoptive father. Perhaps this represents another aspect of the complaint of Laban's daughters.

53. A close cuneiform parallel to this type of marriage arrangement whereby a man serves another for a fixed period of time in order to receive food, clothing, and a wife is to be found in the Middle Assyrian text, VAS 19 NF 3 No. 37 (see J.N. Postgate, Iraq 41 [1979] 93ff.). Note that the wife is not specified as the daughter of the contracting party.

54. T.L. Thompson, The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives, 279; M.A. Morrison, BibArch 46 91983) 163.

55. This Nuzi-biblical parallel was first discussed by I. Mendelsohn, "The Conditional Sale into Slavery of Free-born Daughter in Nuzi and the Law of Ex. 21:7-11," JAOS 55 (1935) 190-95.

riage to be negotiated by her adoptive father.[56] Although the stipulations vary from contract to contract, the documents attest to a variety of options available to the adoptive father. He may at times marry her himself or give her in marriage to whomever he wishes, including his natural son, adopted son, or slave.[57] While certain contracts forbid the adopted daughter to be married to a slave, others specifically state that she is to marry the adoptive father's slave.[58] In the latter case, the contracts specify that she will remain bound her entire lifetime to the household of her adoptive father. Should her slave-husband die, she will be married to yet another household slave. Nevertheless, these contracts stipulate that she shall never be reduced to slave status.[59] Despite the differing options set forth in the individual contracts, the fact that the father receives a lower price than the marriage price his daughter would eventually fetch indicates that the father was economically pressed to negotiate the adoption. The law in Exodus 21:7-11 resembles the Nuzi documents in allowing a father to sell his daughter to a purchaser who is responsible for her eventual marriage. However, unlike the Nuzi contracts, her adopted status is never mentioned and she is referred to as a female slave. Furthermore, the biblical law explicitly forbids the purchaser's right to marry her to an outsider and presumably even to one of his household slaves. Should the master fail her in his contractual obligations toward her, biblical law requires her manumission while the Nuzi documents stipulate a monetary fine for breach of contract. Yet despite these differences, the Nuzi documents provide glimpses of a socio-legal institution which allowed indigent fathers to provide their daughters with the security of marriage by selling them into adoption for the purposes of matrimony and it may be to such an institution that biblical law is reacting.

The third aspect of the re-evaluation is the testing of the uniquely Hurrian character of the Nuzi parallels within the socio-legal traditions of the ancient Near East. Should valid parallels prove to be no longer uniquely Hurrian but rather to reflect common Mesopotamian practice, the Nuzi material would no longer be useful in placing certain biblical traditions within a Hurro-Semitic milieu. Hence the Nuzi tablets could not provide irrefutable evidence for a second millennium dating of these biblical traditions. The attempt to ascertain the uniqueness of Nuzi socio-legal traditions within the orbit of ancient Near Eastern civilization is hampered, however, by a lack of similar documentation from other sites and chronological periods. The Nuzi tablets constitute one of the rare private archives from Mesopotamia that is especially distinguished in its quantitative documentation of family law. Despite the terse, formulaic nature of the contracts, and modern scholars' inability to discern to what extent they reflect the norm, the sheer quantity and varied documentation of the Nuzi corpus in its archival setting allow for a sound though imperfect reconstruction of its

56. For the Nuzi corpus of over 40 documents which represent female adoption texts for the purpose of matrimony and which may bear the superscriptions *ṭuppi mārtūti u kallatūti, ṭuppi kallūti,* or *ṭuppi mārtūti,* see J. Breneman, Nuzi Marriage Tablets (unpub. Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1971) 80-154. For a discussion of the nature of these texts with pertinent bibliography, see also B.L. Eichler, "Another Look at the Nuzi Sistership Contracts," in Finkelstein Mem. Vol., 45 nn. 3 and 4.

57. The most common provision is that the adoptive father may marry her to whomever he wishes. JEN 432 states that he may marry her himself or give her to his slave. JEN 428 states that he may give her in marriage to his natural or adopted son.

58. For example, HSS 9, 145, HSS 19, 82 and 87 stipulate that the adopted daughter may not be married to a slave, while JEN 26, 50, 430, 437 and AASOR 16 (1936) No. 30 specify that she will be married to a household slave.

59. AASOR 16 (1936) No. 61 states that she may be married to a household slave but she herself may not be turned into a slavegirl.

socio-legal institutions. Since there is nothing comparable to the Nuzi documentation, especially within the realm of family law, knowledge of similar Mesopotamian institutions is based on isolated and scattered tablets which allow for only a partial and fragmented reconstruction.[60] Thus it is often difficult to clarify the degree of overlap, if any, between Nuzi and Mesopotamian legal practices.

Again the Nuzi contracts entitled *ṭuppi mārtūti u kallatūti*, "document of daughtership or daughter-in-lawship," are a case in point. There are a number of scattered Mesopotamian documents which mention the giving of one's daughter into daughtership or daughter-in-lawship.[61] A few contracts record the names of the contracting parties and the nature of the transaction, without mention of a future marriage.[62] Some clearly refer to the adopter's choosing of a bride for one's son[63] while others seem to refer to the adoption of a girl with the eventual right or obligation to marry her to a husband.[64] The terseness of the legal formulary exhibited in these texts does not allow a fuller description of the contracted transaction so that a detailed comparison with the Nuzi material is rendered impossible.[65]

Despite isolated cases in which Nuzi practice was shown to be in accord with general Mesopotamian legal practice, the uniquely Hurrian character of its customs until recently had never been seriously challenged. This belief was sustained not only because of the Hurrian names and terms, but also because of the intimate connection between the study of the Nuzi tablets and the unfolding of the role of the Hurrians in ancient Near Eastern history. Nevertheless, within the last fifteen years, the Hurrian background of Nuzi legal practices has been seriously questioned.[66] The detailed

60. Syntheses of scattered published texts, such as R. Harris, "The Case of Three Babylonian Marriage Contracts," JNES 33 (1974) 363-69, her study of the Sippar material (Ancient Sippar: A Demographic Study of an Old-Babylonian City, Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1975) and D. Charpin's study of the Tell Sifr material (Archives familiales et propriété privée en Babylonie ancienne: Étude des documents de "Tell Sifr," Hautes Études Orientales 12, are very important for the reconstruction of the socio-legal institutions of Mesopotamia. Cf. also, F.R. Kraus, "Vom altmesopotamischen Erbrecht," SD 9 (1969) 1-17; J.N. Postgate, "On Some Assyrian Ladies," Iraq 41 (1979) 89-103; S. Dalley, "Old Babylonian Dowries," Iraq 42 (1980) 53-74; R. Westbrook, Old Babylonian Marriage Law, AfO Beiheft 23; and M. Roth, Babylonian Marriage Agreements 7th-3rd Centuries B.C., AOAT 222. Unfortunately, the publications of newly excavated legal material continue to exhibit very few texts dealing with family law.

61. Some of these texts, reflecting a Mesopotamian institution of adoptions in matrimonium or adoptio ad maritandam, have been discussed by A. Van Praag, Le droit matrimonial assyro-babylonien, 79; G.R. Driver and J.C. Miles, The Babylonian Laws 1, 251f.; G. Cardascia, "L'Adoption matrimoniale à Babylon et à Nuzi," Revue historique de droit français et étranger 37 (1959) 6 n. 22; and R. Westbrook, Old Babylonian Marriage Law, AfO Beiheft 23, 38f., 119, 120, 121, and 137.

62. Waterman Bus. Doc. 72, CT 33, 34, MRS 6, 60, and CTN 2, 219. The mention of the term *terḫatu* in these texts does not necessarily imply that the contract relates to marriage since the term conveys the neutral meaning "woman price" and is found in contracts of sale regarding women (cf. B. Landsberger, "Jungfräulichkeit: Ein Beitrag zum Thema 'Beilager und Eheschliessung'," Symbolae Iuridicae et Historicae Martino David Dedicatae 2, J. Ankum et. al., eds., 93 and 105.

63. CT 8, 7b, and YOS 12, 457.

64. CT 47, 40.

65. None of the above noted texts detail the conditions and stipulations under which the adopted woman is to wed. Although two specifically state that the woman has been chosen by the adoptive parents to marry their son, there is no evidence from any of the non-Nuzi *mārtūti u kallatūti* texts that the adoptive father could marry her himself or give her to his slave. Thus it is uncertain whether the Nuzi texts are unique in this respect (cf. R. Westbrook, Old Babylonian Marriage Law, AfO Beiheft 23, 38-39). In a similar vein, it should be noted that the Babylonian and Elephantine texts, cited by van Seters as parallels to the Nuzi sistership contracts (Abraham in History and Tradition 74 n. 33), are only examples of brothers giving their sisters in marriage. None are identical with the Nuzi sistership contracts whereby the privilege to negotiate one's sister's marriage arrangements is transferred from the natural brother to the adoptive brother.

66. Cf. for example, T.L. Thompson, The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives, 294-95.

study of Nuzi transactions and document-types has revealed that even those transactions bearing Hurrian nomenclature, such as the *tidennūtu* texts, reflect known Mesopotamian institutions and share strikingly similar legal formularies with their Mesopotamian analogues.[67] Nor should this be surprising. With the publication of the Hurrian Foundation Lion Inscription of Tiša-RI from Urkiš,[68] it became evident that the Hurrians had already adapted the cuneiform syllabary for writing Hurrian in Old Akkadian times. The Mesopotamian background of Nuzi law could then be explained by the fact that Hurrians in the Habur triangle had come within the orbit of Mesopotamian civilization by the end of the third millennium. This could well account for a Hurro-Mesopotamian legal tradition, since Mesopotamian law and its cuneiform medium were pervasive cultural factors in the ancient Near East.[69] Thus it may be that just as it is impossible to distinguish with certainty the Sumerian, Akkadian, and Amorite strands within the fabric of cuneiform law, so too it may be impossible to distinguish the Hurrian strand.

What emerges from the above re-evaluation is a more sobering and responsible attitude toward the usefulness and importance of the Nuzi tablets for the study of the Bible.[70] Despite the fact that Nuzi-biblical parallels cannot resolve issues of chronological import such as the dating of the Patriarchal Period, the Nuzi material will continue to be a source of utmost primacy for the documentation of socio-economic legal practices in ancient Mesopotamia. Hence in conjunction with other cuneiform documents, the Nuzi texts will continue to help illuminate biblical law, institutions, and practices.

67. For a comparison of the Nuzi *tidennūtu* transaction with its Mesopotamian analogues, see YNER 5 48-101, esp. pp. 85-88, 94-95, 99-101.

68. A Parrot and J. Nougayrol, "Un document de fondation hurrite," RA 42 (1948) 1-20. Cf. E.A. Speiser, "The Hurrian Participation in the Civilizations of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine," Journal of World History 1 (1953-54) 313f., and F. Bush, A Grammar of the Hurrian Language (unpub. Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1964) 7f. and p. 281 n. 30.

69. E.A. Speiser, "Cuneiform Law and the History of Civilization," Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 107 (1963) 536-41. Cf. the use of Akkadian in Ugaritic legal texts and Speiser's comments in "Akkadian Documents from Ras Shamra," JAOS 75 (1955) 156.

70. For a thorough, thoughtful and well-balanced portrayal of the relevancy of the Nuzi material for the Patriarchal Period, see M.J. Selman, "Comparative Customs and the Patriarchal Age," Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives, A.R. Millard and D.J. Wiseman, eds., 91-139.