In his closing paragraphs, Thompson (pp. 329-330) notes that Wright's approach, which bases faith on history, thereby places a severe strain on faith when it is difficult (intellectually) to accept the factuality of the events that faith is supposed to be based on. The same observation applies to the position being defended here, that historical factuality is a necessary though not a sufficient basis for faith. It is not possible to have the advantages of history without its risks. But the pentateuchal narrative, like the preaching preserved in the book of Isaiah, invites us to take this risk.[36]

[36]See further my paper '"That you may know that Yahweh is God": a study in the relationship between theology and historical truth in the Old Testament', *Tyndale Bulletin* 23 (1972), pp. 58-93. I hope shortly to publish a study of recent critical approaches to salvation history in a volume on 'Interpreting the Old Testament'.

2
Methods of Studying the Patriarchal Narratives as Ancient Texts

A. R. Millard

The stories of the patriarchs of Israel have been handed down in their present form since the third century B.C. at least. The witness of the LXX and the texts from Qumran assures us of that, for their variations are only small. We are dealing, therefore, with literature that is more than 2,300 years old. Unless earlier manuscripts are found, we cannot establish the earlier history of the stories with any certainty; every account we may give will be hypothetical and speculative. It is important to recognize and accept this fact, and so to avoid claiming as certain conclusions what are only deductions built upon theories and assumptions.

As they stand, the stories of Genesis 12-50 are part of a large work that traces the history of Israel from its beginnings to its climax in the possession of the promised land. It is natural to assume that these chapters reached their final form after that event (without, at present, discussing how long after it). The stories share the promise theme as their most obvious link, and that also relates them to the rest of the Old Testament. The promise theme, however, immediately involves a strong theological element. The promise was made by God to Abraham and repeated to his descendants, being fulfilled only after many generations. It is not difficult to argue that stories about the patriarchs could have been quite unrelated, originating among various peoples or tribes at different times and places. At a certain time some of these stories were selected, consciously or unconsciously, and moulded around the promise idea. So formed, they served to legitimize Israel's occupation of Canaan and to unify her religious faith, centring it upon the one promise-keeping God. Anyone concentrating on this approach may find himself arguing not only for the diverse roots of the stories but also for invention or insertion of elements in them, or even distortion, to suit the

theological end. This approach is obviously an important one, for it deals with, and accounts for, basic themes. It has the attraction that it can be neither proved or disproved! How satisfactory it is we may consider later.

Approaches to the patriarchal narratives as theological constructions usually stand upon the classical Old Testament literary criticism. This method, as is well known, starts with a detailed analysis of the text to distinguish sources or units within it by means of various internal criteria, principally lexical stock. Once isolated, the sources become the objects of further investigations that aim to discover the circumstances in which they arose. By comparing the actual or supposed histories of ancient stories from other parts of the world, their roots are traced back, by many, to individual shrines or places of pilgrimage. There they may have begun as explanations for the existence of the sacred sites, their founders, and the deities who presided in them. Once the birth-place of a story has been located in this way, the career of the story is followed until it is grouped with others and ultimately interlaced to form part of Genesis. The fusion of the strands into their final form is seen as an achievement of the exilic or post-exilic era. The literary sources themselves are given dates variously from Solomon downwards, although some features within them are nowadays allowed to be of greater age than classic formulations of the documentary hypothesis conceived. The dating, it should be remembered, does not arise from literary considerations primarily, but from a combination of historical and religious views. Since the work of Wellhausen, who commenced with the dictum 'the Law came after the Prophets', and erected a scheme of religious development growing from what he saw as an idyllic family affair to a restrictive priest-ruled liturgy, the basic concept has remained unchanged. Just as it underlies most theological approaches to the patriarchal narratives, so it underlies the work of most form critics, and of most students of the history of traditions.

These attitudes arose in the nineteenth century when knowledge of the ancient Near East was beginning to be widely available. Main-line Old Testament scholarship took relatively little note of it, however; Wellhausen, indeed, practically ignored it, or minimized its value (see, for example, his estimate of Shishak's list of towns captured in Palestine, or his treatment of Manasseh's

Babylonian captivity[1]). Sadly, current work reflects the same stance. Of course, some discoveries have been absorbed into standard works, the Babylonian Flood Story and the Egyptian Teaching of Amenemope being the most widely cited, along with the historical notices for the Divided Monarchy. But the patriarchal narratives, and the Pentateuch as a whole, are still studied along the lines established by Wellhausen's *Prolegomena*. Even the fresh paths taken in recent years by a few operate, with much the same basic criteria while disputing the common distinction of sources.[2]

Now the literary analysis of Genesis is an important and proper exercise; from it we may hope to learn about the construction of the book and the presentation of its contents. We may learn something about its history. All the work described so far has been carried out within the Old Testament alone. Little or no attention has been paid to the world in which the stories came into being, nor have the methods of study applied to them been tested and proved with other literary products of that world.[3] Again, it is perfectly proper to discuss the form and construction of a piece of literature in vacuo, as one might, for example, examine the structure of *Hamlet* or *King Lear*. Hermann Gunkel did draw upon other sources for his study of the literary history of Genesis, but those sources were the legends and traditions of the Greeks, the early Germans, and the Norsemen. They encouraged him to see in Genesis the product of long eras of oral tradition or

[1]See the note on Wellhausen's attitude to Shishak's list in K. A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt* (Aris and Phillips, Warminster, 1973), p. 432, n. 49, and the very different attitudes taken by later scholars whose work is discussed by Kitchen. On Manasseh see Wellhausen's *Prolegomena*, p. 207. While it was wrong to assume that the mention of Manasseh as a tributary in an Assyrian text made the whole Hebrew account credible, as Wellhausen scornfully showed, it was equally wrong to assume that the Hebrew text was without foundation because theological motives could be traced to explain its presentation, as Wellhausen did.

[2]Recent publications make this abundantly clear: R. E. Clements, *A Century of Old Testsament Study* (Lutterworth, London, 1976); H. Donner, *Die Literarische Gestalt der alttestamentlichen Josephgeschichte* (Winter, Heidelberg, 1976), are two. R. Rendtorff's somewhat reoriented approach is conveniently summarized in *JSOT* 3, 1977, pp. 2-56.

[3]W. J. Martin, *Stylistic Criteria and the Analysis of the Pentateuch* (Tyndale Press, London, 1955).

'saga', and of individual stories attached to separate cult-sites. None of these sources belongs to the ancient near-eastern world, and none provides a straightforward analogy to Genesis.[4] (In contrast, Gunkel's form-critical study of the Psalms is based upon compositions from Babylonia which are likely to have much more in common with ancient Hebrew modes of thought). Yet the discussion of Genesis cannot stay in the literary sphere; it reaches out into history and religion, and cannot expect to reach anything approaching a full appreciation of the book without doing so, just as a full appreciation of Shakespeare's plays includes understanding of the Elizabethan theatre and audience. (Where those trained in modern linguistics have applied their techniques to the Pentateuch, the old criteria can be said to be irrelevant.[5])

There seems, therefore, to be good reaon to scrutinize the patriarchal narratives in the context of the ancient Near East. With the works of Shakespeare there is a major advantage for the literary critic in that the period of composition is known, and there is no real dispute about authorship, facts which are lacking for Genesis. At the outset this major problem has to be studied: what is the ancient context of the patriarchal narratives?

This is a question on several levels. At some time the narratives were integrated to become part of Genesis and of the Pentateuch. The reasons for that have long been thought worthy of study. Other parts of the Old Testament and the New Testament reflect attitudes towards the patriarchs at various dates within the biblical period. Then there is the long history of tradition and interpretation within Judaism and Christianity. Each of these is separate, to some extent, and the way in which the patriarchs are treated in the last context is not necessarily helpful to modern appreciation of them. Our present concern is with their place in ancient history. We are asking what age the stories reflect, a question which may have no simple answer, for they may be stories about one age composed in another, and containing traits

[4]Note here the recent critique by S. M. Warner, 'Primitive Saga Men', *VT* 29, 1979, pp. 325-335.

[5]For example, F. I. Andersen, *The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1970); R. E. Longacre, 'The Discourse Structure of the Flood Narrative' in G. Macrae (ed.), *SBL Seminar Papers* (Scholars Press, Missoula, Montana, 1976), pp. 235-262.

from both of them. As those who investigate the history of traditions emphasize, a change of context may cause changes in the traditions themselves, but there is no controllable means for determining the presence or absence of such changes, or even a shift of context.

For Wellhausen the answer to our question was straightforward: the patriarchal narratives were retrojections from the time of the monarchy, mirroring ideals of that time, void of any 'historical' content that could inform about the age in which the stories were supposed to be set. That is the view zealously espoused by T. L. Thompson. For a great many readers of the same text that the answer is unsatisfactory, if for no other reason than that the text appears to contradict it.

1. THE USE OF PARALLELS

As information from the ancient Near East accumulated, similarities were noted between ancient customs and events in the patriarchal narratives. When C. J. Gadd made the first major edition of cuneiform tablets from Kirkuk, tablets now called 'Nuzi tablets', in 1926, Sidney Smith called attention to the similarity between a contract of adoption and the position of Jacob and Rachel and the teraphim.[6] With the recovery of many more texts from the site of Nuzi, the discovery of 'parallels' became almost an end in itself. The work of C. H. Gordon and E. A. Speiser in this matter had great influence, but, we now realize, has to be viewed critically and, partly, jettisoned.[7] In reaction to the stress laid upon these 'parallels' as both explanatory of patriarchal practices and as corroborative evidence for their second-millennium B.C. setting, J. van Seters has sought another 'parallel' in a neo-Assyrian contract of the seventh century B.C.[8] Whether the Nuzi contracts or the later one offer a closer 'parallel' to Genesis' accounts of steps taken by barren wives to acquire sons is not pertinent here.[9]

What we should consider is the way in which these 'parallels' are found and applied. The impression left by many of the essays noting or commenting on them is of their haphazard occurrence.

[6]*RA* 23, 1926, p. 127.

[7]See the study by M. J. Selman in this volume, and his paper in *TB* 27, 1976, pp. 114-136.

[8]*JBL* 87, 1969, pp. 401-408.

[9]For discussion see Selman, *TB* 27, p. 129.

More than one writer has noted this.[10] The 'parallels' have not resulted from comprehensive studies of ancient adoption procedures (to continue the example), but from the finding of a tablet here and another there, each in some way reminiscent of the biblical incidents. Sometimes a single text has been the basis for comparison; sometimes a group from one locality; sometimes, as we have said already, scattered documents. Concentration upon the archives of a single site can bring imbalance. C. H. Gordon's date for the patriarchs in the fifteenth century B.C. arose from the comparisons made with Nuzi texts of that date in the first place.[11] On the other hand, personal names current especially in documents written two or three centuries earlier were being set beside the patriarchal names by other scholars to indicate their age and linguistic horizon. Countering the use of those names, T. L. Thompson has adduced names from the first millennium B.C.[12] Once more, we should observe how study has been undertaken for either period. Yet the names, too, are held to point to one date or another for the setting of the stories.

Such a selective employment of ancient documents seems to be unsatisfactory. It has the air, still, of a search for proof, of an attempt to support a view or a hypothesis by choosing the most suitable evidence—and this applies to those who invoke texts for a first-millenium date as much as to those who invoke others for a higher date. Further, this approach can be shown quite easily to be unbalanced or distorted by the random nature of the records extant. When all is said, 'parallels' prove nothing. At worst, they can be misleading, as additional evidence shows a custom to be local or to be commonplace. At best they show the possibility that the patriarchal narratives exhibit the same practices, so permiting us to conclude that they may tell of the same times. They are not to be neglected, however, when they are thoroughly understood in their context.

2. THE ANCIENT CONTEXT OF THE PATRIARCHAL NARRATIVES

To set a text in its context we need to establish our attitude to the text first. The witness of the text itself should take pride of place

[10]Selman, loc. cit.

[11]*Introduction to Old Testament Times* (Ventnor Publishers, New Jersey, 1953).

[12]*Historicity*, ch. 2.

until unassailable cases are made against it. Here, in my opinion, modern scholarship has shown too critical and too sceptical a mind. If some refuse to accord to Genesis, or to any other ancient work, the common privelege of the accused in British law, 'innocent until proved guilty', the converse of that maxim should be vigorously opposed. Repeatedly ridicule and charges of misrepresentation brought by modern scholars against statements made by ancient writers have been utterly refuted through archaeological and linguistic research, and branded as false.[13] This is not a plea for a blind acceptance of the biblical accounts; it is good to investigate them, their composition, motifs, relationships, and purposes, so long as we are aware of the presuppositions on which we act. Scholars too readily ignore alternatives, avoiding attempts to harmonize apparent discrepancies, and treat the text as raw material for them to model; whereas it is the text that is primary, and our modern opinions and theories that need to be ready to accommodate it.

The contents of the patriarchal stories set some limits to their possible context. The geographical horizon is clear: from Mesopotamia through Canaan to Egypt. Unfortunately, the narratives are devoid of any plain reference to events known from other sources. Consequently, any proposal will rest on indirect evidence. Some point to the lack of any extrabiblical documentation for the patriarchs as evidence against their existence. No case can stand on this ground. It would be extraordinary to find their names in the archives of the cities with whose rulers the stories connect them, even if those archives were found. As it is, documents of the second millennium B.C. have been found at only a few sites in Canaan, and in small numbers, while documents of the first millennium, though slightly more numerous, are limited in scope and distribution. Even from Egypt there are hardly any government records. Let us remind ourselves again how fragmentary and incomplete is the information that does survive from the ancient world, even though we have access to tens of thousands of its documents.[14] That only the Hebrew records name Abraham and his family and relate their affairs is neither unusual nor

[13]I gave three examples in *The Bible BC* (Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1977), pp. 5-7; many more could be offered.

[14]This is vividly explained by E. Yamauchi, *The Stones and the Scriptures* (Inter-Varsity Press, London, 1973), ch. 4.

remarkable, and is certainly no reason against treating them as historical accounts.

Let us consider how we might treat the Pentateuch if it were freshly disinterred from some ancient deposit like the Dead Sea Scrolls, giving us a terminal date of 300 B.C. for its composition.

The books of the Pentateuch are undoubtedly works that have been current in a religious tradition, perhaps produced and affected by it, just like many Babylonian and Egyptian texts known to us. Without earlier copies it is impossible to tell how old the composition may be, a situation also obtaining in the other societies. For the purpose of the exercise, we shall suppose that, like the Babylonian and Egyptian works, the Pentateuch has no religious relevance to us.

Within the Pentateuch are records concerning a people, Israel, known to us from inscriptions of the Assyrian kings who campaigned in the Levant from the ninth to the seventh centuries B.C., and from monuments of the pharaoh Merenptah at the end of the thirteenth century B.C. Our Pentateuch relates the arrival of Israel at the border of Canaan after a period of homelessness. It traces her history back to a single figure, Abraham, who, with his immediate descendants, is the subject of the extensive patriarchal narratives. Here we have a phenomenon unique in the ancient Near East; no other people has left us a family history that explains their occupation of their land. This fact alone demands a critical appraisal of the stories. Do they give hints that they were composed long after the times they describe by men living in a different culture, in order to justify their position? Here we approach the stance of the theological attitude outlined earlier. Proof is as hard to produce as disproof.

The one valuable type of evidence that can be sought to support a positive reply to the question is the evidence of anachronism. A single example would be insufficient; a series of indisputable anachronisms alone could carry weight in assessing the age of a composition. We have to ask, too, whether or not an ancient writer would have been alert to the possibility of anachronisms. Blatant examples might be avoided (e.g. Moses speaking in Persian), but the incidental ones that betray the writer's era might not.

The presence of camels and of the Philistines in the patriarchal narratives are regularly asserted to be such unconscious anachronisms, revealing the time of the stories' production. The stories

evidently claim to tell of a time several generations before the Israelites entered Canaan (before 1200 B.C.), and therefore prior to the time when both camels and Philistines appear in the Near East, according to extrabiblical sources. Neither case is satisfactory, contrary to the dogmatic statements of many writers. There are evidences for the presence and use of the camel earlier in the second millennium B.C., both written and pictorial.[15] The nature of the camel is relevant, also, for, 'the camel is not an urban creature; it is kept outside settlements and used primarily in the steppe, and there it would die. The likelihood of camel bones being found is small, as is the likelihood of city scribes frequently naming it.'[16] In this case we see too facile a conclusion drawn: absence of camels apart from the patriarchal narratives meant that those narratives came from a period after other texts prove the arrival of the animal. The possibility that the Hebrew records might preserve a piece of accurate information was not allowed.

Further, concentration upon the camel question overshadowed another fact which may be a pointer to an opposite conclusion. It is not until the account of Joseph's administration of famished Egypt that the horse is mentioned. The advent of the horse in the Near East is set about 2300 B.C., although it is not widely attested until five centuries or so later, when there are written notices and terracotta figures.[17] These show that it was used as a pack animal as well as for riding. But it was also a very valuable creature, and one that was unsuitable for a royal person to ride (as a famous letter from Mari says), possibly becuase the art of horse-training was not well-developed (the manuals for trainers belong to the Late Bronze Age archives of Hattushas and Ashur, and the medical treatises for horses to the contemporary archives of

[15]See E. Porada, *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 36 (1977), pp. 1-6, for a seal of the eighteenth century B.C. From about the same period are fragments of a camel bone found at Jericho: see J. Clutton-Brock, *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 45, 1979, p. 146; a few domestic horses were also present, ibid., pp. 145, 155.

[16]*The Bible BC*, p. 19. See also C. Kramer in L. D. Levine, T. C. Young (eds.), *Mountains and Lowlands, Bibliotheca Mesopotamica* 7, 1977, p. 100, n. 45.

[17]See P. R. S. Moorey, *Iraq* 32, 1970, pp. 36-50; M. A. Littauer, *Iraq* 33, 1971, pp. 24-30; S. Bokonyi, *Sumer* 28, 1972, pp. 35-38, for terracotta figures and plaques; M. Civil, *JCS* 20, 1966, pp. 121,122 and *RA* 63, 1969, pp. 104-105 for Sumerian texts, W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, p. 1051 for Akkadian.

Ugarit).[18] From the Late Bronze Age onwards horses became the regular means of drawing chariots and of individual fast transport, as their repeated mention in the Old Testament shows. A picture of a wealthy man moving in Palestine drawn during the Late Bronze or Iron Ages might be expected to mention horses at some point, as a sign of his riches or his eminence. (Job is not credited with horses, but his home is set in the east.) Here is a case where the testimony of ancient witnesses is clear, and the patriarchal narratives are silent. In that silence we may be able to see an element that points to a greater age for the stories than those who take note of the camels alone may allow.

As to the Philistines, K. A. Kitchen has put one plausible position in his essay on this people.[19] In brief, the name may be a later replacement for an out-dated term to denote peoples from the Aegean. Once again, we could also argue that Genesis has preserved the name from a period for which, we are compelled to admit, there is no knowledge of the language or affinities of the peoples of the Aegean and Crete who were in contact with the Levant, apart from occasional material imports and the naming of Crete (Kaptara) in the Mari texts. Let us remember how the decipherment of Cretan Linear B revealed the presence of Greek speakers on the island before 1300 B.C., a presence not hinted at by any other texts and which contradicted many theories, but is now accepted. The danger of insisting upon an anachronism where our evidence is limited, and can be radically changed by a new discovery, should not be ignored. (What information is there about the cities of the Philistine region during the earlier centuries of the second millennium B.C.?)

The patriarchal narratives can be taken as products of the Israelite monarchy era, and interpreted as reflecting life in that time. Before anyone can assert that they can only derive from that period, a careful examination of them in an early second-millennium context needs to be made, and to be shown to be impossible. Is the earlier date really so unthinkable as some maintain? The narratives apparently assume that is their context, so they should be inspected on the assumption they make. There would be no hesitation in treating most texts that are excavated from ancient

[18] *Archives royales de Mari* 6, no. 76.

[19] D. J. Wiseman (ed.), *Peoples of Old Testament Times* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1973), pp. 56f.

cities in this way. The exceptions might be just those epics about heroes of the past which were handed down for centuries in Sumerian, Babylonian, Egyptian, and other scribal circles. The Epic of Gilgamesh in Akkadian, and poems about him and several other early kings in Sumerian, are stock examples. Most extant manuscripts were copied during the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries B.C., and in the seventh and sixth centuries. The literary history of some of these compositions, spanning a thousand years, is a fascinating study that has far to go and much to teach, both for the general history of world literature and for the ancient context of the Old Testament. How long before our manuscripts were made the texts were composed we do not know. The kings whom they celebrate are now believed to have lived early in the third millennium B.C. That they were real flesh and blood men is rendered likely by various later references and by the recovery of two inscriptions of a king whom the epics make slightly senior to Gilgamesh. Indeed, the attitudes and actions portrayed in some of these poems, and in various myths about the gods, were utilized thirty-five years ago as satisfactory sources for reconstructing the political development of early Sumer.[20]

It is instructive to view the changes in the convictions of scholars about the nature of Gilgamesh since the start of this century when they saw him either as indubitably a solar hero, the twelve tablets of the Akkadian epic being a clue to that (Jensen and others); or as a vegetation god who took human form, and could not be an historical person (Möwinckel).[21] Very recently the existence of stories about these kings written much closer to their traditional age has been demonstrated with the recovery of a brief text about Lugalbanda, a predecessor of Gilgamesh, amongst the tablets of Abu Salabikh, written about 2600 B.C.[22]

In connection with the Gilgamesh stories, we may note that the Sumerian texts know several independent tales, the Akkadian the single epic into which some of those tales were woven. All the tales revolve around the one hero and his city of Uruk; there is no

[20] *JNES* 2, 1943, pp. 159-172; cf. *ZA* n. F 18, 1957, pp. 91-140, both reprinted in *Towards the Image of Tammuz* (Harvard UP, 1970), pp. 132-156, 157-170.

[21] See the convenient collection of essays edited by K. Oberhuber, *Das Gilgamesh-epos* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1977).

[22] R. D. Biggs, *Inscriptions from Tell Abu Salabikh* (Chicago UP, 1974), no. 327; J. D. Bing, *JANESCU* 9, 1977, pp. 1-4.

suggestion that they originated in separate places or originally told of other kings.

About 2300 B.C. the Dynasty of Akkad arose in Babylonia, founded by Sargon. The impression Sargon and his successors made was strong, lasting until the fall of Babylon to Cyrus. Yet of Sargon himself there is only a single battered and uninformative contemporary inscriptions. Others exist only in copies made five hundred years later.[23] From them the king's conquests as far as Ebla in North Syria, and the Cedar and Silver Mountains are known to us. Much more is told about Sargon in poems of the eighteenth century B.C. and other works available in much later copies. The range of his conquests is wider in these than in the inscriptions, and his campaigns are described in more detail. His grandson, Naram-Sin, is reputed to have followed Sargon's footsteps into the heart of Anatolia as he reasserted his dynasty's rule. Poems abut his feats tell of that; his own inscriptions, some contemporary, some preserved in later copies, do not name any conquests beyond northern Syria.[24]

Are the accounts of campaigns into Anatolia related by the poems later exaggerations of the achievements of Sargon and Naram-Sin? There is some reason to think they may be. During the nineteenth century B.C. there existed a network of Assyrian trading settlements in Anatolia, at Kanesh (modern Kültepe), at Hattushas (Boghazköy), at the site now called Alishar, and at other places. Thousands of tablets from Kanesh and a few from the other sites disclose the trading and business affairs of the resident Assyrians. Some indicate that they faced hostility from time to time from the native people and rulers, and had to secure their positions. Assyria was not then a military force able to defend such distant dependants, so agreements were made with the local kings. In order to strengthen their hands, the Assyrian merchants may well have claimed to be the heirs to an old-established position, owing the origin of their privileged trading posts to Sargon of Akkad, four centuries before. The account of Sargon's campaign, in the text copied or read at el Amarna by Egyptians learning Akkadian, speaks of the merchants whom he aided. By invoking a name respected by general tradition, the merchants may have hoped to strengthen their case, alleging the king had

[23]*ANET*, pp. 267-268.
[24]*ANET*, p. 268.

done more than was actually the case, to provide an aetiology of their existence. All the texts from Kanesh and the other sites belong to the same century, approximately, and so do the buildings occupied by the merchants. Consequently, the mention of Kanesh with certain other places in literary compositions dealing with Naram-Sin has been labelled an anachronism.[25]

Detection of that anachronism did not cause the modern editors of the texts to consider them valueless in their accounts of Naram-Sin's reign, being merely later retrojections; they wrote, 'It seems reasonable to conclude that the incidents recounted in the historical-literary texts . . . are basically authentic, if not in detail, and so may be properly used in reconstructing the history of Naram-Sin's reign'.[26] At a late stage in preparing their study, the editors learnt of the great archive unearthed at Ebla, an archive housed in a palace its excavator believes was destroyed either by Sargon or by Naram-Sin. They were able to add a footnote saying that the new discovery seemed to show the weakness of arguments from anachronisms.[27] Preliminary reports affirm the presence of Kanesh amongst many places named in the Ebla texts as trading with Ebla.[28] Even more recently, excavators at Kanesh have begun to uncover buildings of the age of the kings of Akkad.[29] Perhaps the stories of Sargon and Naram-Sin reaching that or neighbouring cities were not later inventions, but literary accounts of campaigns they had actually conducted.

The study of ancient near-eastern literature can supply other examples of the same thing. Repeatedly, traditional literature or records prove to report accurately events of long ago. In some cases this can now be partially seen, as with Sargon and Naram-Sin, whatever fanciful overlay there may be. In other cases supporting evidence is more meagre, yet points the same way, as with Gilgamesh. Obviously it would be wrong to claim that the existence of a king called Gilgamesh, the reality behind the stories, is established by the recovery of two brief inscriptions of a king named beside him in an epic, or that Sargon's expedition to

[25]A. K. Grayson, E. Sollberger, *RA* 70, 1976, p. 108.
[26]Ibid., p. 111.
[27]Ibid., p. 108, n. 4.
[28]G. Pettinato, *BA* 39, 1976, p. 48. A. Archi, *Biblica* 60, 1979, pp. 556-566, has issued grave cautions about the first interpretations given to the Ebla texts, throwing doubt on the identification of Kanesh (p. 563).
[29]M. J. Mellink, *AJA* 82, 1978, p. 317.

Anatolia is given historicality by the references to Kanesh at Ebla. The contribution of such discoveries is to give greater plausibility to the ancient traditional accounts, on occasion also refuting the charge of anachronism. Where there is no other evidence, where a literary text alone exists, we should be no less ready to treat it as a valuable and reliable record, unless it can be conclusively shown to be false in many matters.

If the possibility of traditional literature (including the book of Genesis) presenting reliable accounts of the past is accepted, can the patriarchal narratives be distinguished in as much as they are a series of stories revolving around one family and linked to a nation's career? A first impression might suggest that the narratives are isolated, they stand apart, and so cannot be compared with other ancient texts. In fact, this is not so. Ancient lists of kings are basic documents for the modern historian, and some served the similar basic purpose of reckoning time in antiquity. As more are recovered, another purpose appears: the celebration and cult of ancestors. There may be significance for the present study in the fact that dynastic rulers of the Late Bronze Age in the Levant traced their lines back to the nineteenth century B.C., or thereabouts, and these family trees can, in some instances, be substantiated.[30] Reference to the deeds of earlier kings in a variety of documents, and a rare text like the Inscription of Idri-mi of Alalakh, show that these king lists were far from representing the sum of the scribes' historical knowledge. The king lists are the records of royal houses, none, so far as we know, expanding to form a nation (although Kitchen has proposed that the kings of Ugarit shared a remote ancestor with the Amorite kings of Babylon and Assyria). Although they are not of exactly the same nature, they illustrate the possibility of family history being preserved, and that is exactly what the patriarchal narratives are.

In drawing upon literary sources, historical, epic, and several other types have been mentioned. Labels are freely applied to ancient documents, often through some apparent similarity to types known from other societies. Caution is needed in using these terms, for many have technical meanings that do not reach the uninitiated reader. 'Myth' is well recognized as a double-edged word, and 'saga' and 'legend' fall into the same category. 'Saga' especially has its home in the Norse world where it served a

[30]K. A. Kitchen, *Ugarit-Forschungen* 9, 1977, 131-142.

purpose different from that of the Hebrew texts. There is the danger, too, that use of these terms may pre-judge the value of the work's content, and so they are best avoided in any attempt to evaluate a text in its own setting. Again and again, incidents in the patriarchal narratives are titled 'folk elements' and thereby voided of any factual basis. Yet even a cursory consideration reveals that many are situations which could easily occur, and it may be simply because they are situations which can easily occur in large family groups in human society that they become 'folk elements'. An account of the origin of a custom or name is an aetiology; the account is not falsified or verified by that title, despite the tendency of biblical scholars to assume the former. Why may the way in which something began not have been remembered correctly?

4. TEXTS AND ARCHAEOLOGY

In attempting to set the patriarchs in an historical period, various archaeological evidences have been invoked, both in favour of an early second-milennium B.C. date, and against. Many dangers beset this practice. The patriarchal narratives tell of a family, a family comprising several hundred people, but not a vast horde. It is conceivable that a group of such size could live and move in Palestine at will whatever the current overall pattern. The evidence from one source, e.g. the Mari archives, or the changed occupation of the land after the end of Early Bronze III, cannot be made into an unyielding norm for the whole area and all its inhabitants. The objection that the patriarchal narratives name cities which were deserted until Middle Bronze II is worthless in the present uncertainty about the archaeology of Palestine between 2300 and 1800 B.C. Furthermore, a city does not have to exist as an active entity to win mention, and many of those named in Genesis are not named as inhabited places. Rather a similar question arises over Shechem (mentioned as a location in Gn. 12:6, then playing a role in the Jacob stories as a true city). From Egypt survives the oft-quoted stele of Khu-Sebek telling of an expedition to a place commonly identified as Shechem under Sesostris III (c. 1878-1843 B.C.).[31] Yet according to the excavators there was no city wall at that time around Shechem, and little

[31]*ANET*, p. 230.

remains of buildings have been found, although there were signs of construction work in Middle Bronze IIA (c. 1850-1750 B.C.).[32]

An extreme example of this way of applying archaeological evidence to the study of the Old Testament is seen in the late Y. Aharoni's essay about the Negev.[33] He argued that his excavation on Tel Beersheva proved that the patriarchal narratives included references to events 'that could not possibly have occurred prior to the thirteenth or twelfth centuries' B.C. He claimed that a well cleared by his team outside the gateway of the Iron Age I city on top of the mound was the one dug by Abraham (Gn. 21:30).

Regrettably, his arguments have to be condemned. First, there is no evidence that the mound now called Tel Beersheva was ancient Beersheba. In fact, the Roman town lay below the present city, and there was occupation there at least during the Iron Age. Secondly, the assumption that the excavated well is Abraham's well is groundless. Ancient wells are still in use at modern Beersheba which could equally be identified with Abraham's well. Thirdly, the Genesis narratives do not imply that Beersheba was a town in Abraham's day. A tract of land or a landmark can bear a name without occupation occurring, as the cases of the Cave of Machpelah, the stone of Bohen, and Ebenezer, illustrate.

5. CONCLUSION

Our study has noted several ways of studying the patriarchal narratives, and concentrated upon one aspect. The stress has been upon examining, as far as possible, the content of the stories before any literary analysis is contemplated; and in order to make that possible, we have tried to show that the patriarchal narratives are not so different from other ancient texts that this exercise can be rejected. It seems that such an approach is more likely to be fair to the text, and to involve fewer presuppositions than any others. If a theological purpose is seen to have moulded the stories, then any element can be branded as a theological construct and emptied of all other value. The religious element is present in many ancient texts, but does not lead scholars to the same conclusions. If a literary analysis is given pride of place, then its consequences for evaluating the content of the stories has to be heeded, and anyone who follows the analysis in Genesis should

[32]G. E. Wright, *Shechem* (New York, 1965), ch. 7.
[33]*BA* 39, 1976, pp. 55-76.

remember that it is partly based upon the content of the stories, so the risk of circular arguments is grave. The attitude that reads the text critically is commendable, so long as it does not stray into hypercriticism and treat the text as something to be disparaged at every turn. If there is to be a search for anachronisms, let it be balanced by a search for reliable information. Let all who read remember that the patriarchal narratives are our only source for knowledge of the earliest traditions of Israel, that traditions can be correct reflections of ancient events, and that they do not pretend to be textbooks of ancient near-eastern history or archaeology.