RECENT DISCOVERY AND THE PATRIARCHAL AGE

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In the early years of the present century it was widely thought that the age of the patriarchs was lost beyond recovery. Whether they ever existed at all was sometimes doubted, while at best they were held by some scholars to be no more than personifications of tribes, whose history was reflected in these pseudo-personal narratives. The dictum of Wellhausen, that the patriarchal narratives could give us no knowledge about the times of the patriarchs but only about the later age in which they were written down, was accepted as axiomatic in some quarters. To-day there are few who would defend these positions, and there is a more general respect for the historical quality of the stories. This

1 A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on 9th February, 1949.
2 Cf. J. Wellhausen, Prolegomena to the History of Israel, E. Tr., 1885, p. 320, where it said that Abraham "might with more likelihood be regarded as a free creation of unconscious art".
5 Cf. S. H. Hooke, In the Beginning, 1947, p. 62: "The sagas of Genesis, while they throw light on the religious ideas of the writers who were using this material, also reflect in many ways the customs and social conditions of an age so far removed in time from that of the Hebrew historian who recorded them that he did not always understand what he was recording; so that we may believe him to have faithfully preserved much of the ancient tradition of his people in its early form." Cf. also Hooke, in Record and Revelation (ed. by H. W. Robinson), 1938, p. 372: "It is safe to say that the general effect of the discoveries of the last decade has been to confirm the substantial accuracy of the picture of life in Canaan in the second millennium B.C. as described in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis": and H. G. May, Journal of Biblical Literature, lx, 1941, p. 113:
is not merely because a more conservative mood has descended upon Old Testament scholars, but because new light has been shed on the patriarchal age from many quarters. Sometimes there is a disposition to err on the other side, and to claim that the new sources of knowledge have proved the accuracy of the Old Testament narratives.¹ This is far from being the case, and it can serve no good purpose to make exaggerated and unprovable claims.² All that can be said is that in many respects the stories fit into the background of the age, as we can recover it from other sources of knowledge now available, and that customs which appear in the stories prevailed in the world in which the patriarchs are set. We have no direct reference in any other source to any incident in the lives of the patriarchs as recorded in the Bible; yet of the credibility of the Biblical record we have greater knowledge than was even quite recently available.

At the same time, it should not be forgotten that every advance in knowledge brings new problems, and not a few of the positions

¹ Absolute scepticism towards the patriarchal narratives as historical records is difficult to maintain to-day in the light of the materials contemporary with the patriarchal period made available as a result of archaeological research.

² Cf. M. Burrows, *What Mean these Stones?* 1941, p. 2: 'More serious is the fact that writers fired by zeal without knowledge have rushed into print with inaccurate statements, doubtless intended for the glory of God but none the less misleading and therefore mischievous.... Reverence for the Bible cannot be permanently promoted by making claims on its behalf which will later prove untrue.'
taken by the defenders of tradition against the earlier views I have mentioned are in no less need of revision than the theories they combated. In the present lecture it is impossible to survey all the new knowledge or to look at all the new problems, and all that I can attempt is to give some illustration of the light that is shed on the Biblical narratives and the new difficulties created.

Between the two world wars archaeological work throughout the Bible lands brought a bewildering amount of new material into our hands. Much of it is relevant to the discussion of other periods than that of the patriarchs, and will not call for mention here. The excavations at Ur directed attention to the early narratives of Genesis and to the patriarch Abraham, though sometimes the problems were screened and people imagined that the Ur excavations had proved that the Biblical story of the Flood was true and had established Abraham as a figure of history.¹


² Cf. C. L. Woolley, Abraham: Recent Discoveries and Hebrew Origins, 1936.

³ Cf. G. Duncan, New Light on Hebrew Origins, 1936, p. 22: 'No one dreamed that the Bible story could ever receive such wonderful confirmation.' M. Burrows, op. cit., p. 26, says: 'Perhaps the most conspicuous instance of confusing interpretation and evidence is the supposed confirmation of the biblical account of the flood discovered by Woolley at Ur and by Mackay and Langdon at Kish... The excavators were convinced that they had found the deposit left by the flood described in Genesis. The fact is that this interpretation is not only uncertain; it is not even probable.' This judgment is supported by cogent reasons (p. 70): 'There is no evidence to connect the deposits of mud found at Ur and Kish with the particular flood of Genesis 6-9... None of the inundations at Kish is contemporary with any at Ur, and none at either place marks a division between two different civilisations. In Woolley's own excavation at Tell Obeid, only four miles from Ur, there was no silt at the levels corresponding to those at which it was found at Ur. As a matter of fact, representations of Gilgamesh were found at a lower level than the "deluge" at Kish, showing that the Babylonian flood-story was of more ancient origin than this.'

⁴ Cf. above, p. 45, n. 1. G. E. Wright, The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible, 1945, p. 25 a, states the sober truth when he says: 'Thus far no contemporary record of Abraham has been found outside the Bible.' Cf. C. L. Woolley,
The period of Abraham was commonly believed, until the last few years, to have been about 2000 B.C., and he was thought to have been contemporary with Hammurabi, the great Babylonian king. The Patriarchal age was thought to extend from about 2000 B.C. to about 1700 B.C.¹ For reasons which will become apparent as we proceed, I want to extend our survey down to about 1400 B.C.

In 1926 the German Egyptologist Sethe published some execration texts from Egypt, which had been written on jars to be subsequently broken.² The texts contained the names of a number of Palestinian and Syrian states and their rulers, and the breaking of the jars had magical significance and was believed to be potent to ensure a curse on those whose names were inscribed.³ The texts were probably written in the twentieth century B.C., and they give valuable information about the little states which existed in that period.⁴ It became known just before the late war ⁵ that further texts of the same kind, though from a somewhat later date,⁶ and differently inscribed and treated,⁷ had been found, The Excavations at Ur and the Hebrew Records, 1929, p. 15: 'The name of Abraham has never yet occurred in our discoveries'; and pp. 15 f.: 'What we have found is illustrative of Hebrew tradition in a very general way.'

¹ The entry of Jacob into Egypt has been commonly assigned to the Hyksos period (circa 1730 B.C. to 1580 B.C.). Albright has connected the entry of the Hebrews with the entry of the Hyksos (cf. From the Stone Age to Christianity, 2nd ed., 1946, p. 150). In my view (cf. my Schweich Lectures, From Joseph to Joshua, now in the press) the entry must be brought down much later.

² C. K. Sethe, 'Die Achtungstexte feindlicher Fürsten, Völker, und Dinge auf altägyptischen Tongefässscherben des mittleren Reiches', in Abhandlungen der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1926, No. 5.

³ Cf. L. H. Vincent, Vivre et Penser, ii (replacing Revue Biblique, li), 1942, p. 206: 'Briser l'objet symbolique, ou ensevelir la figure conventionnelle auxquels on pouvait attacher ce nom individuel équivalait à la-tuer elle-même, ou à sceller dans un tombeau.'

⁴ On the date of these texts cf. A. Alt, Zeitschrift der deutschen Palästina Vereins, lxiv, 1941, p. 24; M. Noth, ibid., lxv, 1942, p. 13; R. T. O'Callaghan, Aram Naharaim, 1948, p. 30 n.

⁵ From G. Posener's paper read at the International Orientalists' Congress at Brussels in 1938—subsequently published in Actes du xxᵉ Congrès International des Orientalistes, 1940, pp. 82 f.—and from his essay on 'Nouveaux textes hiératiques de proscription', in Mélanges Syriens offerts à M. René Dussaud, i, 1939, pp. 313-317.

⁶ Cf. P. Posener, Mélanges Syriens, i, 1939, pp. 314, 315 f.; B. Couroyer, Vivre et Penser, i (replacing Revue Biblique, l), 1941, p. 260; M. Noth, loc. cit., p. 191; R. T. O'Callaghan, loc. cit. [See footnote 7 on page 48]
though their publication did not take place until the war had begun, and it is only since the war that they have become available for study here.\(^1\) Both series of texts have been much discussed, though some of the continental discussions of the second series are very hard of access in this country.\(^2\)

Another accession to our knowledge between the wars, of outstanding importance, came from the ancient city of the kingdom of Arrapha, called Nuzu. This city lay east of the Tigris and south-east of Nineveh. It was excavated between 1935 and 1941 and yielded large numbers of texts, giving an intimate

\(^7\) These texts were inscribed on small figurines instead of on jars, and many of them represent captives. From the fact that many were undamaged Posener suggested that they were intended for burial (loc. cit., p. 316). Vincent, loc. cit., p. 190, says: 'Le fait qu’un certain nombre de figurines sont à peu près intacts et qu’on ne relève sur aucune des "traces évidentes de mutilations intentionnelles" remet en cause l’hypothèse courante d’un massacre rituel.' It may be added that Posener has suggested the possibility that the texts were associated with a magic rite directed not merely against the actual enemies of the moment, but against potential enemies. Cf. Actes du Congrès, p. 83.

\(^1\) Cf. Posener, Princes et pays d’Asie et de Nubie, 1940.


For some of these articles and for not a few of those noted below I am indebted to the kindness of continental scholars who have sent me copies of their works, often otherwise unobtainable here; in several cases where neither offprints nor copies of the journals could be sent I have received photostats of articles, either from the authors or from other scholars. I would acknowledge with gratitude the fine spirit of co-operation in scholarship I have found in so many quarters.
picture of social conditions in the city in the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries B.C. Their importance to the student of the Old Testament lies partly in the illustration they provide of customs which figure in the patriarchal narratives, and partly in the new light they shed on the people known as the Habiru. From the Tell el Amarna letters we had long had knowledge of the activities of the Habiru in Palestine in the fourteenth century B.C., and by some scholars they had been identified with the invading Hebrews entering the land after the Exodus from Egypt. From


other quarters also we have new light on the Habiru question, which proves to be more complex than had been supposed.

Yet another site, which has yielded the most sensational finds of any excavated between the wars, is Ras Shamra, on the Syrian coast, opposite Cyprus. This proved to be the site of the ancient city of Ugarit, mentioned in the Amarna texts, and therefore already known, though little was known about it. Here a number of texts were found, of which those written in alphabetic cuneiform in what is believed to have been a Canaanite dialect have attracted most attention. Many of the texts have been generally described as mythological, though it is held by some that they are cultic and ritual. Of their importance for the study of the background of Israelite religion and culture I cannot speak here, but we shall have to look at some views to which

1 For a bibliography of more than five hundred titles dealing with these texts, and covering the years 1929-1938, cf. C. F. A. Schaeffer, Ugaritica, 1939, pp. 147-203. This may be substantially supplemented by the bibliography in R. de Langhe, Les textes de Ras Shamra-Ugarit et leurs rapports avec le milieu biblique de l'Ancien Testament, i, 1945, pp. xvi-lvii.


currency has been given. Amongst these is the claim that the Hebrew God Yahweh figures in these texts, and that the father of Abraham is found here as a moon-god. Certain Israelite tribes are thought by some to be mentioned in a text to which geographical and historical significance is attached. One school has held that reflected in the texts we can find movements that occurred in the Negeb, in the south of Palestine, in the period before the entry of the Israelites into Canaan. Further, in a text published in 1940 there is important evidence bearing on the Habiru question, to which reference has already been made.

In 1935 the distinguished French archaeologist, André Parrot, undertook excavations at Mari, an ancient city on the Euphrates, somewhat farther north-west of Babylon, as the crow flies, than Nuzu lay directly north of Babylon. Here many thousands of tablets were found, and important evidence was


1 In American Journal of Semitic Languages, liii, 1935-36, pp. 43 f., I. J. Gelb entered an objection against the identification of Mari with Tell el Hariri.

brought to light bearing on ancient chronology. From other sites, too, evidence on this subject has appeared, and anything written before 1940 on the chronology of the first half of the second millennium B.C. is in need of revision.

It will be remembered that we read in the Bible that Abraham sprang originally from Ur, and that his family first migrated from Ur to Harran in northern Mesopotamia, and later the patriarch left Harran for the land of Canaan. It has long been known that Ur was the great centre of the worship of the moon-god Sin, and that Harran was second only in importance to Ur as a centre of worship of the same god. There would thus seem to have been some ancient connexion between these cities, so that it would not be unnatural for a family to leave the one city for the other. Hence verisimilitude had long been allowed to the story, whether it was accepted as historical or not. More, however, cannot be said. We have no direct evidence for the migration outside the Bible itself, and so conservative a scholar as Albright has


4. Gen. xii. 4

suggested that the localisation of Abraham's home at Ur was secondary. ¹

On the question of the date of Abraham the whole discussion has been greatly changed by recent discoveries. A study of certain verses in the Old Testament, which gave the date of the Exodus in relation to the foundation of Solomon's Temple,² the date of the entry into Egypt in relation to the Exodus,³ and the years of the patriarchs from the departure from Harran to the entry into Egypt,⁴ would lead to the conclusion that the departure from Harran was to be dated circa 2092 B.C.⁵ The only passage in the narratives about Abraham which seemed to offer any help in fixing his date in relation to world events was Gen. xiv, which tells how Amraphel of Shinar, Arioch of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer of Elam, and Tidal of Goim together came against Sodom and its neighbouring towns. It was a common assumption that Amraphel was to be identified with Hammurabi, the great king of Babylon, and this seemed to fit well into the scheme of Biblical chronology to which I have referred. For twenty-five years ago the Cambridge Ancient History gave as the date of Hammurabi 2123-2081 B.C.⁶ The identification of Amraphel with Hammurabi was not without difficulties, however, and many scholars refused to accept it.⁷ It is probable, as de

¹ Cf. From the Stone Age to Christianity, 2nd ed., 1946, p. 179. See also his Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible, 1932, p. 209.
² 1 Kgs. vi. 1.
³ Ex. xii. 40. The Septuagint and the Samaritan text halve the length of the Sojourn in Egypt by the addition of some words in this verse, but the fact that they stand in different places in these texts is held by most scholars to be against their originality.
⁴ Gen. xii. 4, xxi. 5, xxv. 26, xlvii. 9.
⁵ Reckoning the foundation of the Temple as circa 967 B.C. While there are slight differences of dating amongst scholars, few would go more than a decade from this date, either forwards or backwards.
Vaux says,¹ that this identification only enjoyed such favour as it commanded because it appeared to place Abraham in the setting of world history.

The other names of the chapter were even more intractable. Arioch of Ellasar was held to be Rim Sin or Arad Sin of Larsa,² whose name might be written Eri-agu, and a late document containing the form Eri-aku was put forward, though there was no evidence to connect this individual with Larsa.³ Chedor-laomer was believed to be Kudurlagamur, a possible Elamite name, though one which is not actually found. Moreover, though Babylon acknowledged the suzerainty of Elam at the time of Hammurabi’s accession, he revolted against Elam, and difficulty was felt about the activity of Elam at this time so far in the west.⁴ For Tidal it was even more difficult to suggest a suitable identification, until Böhl proposed to identify him with the Hittite king Tudhaliya.⁵ This, however, led to an approach to the question

³ Cf. Skinner, loc. cit. Many older scholars regarded Gen. xiv as itself of late origin, and of little historical worth. Cf. J. Wellhausen, Die Composition des Hexateuchs, 3rd ed., 1889, pp. 311-313; H. P. Smith, Old Testament History, 1911, p. 37; J. Morgenstern, A Jewish Interpretation of the Book of Genesis, 1920, p. 119 (‘This is a legend pure and simple, without the slightest historical basis’). W. F. Albright formerly subscribed to this view (cf. Journal of Biblical Literature, xxxvii, 1918, p. 136: ‘The fourteenth chapter must be regarded. . . . as a political pamphlet designed to strengthen the hands of the patriotic Jews who were supporting the rebellion of Zerubbabel against the Persian monarch. As we now know that Warad-Sin of Larsa, who, under the mask of Eriaku-Arioch, was long the comfort of the traditionalists, died about thirty years before Hammurabi-Amraphel acceded to the throne, the historical view has no foundation’), but later abandoned it (cf. Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society, vi, 1926, p. 227: ‘Gen. xiv is a genuine historical document, perhaps somewhat embellished with saga’).
from the other end. For the first Tudhalia reigned in the seven-
teenth century B.C. Hence it was now suggested that Abraham
belonged to that century,¹ and that the doubtful equation of
Amraphel with Hammurabi should be abandoned.²

Hammurabi himself can no longer be dated at anything like
the date I have already mentioned, however. One of the items
of evidence which had led to the adoption of that date was the
year formula of Ammisaduqa in terms of the risings and settings
of the planet Venus. Ammisaduqa was the tenth monarch of the
dynasty of which Hammurabi was the sixth king, and hence if the
date of Ammisaduqa could be fixed, the date of Hammurabi would
at the same time be determined. Elaborate astronomical cal-
culations were made,³ but by the nature of the case they could not
by themselves fix the chronology. The same cycle of risings
and settings of Venus recurs at long intervals, and hence these
calculations could only fix the precise date when the approximate
date was decided on other grounds.

For the approximate dating we now have several lines of
evidence, which have come to light during the last twelve years.
There was first evidence that Shamshi Adad I of Assyria was
contemporary with the early part of the reign of Hammurabi,⁴
while Shamshi Adad's approximate period can be fixed by the
help of the Khorsabad King list, which was first published
during the war.⁵ A further general check came from the pottery
brought to light at Mesopotamian sites, where some tablets of the
time of Shamshi Adad I were found in levels that could be
approximately dated at about three centuries earlier than other

¹ This date was advocated on different grounds by E. G. Kraeling, Aram and
Israel, 1918, p. 32; A. Jirku, Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft,
xxxix, 1921, pp. 152-156, 313 f.; W. F. Albright, 'Shinar-Šangar and its
Monarch Amraphel', in American Journal of Semitic Languages, xl, 1923-24,
pp. 125-133.
² Cf. W. F. Albright, Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society, i, 1921,
pp. 70 ff.
³ Cf. S. Langdon and J. K. Fotheringham, The Venus Tablets of Ammizaduqa,
1928.
⁴ Cf. F. Thureau-Dangin, 'Išmāl-Adad', in Revue d'Assyriologie, xxxiv,
1937, pp. 135-139.
⁵ Cf. A. Poebel, 'The Assyrian King List from Khorsabad', in Journal of
levels which could be dated by evidence from Nuzu in the fifteenth century B.C.\(^1\) Again the Mari evidence brought important material, amongst which may be mentioned the evidence that Zimri-lim, the king of Mari, was defeated by Hammurabi in the thirty-second year of his reign,\(^2\) while there was some interlocking evidence from Ras Shamra, which led Schaeffer to suggest for Hammurabi an eighteenth or seventeenth century date.\(^3\)

By all scholars such a date would now be agreed, though there is still a measure of disagreement as to the precise fixation of the regnal years of Hammurabi. In the year 1940, Sidney Smith\(^4\) and Ungnad,\(^6\) working quite independently on either side of the barrier created by the war, reached almost identical results. Sidney Smith dated Hammurabi 1792-1750 B.C.,\(^6\) and Ungnad dated him one year later, 1791-1749 B.C. In the following year Neugebauer observed\(^7\) that ‘if historical evidence places Hammurabi around 1800, then the Venus observations require for his reign either the years 1792-1750 or an interval 56 (or even 64) years earlier or later’. In the following year, 1942, Albright moved down the sixty-four years later, and argued for the date

\(^2\) Cf. F. Thureau-Dangin, 'Sur les étiquettes de paniers à tablettes provenant de Mâri', in *Symbolae Paulo Koschaker dedicatae*, 1939, pp. 119 f.
\(^3\) Cf. C. F. A. Schaeffer, *Ugaritica*, 1939, p. 18 n.
\(^6\) In *The Journal of the British Astronomical Association*, lvii, 1947, p. 208, A. G. Shortt criticises the astronomical argument of Brigadier-General J. W. S. Sewell, on which Smith relied, and claims that Fotheringham would not have agreed with Sewell’s results. This not only leaves all other considerations out of account, but takes no account of criticisms of Fotheringham’s results (cf. O. Neugebauer, ‘Zur Frage der astronomischen Fixierung der babylonischen Chronologie’, in *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, xxxiii, 1929, cols. 913-21, ‘Chronologie und babylonischen Kalender’, *ibid.*, xlii, 1939, cols. 403-14), or of other recent discussions of the astronomical side of the problem (cf. the works cited in the preceding and following notes).
1728-1686 B.C.¹ Again, by a surprising coincidence, in the same year there was published in Germany a completely independent study along entirely different lines, reaching the same conclusion as Albright.² While there is no final agreement as to which of these two dates is correct, there can be little doubt to-day that Hammurabi must be brought down to one or other of them, and that his reign belonged to the eighteenth century B.C., if not to the seventeenth, and more probably the latter.³

This means that if Amraphel is identified with Hammurabi and Abraham is made contemporary with Hammurabi of Babylon, those chronological verses of the Old Testament to which I have referred must be given up. Actually there is other chronological material in the Bible which cannot be reconciled with them,⁴ and the historical value of the traditions is in no sense dependent on the chronological framework in which they are set. It is probable, however, that just as the equation of Amraphel with Hammurabi has been clung to in the past by defenders of the Biblical

⁴ I discuss these passages in my forthcoming Schweich Lectures.
chronology, in the future this always doubtful equation will be rejected by them.

We now know that there were three, if not four, approximately contemporary kings who bore the name Hammurabi. There was a Hammurabi ruling in Aleppo, and another in Kurda, and some scholars have recently argued that if Amraphel is to be identified with any one of them, it should be with the king of Aleppo. It is, however, significant that while all our evidence is doubtful, such as it is it seems to be steadily pointing to the seventeenth century B.C. for the period indicated by Gen. xiv. 1.

If Albright’s date for Hammurabi is accepted—and he has produced an interesting supporting argument for it in the form of a Mari reference to a prince of Byblos named Yantin-hamu, who is probably to be equated with one Entin referred to in an Egyptian inscription which is to be dated 1740-1720 B.C.—then part of his reign fell in the seventeenth century B.C., to which the Hittite king Tudhalia I belonged. Böhl, who prefers to identify Amraphel with Amut-pi-el, the king of Qatna, has suggested that Arioch is to be equated with Arriwuk the son of Zimri-lim of Mari, who again would belong to the same century. For Chedorlaomer Albright now proposes the identification with the Elamite king Kuter-Nahunte, whose reign would fall, however, towards the seventeenth century B.C.

1 For the fourth cf. Actes du xx e Congres international des Orientalistes, 1940, pp. 116 f.
4 Cf. King Hammurabi of Babylon, pp. 17 f. Böhl thinks Amur-pi-el is a possible corruption of Amut-pi-el, and Dougherty (loc. cit.) is inclined to agree. O’Callaghan (Aram Naharaim, 1948, p. 31 n.) is more doubtful, finding the suggestion attractive but hazardous, while C. F. Jean (Bibliotheca Orientalis, v, 1948, p. 128) is more critical, and finds it hard to accept the shift from Amut-pi-el to Amur-pi-el. It may be added that Gelb had earlier thought Aleppo a more likely home for Amraphel than Babylon (cf. American Journal of Semitic Languages, liii, 1936-37, pp. 253 ff.), while twenty-five years ago Albright had thought of northern Mesopotamia as a more likely home (cf. ibid., xl, 1923-24, pp. 125 ff.).
6 Cf. Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, No. 88, Dec. 1942, pp. 33-36; R. T. O’Callaghan, Aram Naharaim, 1948, p. 31; R. de Vaux, Revue Biblique, lv, 1948, p. 334. While this paper has been in the press, Albright’s Archaeology of Palestine, 1949, has appeared, from which it would
end of the seventeenth century B.C., and therefore later than Hammurabi's. Albright does not accept the identification of Amraphel with Hammurabi, but relies on this identification of Chedorlaomer to bring down Abraham to a date late in the seventeenth century B.C., after the time of Hammurabi. While I recognise that no one of these identifications is conclusive, and reserve is necessary at every point, it does seem to be significant that such evidence as we have to-day seems to be pointing to the seventeenth century B.C., and mainly to the first half of that century. 1

Abraham is called 'the Hebrew' in the Bible, and this name has long been associated with the name Habiru which is found in the Amarna letters. In those letters, written in the fourteenth century B.C. from the Palestinian princes to the Egyptian chancellery, we find appeals for help against people who are called by the ideogram SA-GAZ in many of the letters, but by the name Habiru in the letters of Abdi-Hiba, the king of Jerusalem. The equation of the names Habiru and Hebrews is not quite so simple as it seems to the English reader, and it has always been opposed by a number of scholars. 2 Others claimed that not only were the names to be equated, but that the Amarna letters gave us the story of the entry of the Israelites under Joshua after the Exodus from Egypt. 3 It is a curious fact that while the Bible speaks of Hebrews before the descent into Egypt and during the sojourn in Egypt, it never uses the term in connexion with the people who were brought out of Egypt by Moses and who entered the land under Joshua. There are seem that Albright has tacitly abandoned this view, since he now (p. 83) says 'In the writer's present opinion the Terachid movement from Ur to Harran and westward may have taken place in the twentieth and nineteenth centuries.'

1 As observed in the preceding note Albright has now withdrawn from his view on the chronology of Abraham. He now declares (op. cit., p. 237) that 'Genesis xiv remains an enigma which only the future can solve.'


some later references to Hebrews at the time of the Philistine oppression and the foundation of the monarchy, but none in connexion with the Settlement in Canaan. This would be curious if the Amarna letters gave the story of their entry under Joshua.

From Egyptian sources we had references to some people called 'Aperu,' who were set to hard labour, and these again were identified by some with the Hebrews in Egypt. There was a reference to 'Aperu in a text which told of the activity of Thothmes III in Palestine, but the text itself is of a later date and is not regarded as a historical source. Other texts, of a historical character, came from the reigns of Seti I and Rameses II, and even later, and since on the view that the Amarna letters give the story of the entry into Palestine after the Exodus, all of these come from a time after the Exodus from Egypt, the equation of 'Aperu with Hebrews has been denied by some of those who have stoutly maintained the equation of Ḫabiru with Hebrews.

Here again we have more evidence to-day than we had but a few years ago. Between the wars further mention of the 'Aperu was found at Bethshan, in the Jordan valley. We now know that


there were 'Aperu in the Transjordan in the time of Seti I, and that they were engaged in fighting, though there are obscurities in the text and it is not certain on whose side they were fighting.\(^1\) Six years ago a further reference to no less than 3600 'Aperu prisoners who were taken by Amenhotep II in fighting in Palestine became known.\(^2\) At this time, if the Biblical chronology is correct, and if the view that the Amarna letters tell of Joshua's campaign after the Exodus is correct, the Hebrews ought to have been wandering in the wilderness and not fighting in Palestine.

Again in 1940 a Ras Shamra text was published which offered evidence for the equation of the names 'prm and SA-GAZ.\(^3\) Since we already had Hittite evidence which made it plain that the terms Ḫabiru and SA-GAZ referred to the same people, it now became clear that 'prm and Ḫabiru should be equated. It was at once claimed, however, that Ḫabiru could no longer be connected with Hebrews.\(^4\) For the word written Ḫabiru could be read Ḫapiru, and it was claimed that the new evidence meant that it should be so read, and the apparent connexion with Hebrews be accordingly weakened. Actually, it is once more not quite so simple as that, and the equation of both Ḫabiru and 'Aperu with Hebrews is still possible, though it is not, and never has been, very secure.\(^5\)

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Evidence from the Nuzu texts brought a much greater complication into the discussion of this question. For there a number of references to Ḥabiru or Ḥapiru are found. Many of them are described as voluntary slaves, and the term by which they are called appears to have a social rather than an ethnic connotation.¹ It is then observed that in the Pentateuch we have legislation that required a Hebrew slave to be set free after six years of service, unless he voluntarily chose to remain in his master's service.² Further, there is a nuance of depreciation about most of the uses of the word Hebrews in the Old Testament. Hence, it is claimed, the word had reference primarily to status and not to race, and in so far as it ever has a racial meaning, that is a secondary development in Israel, where it became associated with their national consciousness.³ On the whole it seems to me more likely that the term began with a racial significance which it lost in such a community as that of Nuzu, where large numbers of them sank into a condition of slavery, until their name became used for their class, whether members of their race or not. In the same way in the Roman world the term Chaldaean, originally of racial significance, came to mean a soothsayer because numbers of soothsayers came from the east.

It is of importance to observe, however, that not all the Ḥabiru of the ancient world were in Palestine. The name is found in Babylonia as well as in Nuzu,⁴ and if Ḥabiru and ‘Aperu are identified, also in Egyptian and Ras Shamra texts, as has been said. It is therefore of much wider significance than to denote

the Israelite people in certain periods of their history. This, however, is in full accord with what we read in the Bible. For Eber is the eponymous ancestor of the Hebrews, who therefore include more than Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob. Some were left in Babylonia when Terah migrated with his family, and some were left in northern Mesopotamia when Abraham migrated from Harran. The putting of the Habiru in a much wider context by archaeological discoveries, therefore, is not an embarrassment to the Biblical student.

If, however, Abraham is placed in the seventeenth century B.C., and it is held that he migrated from Harran to Palestine in that age, there is no room for all the period that separated him from the Exodus if the Exodus is placed in the fifteenth century B.C. Albright associates Jacob and the entry into Egypt with the establishment of the Hyksos power there about 1730 B.C., and since he puts Abraham about a century later than this, he would seem to reverse their order. This seems to me very doubtful, and I think it is more probable that the age of Jacob should be brought down much lower to the Amarna age. Instead, therefore, of finding the campaigns of Joshua reflected in the Amarna letters, I find that age to provide the appropriate setting for a number of the incidents recorded in the book of Genesis, dealing with the time before the entry into Egypt.

1 Gen. xi. 16 ff.
5 In The Archaeology of Palestine, 1949, which was published since this article was in type, it is made clear that Albright no longer reverses the order of Abraham and Jacob, since he now abandons the late date for Abraham (p. 83).
6 See my forthcoming Schweich Lectures.
It has long been known that one of the Hyksos leaders was named Jacob-hr or Jacob-el, and another Jacob-baal, and it has been improbably suggested that they were named after the patriarch Jacob. Such a view would seem to be ruled out if Abraham is to be placed in the period of the Hyksos decline. Further, it has been known for more than half a century that there are Egyptian references coming from circa 1479 B.C. to Palestinian place-names Jacob-el and Joseph-el, though the latter name is but doubtfully so read. There is no reason whatever to suppose that any of these names had anything to do with the Biblical characters. We have already seen that there were at least three contemporary kings named Hammurabi, and there is no reason why more than one person should not bear the name Jacob or Joseph, or why the place-names should not be connected with a non-Biblical holder of the name. It would in any case be surprising for Joseph, who was carried into Egypt while still a youth, to have left his name in a Palestinian place-name during the period of the sojourn in Egypt; and even on the earliest chronology the year 1479 B.C. would fall within the period of the Egyptian sojourn.

These are not the only Israelite names which are found in non-Biblical texts of the period we are studying, according to the

5 It is true that the view of Josephus (Contra Apionem, i, 16 (103)), that the Exodus is to be identified with the expulsion of the Hyksos, has found some modern following (cf. H. R. Hall, Cambridge Ancient History, i, 2nd ed., 1924, p. 311, and The Ancient History of the Near East, 7th ed., 1927, pp. 213 n., 408 n.; A. H. Gardiner, Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, v, 1918, pp. 36 ff., xix, 1933, pp. 122 ff.). But it is decisively rejected by the great majority of scholars.
view of some scholars. Leaving out of account the name Abram, which is found in Babylonia, where no one connects it with the Biblical patriarch, and the name Israel, which is doubtfully claimed to be found on a cylinder from the period of Agade, where again it could not possibly refer to the Biblical Israel, we may note that in Mari texts there are references to Benjamites, and it has been suggested that they are to be connected with the Biblical Benjamites. This does not seem very likely. The name Benjamin means ‘son of the south’, and there is no reason why it should not be given to tribes in more than one locality. In Mari we find the corresponding name ‘sons of the north’. If the Mari Benjamites should be connected with the Biblical Benjamites, then the tribe was in existence already at about 2000 B.C., and therefore earlier than the birth of Benjamin on any Biblical chronology. Further, in the Biblical story Benjamin is said to have been born in Palestine, after Jacob’s return from Laban, and never to have been in Mesopotamia at all. Clearly the tribe carried no memory of any history of theirs stretching back to the period before their entry into Palestine.

In the earlier collection of excretion texts from Egypt, assigned to the twentieth century B.C., the name 'Ijsipj stands,’ while in the collection that probably comes from the following century a similar name 'Isipi is found. Dussaud identifies both of them with the already mentioned Joseph-el, but other scholars

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6 Cf. K. Sethe, Abhandlungen der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1926, No. 5, pp. 54 f., 58.
7 Cf. G. Posener, Princes et pays d’Asie et de Nubie, 1940, p. 71.
are unconvinced. If Dussaud is right, we should still not be able to connect the name with the Biblical Joseph, who on any chronology was not born until after the date of the earlier of these texts.

Similarly, in the Posener collection of execution texts, which was published in 1940, the name of Simeon has been found by some scholars, though the identification is denied by others. Once more we should have to recognise, if the identification were established, that the Simeon referred to could with little probability be connected with the Biblical Simeon. In the Sethe collection, coming from an even earlier date, the name of Zebulun has been found, and here Albright accepts the identification of the name. On the other hand, he denies the claim to find the name of Zebulun in the Ras Shamra texts.

Both Asher and Zebulun are alleged to occur there, though for the former Albright finds a verb meaning *march* and Ginsberg the meaning *after*, while for the latter Albright finds the meaning *patricians* and Ginsberg *sickness*. The view of Albright has a substantial following, and it is clear that the

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alleged occurrences of the names of the Israelite tribes are too insecure to build on. On the other hand, there is reason to believe that the name of Asher stands in Egyptian texts coming from the reigns of Seti I and Rameses II in the form of 'Asaru. It would then appear that this tribe was already in Palestine in those reigns, and the view that they entered the land in the Amarna age more than a century earlier than the reign of Seti I gains in probability. Nevertheless the identification is not accepted by all scholars, and it cannot be regarded as certain.

On the whole, therefore, it is improbable that in any texts coming from the period 2000 B.C. to 1400 B.C. references to the Biblical tribes or persons are really to be found. A like improbability attaches to the 'Negebite' theory of the Ras Shamra texts, associated particularly with the names of Virolleaud and Dussaud. According to this view there are a number of origines israélites, 1939, pp. 76 ff., 79 ff., and Les textes de R.S.-U. et leurs rapports avec le milieu biblique de l'Ancien Testament, ii, 1945, pp. 472 ff., 477 ff.; C. H. Gordon, Ugaritic Grammar, 1940, pp. 34, 36; J. Pedersen, Berytus, vi, 1941, p. 68; W. Baumgartner, Theologische Rundschau, N.F. xiii, 1941, p. 17; I. Engnell, Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East, 1943, pp. 150, 157 f. G. A. Barton, loc cit., protests that 'The root air (or atr) does not mean "march" in any Semitic language or in Hittite. So far as Hurrian is yet known to us that tongue furnishes no basis for such a meaning. Egyptian has a verb *ir, but it means "broil", "roast".' He further observes: 'Similarly to translate zblnm "patricians" instead of "Zebulonites", in order to get rid of a definite Palestinian reference appears to be motivated more by a pre-conceived theory than by philology'.

1 R. de Vaux formerly accepted these references to the Israelite tribes (cf. Revue Biblique, xlvi, 1937, pp. 446, 542), but appears to have abandoned this view (cf. ibid., lv, 1948, pp. 326 f.). Cf. also J. P. Lettinga, Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux, ix, 1944, p. 120; A. Herdner, Syria, xxv, 1946, p. 137 b.


references to the district in the south of Palestine standing in these texts, connecting the history of the Ras Shamra people with that district. Evidence of a great battle with the Terahites has been read into the texts, and the Terahites are then thought to be the ancestors of the Hebrews. All of this is speculative and doubtful, and to-day the Negebite hypothesis commands practically no following.\(^1\) The texts are quite differently understood by most scholars, and where a geographical interpretation is given, it is associated with quite different districts.\(^2\) By some, however, it is held that the texts are of ritual significance, and not of geographical and historical significance.\(^3\)

The mention of Terah, however, raises the question of the mention of the father of Abraham in these texts. It has already been said that Ur and Harran were connected with moon worship. The name Terah appears to be connected with the Hebrew word des Patriarches et l'histoire', in *Revue des Etudes Sémitiques*, 1937, pp. 145-206; G. A. Barton, ' Danel: a pre-Israelite Hero of Galilee', in *Mémorial Lagrange*, 1940, pp. 29-37.

\(^1\) W. F. Albright, ' Was the Patriarch Terah a Canaanite Moon-God ?' in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 71, Oct. 1938, pp. 35-40, and ' L'hypothèse négebite des origines cananéennes', in *Actes du xx\(^{\text{e}}\) Congrès International des Orientalistes*, 1940, pp. 253-256. On p. 256 Albright speaks of the 'mirage enchanteur de Negeb', and in *Bulletin*, No. 71, p. 40, he says: 'There is no reason to give it'—i.e. the literature of Ugarit—'a factitious value by spinning webs of Negebite gossamer and substituting them for honest linen'. In *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, 2nd ed., 1946, p. 60, he observes that the entire negebite hypothesis 'is now virtually extinct in serious scholarly circles'.


for moon,¹ and this would not be surprising. It has been claimed, however, that in the Ras Shamra texts the name stands, not as the name of a man, but as that of a divinity, and here the father of Abraham occurs as a moon deity.² Again, however, the text is susceptible of a very different interpretation, and it is improbable that the name of Terah stands at all,³ and therefore still more improbable that we have any reference to the ancestor of the Israelites.

Of the importance of all the texts I have referred to for other sides of Old Testament study it would be beyond our present subject to speak, and the relatively negative results we have reached so far as any direct references to the Israelite tribes are concerned should not create the impression that they are without value to the Biblical student. In particular, the Ras Shamra texts offer a most valuable contribution to our knowledge of Canaanite thought and practice. And when we remember the evidence of the Old Testament that the Israelites settled amongst the Canaanites, intermarried with them, and often took over their beliefs and practices, we are not surprised to find these texts of the highest importance. There is insufficient evidence, however, to sustain the claim that the name of Israel’s God, Yahweh, stands in the texts in the form of Yw, where he is represented as the son of El.⁴ The text where the name is said to stand is

fragmentary and its interpretation is very doubtful, and until we have clearer and unequivocal evidence it is wiser to treat the claim with caution.\(^1\) Even if the name should be established there, we should have to recognise that this God plays no prominent part in the mythology of Ras Shamra, and we could hardly trace to the people of Ugarit the influence which led the Israelites to make him the only God whose worship was recognised as legitimate for them.\(^2\)

Despite exaggerated and often doubtful claims, we can at least say that some of the names borne by Biblical characters in the patriarchal age are now known to have been used in that age.\(^3\) Our evidence comes from various localities, and even though none of it refers to Biblical persons, it is still valuable as evidence of verisimilitude in the Biblical accounts, which use these names in that period.

Further, in the Bible we read of a number of different races being found together in Palestine at the time of the Israelite entry into the land. Of the Hittites our knowledge has increased enormously during the present century through the important discoveries of texts at Boghaz Keui in Asia Minor, where the Hittites had their capital. Even before that we had much knowledge from Egyptian sources of their influence in Syria and in Palestine, and their conflicts with Egypt and diplomatic relations with the Egyptian court. But of another of the races mentioned our knowledge has grown rapidly in much more recent years. It had often been supposed that the Horites were cave-dwellers, since their names had been etymologically connected with the


\(^2\) Cf. A. Bea, Biblica, xx, 1939, p. 441.

\(^3\) Cf. R. de Vaux, Revue Biblique, liii, 1946, p. 324: 'Ainsi les noms des Patriarches appartiennent à des types onomastiques connus dans les milieux d'où sont sortis les ancêtres des Hébreux.'
The Patriarchal Age

Hebrew word for cave. To-day they are connected with the Hurrians, who were a powerful people in Mesopotamia, and who were found in Nuzu and Mari, and who are also known from Ras Shamra texts written in the Hurrian language. They were a non-Semitic people, of whose origin we have little knowledge, but of whose activities in the Mesopotamian world we have knowledge from texts written in Babylonian. Texts written in Hurrian are now being read, and a first study of Hurrian grammar has been published.

A few years ago it was thought that the Hurrians were to be identified with the Subarians, who figure in cuneiform texts as Subartu. Recent study of this question has yielded the view that they were quite separate peoples, and the Subarians have now to be added to the list of peoples who are known to have been in

1 Cf. W. F. Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity, 2nd ed., 1946, p. 109: 'The Hurrians (Biblical Horites) have only been known to scholars for the past twenty years and most of our information about them is less than ten years old.' Already in 1939 R. de Vaux felt it necessary to 'opposer des barrières à cette "invasion hurrite" dont la Bible est menacée' (Revue Biblique, xlviii, 1939, p. 621 n).


4 Cf. A. Ungnad, Subartu, 1936, pp. 129 ff. See also R. de Vaux, Vivre de Penser, i, 1941, pp. 195-200.
Mesopotamia in the patriarchal age.\textsuperscript{1} There was, indeed, quite a mixture of races in Mesopotamia in the first half of the second millennium B.C.,\textsuperscript{2} as well as in Palestine, and the migrations that are recorded in the patriarchal narratives were probably connected with wider migrations that marked the age.

I have already noted that Ur and Harran are linked by their common worship of the moon-god Sin. It is now known that there was a temple to the same god at Mari,\textsuperscript{3} which lay on the route from Ur to Harran, and more than half way between them. It has been conjectured that it was through Amorite influence that the cult of this god was spread from Ur to the north-west.\textsuperscript{4} On the other hand there is little trace of moon worship at Nuzu.\textsuperscript{5}

From Harran it spread farther west and south to Syria and Palestine, where such a place-name as Jericho is connected with the word for moon.\textsuperscript{6} In the story of the patriarchs also we find some moon names. It has already been said that the name of Abraham's father, Terah, has been found by some as a divine name at Ras Shamra. While this is improbable, it is not at all improbable that the name Terah is due to moon-worship amongst Abraham's ancestors. Similarly the name Laban is another name for the moon-deity,\textsuperscript{7} and the names Sarah and Milcah may also be


\textsuperscript{2} Cf. O'Callaghan, *op. cit.*, passim.

\textsuperscript{3} Cf. O'Callaghan, *ibid.*, p. 28.

\textsuperscript{4} Cf. P. (E.) Dhorme, 'Abraham dans le cadre de l'histoire', in *Revue Biblique*, xxxvii, 1928, pp. 367-374, 481-511, xl, 1931, pp. 364-374, 503-518, where it is argued that the moon was the god of the nomads, who spread the cult, and that it was worshipped under the name Sin by the Sumerians and Accadians, Warah by the Amorites, and Sahar by the Aramaeans. Cf. also O'Callaghan, *loc cit.*, where the spread of the cult is associated more particularly with the Amorites, whereas Dhorme had associated it more particularly with the Aramaeans. On Amorite influence at Mari, cf. G. E. Mendenhall, *The Biblical Archaeologist*, xi, 1948, p. 12.

G. E. Wright (The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow, ed. by H. R. Willoughby, 1947, pp. 81 ff.) thinks it is probable that the 'Fathers of Israel were one small branch of the Amorite movement'.

\textsuperscript{5} Cf. O'Callaghan, *op. cit.*, p. 28.


associated with moon-worship. All of this fits excellently into the fuller background which we now have of this period. As O'Callaghan says: 'The biblical narrative which traces the journey of Abraham . . . from Ur to Harran . . . could fit in perfectly with the migrations of nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples of the entire first half of the second millennium B.C.'.

Finally we may see how some of the customs referred to in the stories of the patriarchal age find their illustration in recently found evidence from Nuzu. Many of the documents found there relate to adoption. Sometimes a childless man or woman legally adopted a free-born person or slave, thus securing someone whose duty it would be to look after them and to bury them, and who in return became the heir of the adopter. The practice was liable to abuse, and indeed became a means of evading one of the laws of the land. For in addition to genuine adoptions, there were what are called sale adoptions. A man who was financially embarrassed would adopt as his son a wealthy man who would help him out of his difficulties and who would become the heir.

Religions, cx, 1934, p. 45, identifies the Biblical Laban with this moon-deity, much as others have identified Terah with the same deity under another name. Cf. Dhorme, loc. cit., p. 74.


Ibid., p. 29.


to his land. The law provided that land was inalienable and
must be kept within the family, but by the fiction of adoption
this was evaded. One man, who appears to have been the richest
man in the community was adopted by very many men. In
the deeds of adoption it is specified what gift he gave to each of
his 'fathers', but there is no mention of any duty to care for
them during life and to mourn for them when dead, as there is
in genuine cases of adoption.

It will be remembered that in Gen. xv. 2 Abraham, who has no
hope of any children of his own, refers to Eliezer as his heir, and
further calls him 'one born in my house', i.e. a slave who had
been born in slavery. Presumably Abraham had adopted him
in accordance with this custom, to the mutual advantage of them
both. But God says to the patriarch 'This man shall not be thine
heir'. If he had been a legally adopted heir, how could his rights
be set aside so long as he fulfilled his filial duties? Here again
we find illustration in the Nuzu texts, where it is provided that
if the adopter should subsequently beget a son, the adopted son
must yield to him the place of chief heir.

Again we find that Sarah, when she had given up hope of
motherhood gave her maid-servant Hagar to her husband to be
her substitute, saying: 'It may be that I shall obtain children by
her.' Later we find that Rachel does the same thing with Bilhah,
and her example is followed by Leah without the same reason.
In marriage contracts from Nuzu it is specified that if the wife
should prove childless she must provide her husband with a slave
wife.' It is curious to observe that a foreign slave may be specified

1 Cf. C. H. Gordon, The Living Past, p. 164: 'Tehiptilla, for instance, had
himself adopted as the son of several hundred people in the town, and accordingly
obtained the right to inherit their property. He thus became the son of many
fathers.'

2 Cf. E. A. Speiser, Annual of A.S.O.R., x, 1930, pp. 30 ff., where some
examples of deeds of adoption are given. Cf. C. J. Gadd, Revue d'Assyriologie,
xxiii, 1926, p. 94; E. Chiera and E. A. Speiser, Journal of the American Oriental
Society, xlvii, 1927, p. 40.

3 Gen. xv. 4.

4 E. A. Speiser, loc. cit., where this provision stands in the texts given.

5 Gen. xvi. 2.


7 Cf. C. H. Gordon, Revue Biblique, xlv, 1935, p. 35; E. A. Speiser, loc. cit.,
pp. 31 f.
in these texts,¹ and that Hagar was a foreign slave. In the Nuzu
texts it is specified that the slave must come from Lulluland,
whence the best slaves were obtained,² while in the case of Hagar
she was an Egyptian. Later, when Sarah had herself borne
Isaac, she demanded that Hagar and her child should be driven
forth, and the patriarch was reluctant to comply with her demand.³
Indeed, it was only as the result of divine instruction that he
complied. Here again the Nuzu documents come to our help,
for we find it is specified that if the slave wife should bear a son
he must not be expelled.⁴ In the light of this we can understand
Abraham's reluctance to agree to Sarah's illegal demand, until
a divine dispensation overrides the law.

There is a parallel to Esau's sale of his birthright. For we
learn of a legal arrangement whereby the rights of the first-born
are transferred to another.⁵ In one case they are transferred
to one who was not really a brother, but who was adopted as a
brother.⁶ In another case actual brothers were involved and the
one who renounced his rights received three sheep in return.⁷
He seems at any rate to have received more than the single meal
which Esau got.

Another tablet offers a parallel to the story of Jacob and Laban.
Here a man adopts another as his son, giving him his daughter
to wife, and making him and his children heirs unless the adopter
should subsequently beget a son, when the adopted son should
take an equal share of the estate with the actual son, but the

¹ As in the text indicated in the preceding note, where we read: 'If Gilimninu
bears (children), Shennima shall not take another wife; and if Gilimninu does
not bear, Gilimninu a woman of the Lullu as wife for Shennima shall take'
(translation of Speiser, loc. cit., p. 32).
³ Gen. xxi. 10 f.
⁴ Cf. the text transliterated and translated by Speiser, loc. cit., pp. 31 f.
⁵ Cf. E. A. Speiser, Annual of the A.S.O.R., xiii, 1933, p. 44: 'Another
interesting analogue from Nuzi is a legal arrangement as to the disposition of
the birthright: one of the parties acquires the rights of the firstborn, while the
other, whose claims to the privilege would have been actually justified by reason of
birth, is satisfied to accept a minor share in his father's estate.'
⁷ Cf. C. H. Gordon, The Living Past, 1940, p. 177; The Biblical Archaeologist,
iii, 1940, p. 5.
children of the adopted son would forfeit any right. It is
further laid down that the adopted son would not be entitled to
take another wife beside the daughter of his adopted father. While the parallel is not complete, it is sufficiently close to shed
light on the Biblical story.

Again, Rachel's theft of the teraphim of Laban is better
understood in the light of Nuzu evidence. There we find that in
law the possession of such idols by the woman's husband ensured
for him the succession to the father-in-law's property. It has
been conjectured that Laban had no son at the time of Jacob's
marriage of Leah, but that he subsequently became the father of
sons, who were therefore now superior in legal standing to Jacob.
By carrying off the teraphim, however, Rachel preserved for
Jacob the chief title to Laban's estate.

In all of these cases we have customs which do not recur in
the Old Testament in later periods, and which therefore are not
likely to reflect contemporary society in the age when the docu-
ments were written. Their accurate reflection of social con-
ditions in the patriarchal age and in some parts of the Mesopotamia
from which the patriarchs are said to have come, many centuries
before the present documents were composed, is striking.
Speiser conjectures that the true significance of these incidents
had probably been lost even before the time of David. It is in
any case significant that if these stories had been carried in oral
tradition they correctly reflect obsolete customs, and it is not
surprising that to-day there is a disposition to treat them with
more respect than some of the earlier scholars accorded them. To
quote Speiser again: 'It follows that we cannot afford to dis-
regard lightly the information contained in the patriarchal stories,
no matter what we may think about the historicity of the in-

1 Cf. C. J. Gadd, Revue d'Assyriologie, xxiii, 1926, pp. 126 f.; C. H. Gordon,
The Biblical Archaeologist, iii, 1940, p. 5.
2 Ibid.
3 Gen. xxxi. 19.
5 Cf. C. H. Gordon, Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research,
6 Cf. Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research, xiii, 1933, p. 44.
dividual heroes. Since the minor incidents are demonstrably in keeping with the times, not to say conditioned by them, it is likely that the accounts of the migrations of Abraham and his descendants have some foundations in fact.¹

It may be asked how it comes about that such close parallels can be found at Nuzu, which was a Hurrian centre, when it has been said that it was Amorite influence which prevailed at Mari and which may have carried moon-worship along the road to Harran. To this the reply is that there was an amalgam of cultures throughout Mesopotamia, and while moon-worship does not seem to have taken the same hold at Nuzu, there was certainly Hurrian influence there, and also at Mari,² and indeed throughout the whole Mesopotamian area.³ If the Horites of the Bible are equated with the Hurrians, then that influence reached Palestine. It certainly reached Ras Shamra on the Mediterranean coast, where some tablets in Hurrian have been found.⁴ Moreover, there is reason to believe that even Babylonian myths reached the Hebrews through a Hurrian milieu. For in the Babylonian flood story the hero bears a name which shows little likeness to that found in the Bible. For the Babylonian hero is called Ut-napishtim⁵ and the Biblical hero Noah. Here, however, we find that a Hurrian fragment of the Gilgamesh epic contains a name related to the Biblical name Noah,⁶ and it has therefore

² Cf. I. J. Gelb, Hurrians and Subarians, 1944, pp. 62-65. Some Hurrian texts have been found at Mari, indeed (cf. F. Thureau-Dangin, 'Tablettes hurrites provenant de Mari', in Revue d’Assyriologie, xxxvi, 1939, pp. 1-28), and these are at least three centuries older than the Hurrian texts of Boghaz Keui and Ras Shamra (so A. Bea, Biblica, xxi, 1940, p. 193), while Speiser estimates them to be four to five centuries older (cf. Introduction to Hurrian, 1941, p. 6) and Thureau-Dangin several centuries older (loc. cit., p. 27).
⁵ P. (E.) Dhorme, Revue Biblique, xxxix, 1930, p. 487, maintained that the name should be read Um-napishtim, but most continue to read Ut-napishtim.
been suggested that there was a Hurrian source for the traditions of Genesis. Further, in the presence of important bodies of Habiru at Nuzu and in Palestine we have a further link between these two societies that is beyond conjecture, whether Harran provided a bridge between them or not. If the Habiru were of a common stock, they may well have kept in some touch with one another for some time after they broke off into separate groups, just as we are told that the family of Abraham kept in touch with their northern kin for two generations. Later these links would tend to be lost, especially with groups that became absorbed in the culture that surrounded them, or that sank into a normal condition of slavery.

The results of our study, of whose incompleteness I am fully conscious, may seem more meagre than some eager advocates have claimed. Yet they are not inconsiderable; and a sober recognition of the limits of our evidence is less harmful to the cause of truth than any exaggerated claims. Of the events of the patriarchal story we have no confirmation from any external source; of any mention of the patriarchs or of Israelite tribes in non-Biblical sources of the first half of the second millennium B.C. there is no solid evidence; of any external evidence for the soundness of the Biblical chronology which would put Abraham in the twenty-first century B.C. there is none, and he must either be placed in the eighteenth or seventeenth century B.C. or completely loosed from known external history. On the other hand, if the reasonable probability that Gen. xiv. 1 reflects the conditions of the early seventeenth century is recognised, much more is gained than is lost by the sacrifice of the chronology, which is, in parts at any rate, late and inconsistent with other Biblical statements. For if a sound tradition lay behind the synchronism of Gen. xiv. 1, it is likely that in other respects the chapter rests on ancient tradition. Further, the evidence that the names borne by persons in the patriarchal stories are known to have been borne by persons in the second millennium B.C., and in some cases

borne by several persons, helps to increase our respect for the traditions. For a modern writer to compose historical fiction, with large libraries at his disposal, is one thing; but for an ancient writer it was not so easy. Yet even a modern writer can be guilty of anachronisms. While there are undoubted anachronisms in the book of Genesis, however, such as the use of the name Dan in Gen. xiv. 14 \(^1\) and the references to the Philistines in the time of Abraham,\(^2\) they do not concern the names of persons or the conditions of the times. Moreover, the patriarchal stories cannot be classed with modern historical fiction, since they undoubtedly rest on traditions handed down from the past. If they were traditions which came into existence without basis long after the times they purport to describe, the close accord with the conditions of those times would be remarkable. For, as Albright says, and as has been made clear in what I have said in this lecture,\(^3\) It is now becoming increasingly clear that the traditions of the Patriarchal Age, preserved in the book of Genesis, reflect with remarkable accuracy the actual conditions of the Middle Bronze Age, and especially of the period between 1800 and 1500 B.C.\(^4\) It is, therefore, as I said at the outset, not because scholars of to-day begin with more conservative pre-suppositions than their predecessors that they have a much greater respect for the patriarchal stories than was formerly common, but because the evidence warrants it.\(^5\) That the evidence concerns the background of the stories and not their content does not make it less significant; and in any case it is the only contemporary evidence that we have.

\(^1\) Cf. Jg. xviii, 29, where it is said that the city was not called Dan until long after the time of Abraham, and after the days of Moses and Joshua.

\(^2\) Cf. Gen. xxi. 32, 34, xxvi. 8, 14, 15, 18. The Philistines did not enter the land until the beginning of the twelfth century b.c., and therefore long after the Biblical chronology would put Abraham and Isaac, and after that chronology would put Moses.
