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# The Generations of Genesis

by Dale S. DeWitt

*The genealogical tables or other records in the book of Genesis which are either introduced or concluded with "These are the generations . . ." (or similar words) have provided material for many studies. Professor DeWitt, of the Department of Bible in Grace Bible College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, takes a fresh look at them in the light of recent Near Eastern discovery and scholarly assessment.*

**I**N his essay, "Biblical History in Transition," written in 1957 for the Albright memorial volume *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, George Mendenhall wrote of the traditions preserved in Genesis,

However much these narratives have been refracted in the process of centuries of oral transmission, they nevertheless preserve with such vividness and accuracy cultural features which we know to be characteristic of the pre-Mosaic period that scholars today must take them seriously as historical sources, at least potentially. A seemingly endless stream of details has shown us that the cultural milieu of these narratives lies in the Bronze Age, especially the period from 2000 to 1400 B.C. . . . No longer does the cultural and religious history of Israel begin with a *tabula rasa* in the time of Moses. The religion of ancient Israel did not necessarily begin from scratch, so to speak, but rather it had behind it traditions which show a continuity extending over at least half a millennium. Furthermore, the very beginnings of this cultural continuity took place in a region which we now know to have been in close contact with the high civilizations of Mesopotamia preceding the migrations which mark the beginnings of Israelite traditions, associated with the name of Abraham.<sup>1</sup>

The discoveries which support these generalizations are, of course, the approximately 40,000 clay tablets found at Nuzi and Mari in upper Mesopotamia, at levels dating to the Middle Bronze Age. Mendenhall affirms that the discoveries support the *cultural background* reflected in the patriarchal material, though the material still evidences a certain *refraction* which has occurred in the process of *oral transmission*. The question must be raised, however, as to why we must continue to think about *refraction* in the process of *oral transmission* when the very same discoveries which support vividly the cultural scenes and historical accuracy of the narrative also clearly illustrate the development of *writing* and the *written preservation* of events and transactions. This in turn suggests the *creation, fixation and stabilization* of the patriarchal tradition during the very same age when the patriarchal history occurred.

A second orientation point for this study is the more specific question of the origin and structure of Genesis, a problem closely

<sup>1</sup> G. E. Mendenhall, "Biblical History in Transition," in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, edited by G. E. Wright (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1961), pp. 36-37.

intertwined with the oral transmission/written transmission discussion. The idea of a new approach to both the early writing of the Genesis accounts and the origin and structure of the book is encouraged *prima facie* by two facts: (1) what is preserved is a record of covenants between God and man, and (2) the mention of "a book of the generations of Adam" (5: 2). The references to covenants in Genesis are suggestive because a possible analogy might be sought between them and other agreements and pacts already written down on clay during the Middle Bronze Age at a time very close to the conclusion of the agreements themselves. The reference to the "book of the generations of Adam" (Gen. 5: 2) is important in the light of the north Mesopotamian milieu of the patriarchal history and cultural background. The presence of the word "book" in one of the "generations of" formulae in Genesis could be a clue of importance for both the structure of the book and its writing in the Middle Bronze Age.

Accordingly, both points will be explored in this article: (1) the development of writing formats in the patriarchal cultural milieu and (2) the origin and structure of Genesis in the light of writing and book-making in this milieu. The first point will be approached by way of the second.

## I

The Genesis expression "these are the generations of . . ." and the problem of its meaning have generated discussion for a long time. It is however, generally agreed by representatives of otherwise widely divergent viewpoints that this language is some kind of clue to the schematic structure of chapters one to thirty-seven of Genesis.

This article continues the discussion begun by P. J. Wiseman in 1936 with *New Discoveries in Babylonia About Genesis*.<sup>2</sup> In 1969, R. K. Harrison gave new currency to Wiseman's view in his *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Harrison believes that Wiseman's studies have opened a line of inquiry which is fruitful both as a guide to understanding the sources and structure of Genesis and as a viable alternative to the still widely current documentary analysis of Genesis in the Wellhausen tradition.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> D. L. Cooper, *Messiah: His First and Second Coming Scheduled* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1939) attempted to popularize Wiseman's views without any modification or critical assessment.

<sup>3</sup> G. E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1973) thinks too that any documentary analysis must be radically modified so as to allow the *historical events* behind the Biblical literature to have their proper role in analysing literary origins. Dissatisfaction with Wellhausenism is evident especially in treatments of Biblical origins concerned with the movement of events in the ancient Near East. Mendenhall wants a wholly new historical synthesis with which to explain Biblical literature. Documentary analysis is allowed by Mendenhall but largely eclipsed by his concern for the *events* which generated the Biblical tradition.

Three specific suggestions on the ideas of Wiseman and Harrison are offered here: (1) that "these are the generations of . . ." refers not only backward to a preceding history, but *both* to the preceding history *and* the following genealogy; (2) that the words following such as "the heavens and earth" (Gen. 2: 4) or "Adam" (5: 1) refer not to the owner or writer of the tablet, but its contents; and (3) that the most likely creator of the proposed tabletery format is not God himself, or even Adam, but Abraham followed by Jacob.

The word *tôledôth* ("generations") can have the meaning "history-origin" or "offspring-descendant." Brown-Driver-Briggs speak of "an account of man and his descendants." They refer most of the uses of *tôledôth* in Genesis to this concept which they distinguish from "successive generations" and "genealogical division." This is worth noting because it recognizes the ambiguity inherent in *tôledôth*.

Earlier Old Testament scholarship usually asserted that *tôledôth* in Genesis introduces genealogical material which regularly, though not always, follows it.<sup>4</sup> This, or course, always proved problematic with Genesis 2: 4 and 37: 2 since no genealogy follows, and the subject matter covered by the rubric appears to precede not follow its appearance. Accordingly, in pursuing a clearer concept of the construction of Genesis, Wiseman suggested on the basis of Mesopotamian clay tablets that *tôledôth* referred to material preceding rather than following its occurrence. The basis for this suggestion is the observation that clay tablets often use a notation (colophon) which identifies preceding rather than following material. Such a view is indeed attractive. However, in Genesis 5: 1; 10: 1; 11: 10, and 36: 1, the reference seems certainly to include the genealogy immediately following.

We suggest, therefore, that "these are the generations of . . ." was indeed, as Wiseman and Harrison maintain, a colophon at the bottom of a tablet to identify its contents, but that it denoted *both the history on the face of the tablet* (or series of tablets) *and an attached genealogy probably inscribed on the back*. "These are the generations of . . ." thus functions as an identifying colophon for the *whole* contents of a tablet, the primary content of which is both an historical event of decisive importance and a list of the offspring of chief personnel involved in the event. This does not imply two meanings for *tôledôth*, but a denotative reference encompassing the whole of the tabletery contents—primarily history and genealogy.

Genesis 5: 1 contains a clue to the background materials with its reference to the "*book* of the generations of Adam." The word

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 544, for a list of commentaries and studies which represent this point of view.

*sēpher* ("book") is so broad in the possibilities for its denotative meaning that it can cover nearly any kind of written material. Only the artifactual evidence can fill out the picture of its denotation at any time or place during the history of the Old Testament. In ancient Mesopotamia "book" could only mean a clay tablet since clay was the primary if not only medium for recording and preserving information. Wiseman and Harrison have shown how the use of the colophon in Mesopotamian clay tablets illustrates the use of the generations rubric in Genesis. Normal colophons include a title or name for the material, a dating of the writing, a statement that the tablet did not finish the series, and/or the name of the owner or scribe who wrote the tablet.

Certain variations in tabletery format, however, provide even closer (possible) analogies to the suggested Genesis format. One such is the type which contains the record of a transaction on the front and a list of witnesses on the back.<sup>5</sup> Wiseman illustrated this type in a photograph facing page 80, but he did not draw out its implications. He describes its contents as "a will and Law of adoption" and notes that "The names of thirteen witnesses are given on the back." The tablet dates from 1950 B.C.<sup>6</sup> Similar in content are Nuzi tablets 210 and 211.<sup>7</sup> Tablets 210 is a record of the sale of a slave with an accompanying list of officials of some sort, the significance of which is not clear.<sup>8</sup> Tablet 211 is also the record of the sale of a slave and likewise contains a list of personal names following the record of transaction. It is also worth observing that there was great variety possible in the use of colophons and notations.<sup>9</sup> Usually they appear at the bottom of the face of a tablet, though sometimes on the sides when there was interest in storing them on shelves or in jars.<sup>10</sup> These possibilities of format open the way for the suggestion that the Genesis colophon "these are the generations of . . ." denoted a significant historical event or series of events on the face (obverse)

<sup>5</sup> P. J. Wiseman, *New Discoveries in Babylonia About Genesis* (4th ed., London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1946), plate facing p. 80.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> T. J. Meek, *Excavations at Nuzi. Vol. III: Old Akkadian, Sumerian, and Cappadocian Texts from Nuzi*. Vol. X of Harvard Semitic Series, edited by H. A. Wolfson, W. Thomson, and R. H. Pfeiffer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935), p. liii.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> E. R. Lacheman, *Excavations at Nuzi, Vol. VIII: Family Law Documents*, Vol. XIX of Harvard Semitic Series, edited by F. M. Cross, Jr., H. A. R. Gibb, and G. E. Wright (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), *passim*. The sketches of tablets are helpful in illustrating the variety of format possibilities.

<sup>10</sup> G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, translated by D. E. Green (New York: Abingdon Press, 1968), p. 39.

of the tablet and a genealogy related to the personnel involved in the event or its results on the back (reverse) of the tablet.

The publication in 1966 by J. J. Finkelstein of a tablet containing the genealogy of the Hammurapi dynasty adds further material to certain dimensions of the suggested background and structure.<sup>11</sup>

The tablet, now in the British Museum (BM 80328) is probably from Sippar and is thought to have been written near the end of the First Dynasty of Babylon, i.e., about 1600 B.C. It consists of a genealogical list of kings constituting the rulers of the First Dynasty of Babylon with a summarizing "history" (i.e., historical notations) at the end. The genealogy begins on the front and continues on the back. The bottom half of the reverse side contains notes about the historical connections of the persons or groups of persons in the genealogy. These historical notes are of sufficient importance to the discussion to be reproduced here in translation:

The *palū* of the Amorites, the *palū* of the Haneans, the *palū* of the Gutium, the *palū* not recorded on this tablet, the soldiers who fell on perilous campaigns for their lord, princes, princesses, all "persons" from the East and West who have p. nor s., come ye, eat this, drink this, (and) bless Ammiṣaduqa the son of Ammiditana, the king of Babylon.

*Palū* means something like "dynasty, era," a segment of time during which a particular city or power held sway over an area.<sup>12</sup> The note thus gives a summary of several successive eras dominated respectively by Amorites, Haneans and Gutians, probably spanning the period c. 2200-c. 1650 B.C. The eras are to be read in reverse order so that the proper sequence is: Gutians—Haneans—Amorites. Their sphere of tribal influence is the West Euphrates plain.<sup>13</sup>

It is of considerable importance that the tablet and the information it contains are of Amorite origin since this is the provenience of the Biblical patriarchs also, as we now know from the appearance of the patriarchal names in Amorite-related texts of the Middle Bronze Age, especially those from Mari. The fact that the format follows a genealogy-history (rather than the Biblical history-genealogy) sequence is significant only as a format variation. The salient facts are that Semitic (i.e., Amorite) tribes of the western plain of the Upper Euphrates had evolved and elaborated genealogical traditions at a time not later than the end of the third millennium B.C., and that by no later than 1650 B.C. they had begun to write genealogies accompanied by historical notes. The writing development may have begun long before, but we do not know of it yet.

<sup>11</sup> J. J. Finkelstein, "The Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, XX, 3-4 (1966), pp. 95-118.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

Finkelstein himself is prepared to go further, though we must here follow him with great caution and with a tentative mind. He thinks it proper to speak of a "heretofore unsuspected genre of document" which may now take its place along with royal inscriptions upon which the Mesopotamian scholarly tradition could have drawn in compiling king lists, chronicles and similar literature.<sup>14</sup> The suggestion of a new genre is interesting for our thesis, since it would broaden support considerably. It is not farfetched, but, of course, is not yet established either. The possibility exists, however, that since two Amorite interests in genealogical-historical data have been identified (Hammurapi and Biblical), talk of a new genre may not be too optimistic. At any rate, the analogy to the suggested construction of the generations material in Genesis is of interest.

Finally, C. H. Gordon has observed the close coordination of history and genealogy in East Mediterranean epic literature in a broader sense. A case in point is the meeting of Glaucus and Diomedes on the battlefield, a narrative accompanied by Glaucus's genealogy (Iliad 6: 119-236).<sup>15</sup> Gordon thinks it would be "fantastic" to rip the history and genealogy apart in such a context, as is done in Pentateuchal studies by assigning a narrative to J or E and the accompanying genealogy to P. Regardless, the notice of narrative and genealogy in proximity is of importance for its possible analogy to the origins of the Genesis material.<sup>16</sup>

## II

With these observations in mind, a new sketch of the contents and construction of Genesis is offered, embodying the implications of the preceding discussion. It will be noted that the general outline of the tabulary structure suggested by Wiseman and Harrison is followed.<sup>17</sup> One additional factor is the possibility that each of the tablets except the first originally contained a summary or concluding colophon at the end of the genealogy on the back side of the tablet.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>15</sup> C. H. Gordon, *Homer and Bible* (Ventnor, N. J.: Ventnor Publishers, 1967), p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> Further discussions will be found in M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), A. Malamat, "King Lists of the Old Babylonian Period and Biblical Genealogies," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 88 (1968), pp. 163-173, and R. Wilson, "The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 94, 2 (June, 1975), pp. 169-189. The influence of the Finkelstein article and its implications are obvious in these discussions. Both Malamat and Wilson are interested in the historical and social connections of ancient genealogies, induced in part at least by the Finkelstein tablet.

<sup>17</sup> Wiseman, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-68; Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 548.

Genesis 10: 32 is so striking an example of a concluding summary (cf. 10: 1 and the genealogy between the two notices) that it may be taken as a clue to the broader pattern of the whole series.<sup>18</sup> The sketch below uses the *tôledôth* passages as a guide.

### I. Gen. 2: 4. The Creation Tablet

(on front side)

<p>Title: Gen. 1: 1</p> <p>Decisive History: Gen. 1: 2-2: 3</p> <p>Creation</p> <hr/> <p>Colophon: Gen. 2: 4-7 (possibly on bottom edge)</p>
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(on backside of Tablet I)

<p>[No genealogy survives, but none needed because none existed. If back of tablet view is adopted, the 1st tablet simply left back blank. Tablet I complete in itself on front side.]</p> <hr/> <hr/>
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<sup>18</sup> A good Middle Bronze example of this structural feature has not been located. A very striking later example is visible, however, in the text Pritchard calls "Daily Sacrifices to the Gods of the City of Uruk" (*ANET*, 343-345).

The text contains ritual prescriptions for the daily sacrifices offered to the deities of Uruk. On the front of the tablet is an outline of the drink and meal offerings with instructions for performance of the cultic rituals. On the back, however, is a heading which reads: "(Below are enumerated) the bulls and rams for the regular offerings. . . ." This is followed by the list of animals. *The back of the tablet concludes with a colophon which summarizes the whole tabletary contents.* Further discussion of this colophon is necessary since it includes a notice that the tablet was copied from older tablets during the reign of the Kings Seleucus and Antiochus.

This note of the source of the tablet takes the form of an appendix to the colophon. It reads, "(This tablet was copied) from tablets which Nabupal-aurur (*sic*), King of the Sea Land, carried off as plunder from the city of Uruk. . . ." Presumably the text existed before this time and is, therefore, of at least Iron II antiquity, if not older. The first half of the colophon seems to belong to this earlier history of the text. The second half is later as noted above. While, therefore, the tablet nicely illustrates a concluding summary colophon of several lines in length, it may not properly be used as evidence for Genesis since it is much too late.



II. Gen. 5: 1 (Tabloid contents more complete here.) The Adam Tablet

Front

Title: Gen. 2: 7a

Decisive History: Gen. 2: 7b-4: 26

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Creation of Man

Fall

Colophon: Gen. 5: 1-2

Back

Genealogy: Gen. 5: 3-32

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[Summary colophon lost]

III. Gen. 6: 9. The Noah Tablet

Front

Title : Gen. 6: 1a

Decisive History: Gen. 6: 1-8

Pollution of the Earth

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Colophon: 6: 9-12

Back

Genealogy: None (here)

History of the flood continues for perhaps 2-3 tablets: Gen. 6: 13-9: 17

[Genealogy not needed since it comes in next section]

---

Summary Colophon: Gen. 9:18-?

IV. Gen. 10: 1. (This section is almost perfectly complete and symmetrical.) The Sons of Noah Tablet

Front

<p>Title: Gen. 9: 19</p> <p>Decisive History: Gen. 9: 20b-29</p> <p>Noah's Drunkenness Prophecy of Noah's descendants</p> <hr/> <p>Colophon: 10: 1</p>
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Back

<p>Genealogy: Gen. 10: 2-31</p> <hr/> <p>Summary Colophon: 10: 32</p>
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V. 11: 10 Complete Pattern. The Shem Tablet

Front

<p>Title: Gen. 11: 1, cf. 10: 5, 25</p> <p>Decisive History: Gen. 11: 2-9</p> <p>Tower of Babel</p> <hr/> <p>Colophon: Gen. 11: 10</p>
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Back

<p>Genealogy: Gen. 11: 10- 26</p> <hr/> <p>[Summary colophon lost]</p>
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VI. 11: 27. The Terah Tablet

Front

Title: Missing

Decisive History: Missing

[But the same decisive event may hold for Terah as for Shem, i.e. the Tower of Babel. Perhaps the genealogy was simply extracted from a larger whole by Moses in the editing process.]

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Colophon: Gen. 11: 27

Back

Genealogy: Gen. 11: 28-32

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Summary Colophon: 11: 32

VII. 25: 12. The Ishmael Tablet

Front

Title: Missing

Decisive History: Gen. 12-16

History of Ishmael, particularly his elimination from the inheritance.

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Colophon: Gen. 25: 12a

Back

Genealogy: Gen. 25: 12b-16

[Genealogy has been detached from the history by later editing, perhaps in interest of regrouping materials to give centrality and continuity to Abrahamic material.]

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Summary Colophon: Gen. 25: 17-18

## VIII. 25: 19. The Isaac Tablet

Front

Title: Missing

Decisive History: Gen.  
17: 1-25: 11

Abrahamic history in its Isaac phase, showing the continuity of the promise to the true heir—Isaac.

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Colophon: Gen. 25: 19

Back

[Genealogy: None given.

Instead a record of the birth of Jacob and Esau is given; hence the genealogical *idea* is represented, i.e. the text tells about their birth: Gen. 25: 20-26. This material taking the place of a genealogy has again been removed slightly from the history, hence rearranged in the later editing process.]

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Summary Colophon: Gen.  
25: 26

## IX. 36: 1. (Tabloid contents again fully intact showing all format features, but with some rearrangement.) The Esau Tablet.

Front

Title: Gen. 25: 27a-28: 9

Decisive History: Gen.  
25: 28-27: 48

Esau sells birthright.  
Jacob steals Isaac's  
dying blessing.

---

Colophon: Gen. 36: 1

Back

Genealogy: Gen. 36: 1-  
43a

[Again the genealogy has been removed from its original place and rearranged in the editing process. Otherwise the entire contents and format intact.]

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Summary Colophon: Gen. 36:  
43b

- X. 37: 3. (Tabloid contents rearranged, but all elements are present.) The Jacob Tablet.

## Front

<p>Title: Gen. 28: 10</p> <p>Decisive Events: Gen. 28: 11-35: 22</p> <p>Jacob at Padan-aram</p> <p>Return to Palestine</p> <p>The theme is the triumph of Jacob and his family over Esau.</p> <hr/> <p>Colophon: Gen. 37: 2</p>
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## Back

<p>Genealogy: Gen. 35: 22b-26a</p> <hr/> <p>Summary Colophon: Gen. 36: 26b</p>
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Some further comments and implications can now be drawn. To begin, the Joseph narratives are not part of the suggested scheme. The distinguishing features of the tabletary format are not visible in the Joseph narratives. The relevant background for this portion of Genesis is rather to be sought in Egypt, where the popular "Tale of Two Brothers," the traditions regarding seven lean years, and the "Tale of Sinuhe" furnish the literary backdrop and thematic motifs.<sup>19</sup>

The tabletary structure and its background suggest that Genesis originated as family archive material. Thus far, the tablets discovered at Nuzi furnish the closest Middle Bronze (or earlier) parallels to this implication. Of those so far found, the best illustration of family archives in clay is furnished by the records of the Tehiptilla family of Nuzi. The archives of this business family contained tabletary lists of workmen and slaves and records of business transactions. The records became permanent contributions to a cumulative family record. The material is full enough to form the source for composing

<sup>19</sup> ANET, pp. 18 ff., 23 ff., 31 ff.; D. W. Thomas, *Documents from Old Testament Times* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons 1958), p. 168; for local color in the Joseph narratives, see C. H. Gordon, *The World of the Old Testament* (London: Phoenix House, 1960), p. 139.

an outline history of four or five generations of the family based on employee lists, major family events, and business transactions.<sup>20</sup>

Turning now to the origin of the specific Biblical form, it is noteworthy that the central figure in this history is Abraham. If a suggestion must be offered as to the creator of the format and writer of the tablets through Isaac, or at least Ishmael, Abraham seems to be the best possibility. Enough time had to elapse in human history for the development of writing generally and the kind of clay tablet format under discussion particularly. The cultural developments forming the background are well attested by the Middle Bronze Age. This implies unlikelihood in the view that God himself or Adam composed the original tablets, a view which glorifies God at the expense of docetizing Scripture. Furthermore, the primary focus of interest in Genesis is the Abrahamic *covenant* in its inception and history. It is this covenant which lies at the base of Israel's national consciousness and stands as the indispensable preface to the Mosaic covenant. The writing of treaties and agreements is well attested in the Middle Bronze Age from the Cappadocian texts, the Alalakh tablets, and other Mesopotamian documents including the directly applicable Nuzi texts. In addition to the attestation of written agreements, there is evidence that they were concluded with sacrifice.<sup>21</sup> The magnitude of the covenant promises and the experience of the beginnings of their historical fulfillment in his own lifetime would certainly have been sufficient cause for Abraham to have committed the most important aspects to writing. The concern of the covenant with the continuity of the "seed" would be sufficient cause for the acute sense of genealogy needed to make family lists part of the record. This covenant is sufficient to create the sense of history necessary to the compilation of covenant disclosures and their implications.<sup>22</sup>

Despite whatever cogency there may be in an appeal to family

<sup>20</sup> E. R. Lacheman, *Excavations at Nuzi. Vol. VII: Economic and Social Documents*. Vol. XVI of Harvard Semitic Series. Edited by R. H. Pfeiffer and H. A. Wolfson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958) Preface, pp. v-vi. Comments are offered on the archive.

<sup>21</sup> For the Alalakh tablets, see ANET Supplement (1969), 531-532; for examples of sacrificial conclusion to agreements from Mari see G. Mendenhall, "Mari," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, XI (February, 1948), pp. 1-19. The Cappadocian texts show evidence that a personal and contractual relationship between a clan chief and the clan god was a widespread phenomenon among nomads (J. Bright, *A History of Israel* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959], p. 89). Apart from these basic sources, however, the examples given in ANET, 217-220 show a wide variety of contractual arrangements put into writing in the Middle Bronze Age including court decisions, loans at interest, divorces, lawsuits, division of an estate, sale adoptions, and real adoptions.

archives or written treaties to explain the impulse to writing such documents, there is yet another factor with equally suggestive possibilities, i.e., the occasion for the draft of the Hammurapi tablet referred to above.<sup>23</sup>

Finkelstein is of the opinion that the last several lines, while giving the historical connections of the genealogy, also give us the occasion for its recital, i.e., the care and feeding of the dead. The broader life-context for the use of genealogy appears to have been mortuary activity, ceremonial for caring for the dead (ancestors) whose spirits are invited to come and share in the meal with the royal family still living. Parallels to these ceremonies can be cited in the Mari texts,<sup>24</sup> which are also of Amorite background. This *kišpu* ceremony was not limited to western Semites, but was part of the regular series of rituals attending new moon, going back to pre-Sargonic Sumer and continuing through Neo-Babylonian times.<sup>25</sup> Finkelstein suggests that the recital of pedigree must have been sufficiently regular to warrant the preparation of such a text as the Hammurapi tablet. In this way mortuary interest can be seen to have been an impulse to the writing of genealogy-history material, an occasion more religiously oriented than archival-commercial or treaty-draft contexts might provide.

The Amorite origin (of which Ezekiel 16: 3, 45 may be caustic echoes), the patriarchal interest in ancestors (with which the patriarchal narrative is replete) and the interest of the narrative in the circumstances of deaths and burials (cf. Genesis 23, 25, 48-50) all harmonize well with the possible mortuary occasion for the origin, use and preservation of such material. We do not know, of course, how much ancestral ceremonial Abraham or Jacob continued to practise once they were drawn into their relationship with a new God. But if the correspondence of patriarchal practices to ancient Near Eastern customs now evidenced by the Nuzi, Mari, Cappadocian and Alalakh texts are any indication, we may certainly assume that many of the old ways were continued.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> The patriarchal origin of at least parts of Genesis now seems supported firmly by Albright in his last reassessment of Biblical history before his death. Cf. W. F. Albright, "From the Patriarchs to Moses," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 36 (May, 1973), pp. 66-67.

<sup>23</sup> *Supra*, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Finkelstein, p. 116.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>26</sup> The Middle Bronze burials at Jericho appear to be "Amorite" and may thus give us a picture of practices generally in Palestine. If so, we have some guidance on the burial customs of the Biblical patriarchs at Machpelah. Cf. K. Kenyon, "Palestine in the Middle Bronze Age," *Cambridge Ancient History*, 3rd Edition; Edited by I. Edwards, C. Gadd, N. Hammond, and E. Sollberger (Cambridge: The University Press, 1973), Vol. II, Part I, pp. 94-96.

The preceding discussion implies that one must choose one of the three possible settings, since the three seem mutually exclusive, and indeed this may be the case. But the possibility should be left open that the three may at least have been capable of correlation, if not coalescence. No patriarchal coalescence of archive-deposition, treaty renewal and mortuary-ceremonial interests is in evidence in Genesis, at least not explicitly. There is, however such a coalescence in the case of Joshua, whose *death* was the occasion for *treaty* renewal and *deposition* of the renewed treaty in the Shechem Yahweh sanctuary (Joshua 23-24, especially 24: 25-29). This, of course, is not sufficient evidence, which must be sought in the Middle Bronze Age, not the Late Bronze Age, to be of any significant value. It is nonetheless suggestive, and leads one to want to look further.

Jacob was the likely continuator of the work. Through him the tablet series perhaps was completed and transported to Egypt where it came into the hands of Moses. Mosaic editing would be a suitable way to account for the relocations of some details insofar as some portions have been removed from their original position and placed in other settings in Genesis while other elements have not been preserved at all.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, some implications can be drawn for Biblical Theology. The scheme suggested above yields a clear outline of the distinctive contents of each tablet. These are the proper units for study of the theology of Genesis. Each tablet makes its own *distinctive* contribution while the covenantal character of the whole is the organizing principle by which a genuinely *unified* Biblical theology of Genesis can be achieved.

The whole will be markedly Abrahamic-Jacobite up to chapter 36. This is important, since Biblical Theology, if done with proper respect for the Biblical concept of prophetic authority, needs to stress the role of the key persons in the history of revelation who served as the chief instruments of the divine revelatory activity. In this way alone both the personal and propositional aspects of revelation can be meaningfully balanced.

Finally, to return to the point of departure—Mendenhall's observations about the cultural milieu of the patriarchal history—there is good reason to think in terms of the writing rather than oral transmission of the traditions of Genesis in the Middle Bronze Age. The evidence is clear for the writing of "books" in that period. No longer should the cultural milieu be thought of as something in

<sup>27</sup> Albright's suggestions in the article cited in note 22 are realistic and helpful along the lines of Mosaic editing. ". . . I see no reason to doubt that most of this material was approved in Mosaic circles. . . ."



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addition to the development of writing and writing formats. Rather the cultural background of the patriarchs includes the development of writing and its application to book-making and record-making. Since the format of such a Middle Bronze Age "book" can be traced in Genesis, there is reason to place the original writing of the history as well as the history itself in the Middle Bronze Age.

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