

## Beyond Literary Criticism

Today the original text critical arguments that once established the Documentary Hypothesis no longer sustain it. While the question of sources is still open to debate, considerable study is spent on understanding the issue of textual corruption such as what corruption was due to the normal process of copying and annotating and what corruption was due to a conscious effort to edit the text. However, it is the scientific disciplines of anthropology and archaeology, in the pursuit of reconstructing the early history of Israelite history, that is predisposed towards a late dating of the authorship of the Pentateuch as a compilation of early oral and written sources edited over a period of some 400 years by a variety of scribes and scribal groups with various literary tendencies.

While many scholars do not fully appreciate the contemporary literary and text critical arguments responsible for the demise of the original text critical arguments of the Documentary Hypothesis, they fail to acknowledge or address the problematic logical implications of accepting it.

1. How and why is it possible that scribes or scribal groups would create a sacred body of work with the intentional and fraudulent claim of Mosaic authorship?

How would this be morally possible within the context of the deuteronomic command of not altering the word of God (Deut 4:1-2) or with the emphasis of teaching its regulations to children (Deut 6:4-9; 11:18-20)?

How could this deceit take place over a long time without anyone noticing its fraudulent nature given the Pentateuch's foundational role in the religious and socio-cultural life of the ancient Hebrew?

Why would some of the Patriarchs, heroes of the Hebrews, be recorded as violating the Mosaic Laws?

Abraham marries his half-sister (Gen 20:11-13)

This was prohibited in Leviticus 18:9, 20:17, and Deuteronomy 27:22.

Jacob marries his sister-in-law Rachel (Gen 29:15-30).

This was prohibited in Leviticus 18:18.

The designation of Isaac as the firstborn (Gen 21:10-13) skipped the first born Ishmael.

This was prohibited or regulated in Deuteronomy 21:15-17.

Jacob set up a standing stone as a focus of worship (Gen 28:18).

This was prohibited in Exodus 34:13, Leviticus 26:1, Deuteronomy 12:3 and 16:21-22.

2. If there is no literary or textual evidence nor archaeological or socio-cultural evidence that points to the existence of a scribal society or priestly redactor(s) of the Pentateuch's creation over the hypothetical 400 year period, why is the Pentateuch still considered the creation of first millennium B.C. authors?

Literary critics, who propose that Deuteronomy was composed to validate and legitimize the priesthood in Jerusalem during the first millennium B.C., cannot explain why Jerusalem is not mentioned even once as the central shrine for worship. Instead of Jerusalem, which is first mentioned in Joshua 10:1 after the Pentateuch corpus, Bethel is consecrated (Gen 28:16, 19; 35:14, 15). Furthermore it is not one but two sources responsible for this glaring omission: the hypothetical Jehovist and Priestly documents, which were presumably used to compile the Pentateuch.

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When evaluating the biblical text, historians (including Christians) are faced with the challenge of understanding how the Bible reveals historical information that enables one to reconstruct a history. Hypothetical historical reconstructions can be tested by data from archaeology and the cultural and political history of the surrounding nations. And while interpretations of the archaeological data may reflect certain biases, the correct interpretation will be born out with the test of time.

Current archaeological data cannot conclusively affirm or deny Mosaic authorship or historicity of the Pentateuch; however, the cultural data can place the Pentateuch in the Middle Bronze Age (2000–1500 B.C.). This cultural match is made on the basis of analyzing the Patriarchal names, their migration patterns, and their legal and social customs.

Archaeology has been successful in discovering thousands of tablets in Mesopotamia and Northern Syria (i.e. Nuzi tablets, etc.) dated to the second millennium B.C., which has provided information on the culture and life during that time.

### Patriarchal Names

The personal names of the Patriarchs have found similarities in extrabiblical texts of the early second millennium B.C. For example, *Abram* has parallels in documents of the First Babylonian Dynasty at Dilbat, and *Abraham* has been compared with *Aburahana* in the Execration Texts of the Middle Kingdom Egypt (2000-1900 B.C.). Assyrian texts of the Ur III period also refer to names such as *Til-turakhi* (Terah) and *Sarugi* (Serug).

The Patriarchal names such as Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are called *Amorite imperfect names* for their grammatical structure and orthography. Amorite imperfect names appeared as early as the third millennium, were very common in the second millennium, and dramatically declined in usage in the first millennium. The use of Amorite imperfect names indicates the likelihood of these individuals existing during the first half of the second millennium B.C.

The places mentioned in the patriarchal narratives also associates the Patriarchs with the Amorites. While the original homeland of the Amorites is unclear, *Amurru* in the Akkadian texts refers to northwestern Mesopotamia, which is where Abraham considered his ancestral homeland (Gen 24:1-10).

Mari and later Assyrian texts mention other cities located in northwestern Mesopotamia such as *Harran* (Haran, Gen 11:31; 12:4), and *Nakhur* (Nahor, Gen 24:10).

Having located similar names and places in extrabiblical texts associating the Patriarchs with an ethnic group with the same possible homeland of the first half of the second millennium B.C., there is a growing body of archeological evidence that the Patriarchs were indeed real people. And there is a fair degree of confidence that the Patriarchs originated in Upper Mesopotamia as part of the Middle Bronze Amorite and Late Bronze Aramean migrations.

### Patriarchal Migration

The semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Patriarchs was consistent with Palestine in the early second millennium BC, which was a transitional time between a nomadic and settled way of life.

Egyptian Execration Texts and the Tale of Sinuhe (1900-1800 B.C.) reveal that tribal groups and minor city-states coexisted. The word used for Abraham's "armed men" is a hapax legomena (a word used only once in the Bible), yet it appears in the Execration Texts and a tablet from Taanach to mean "armed supporters."

The Tale of Sinuhe and the paintings by the Beni-Hasan tomb indicate that there was free and frequent travel between Palestine and Egypt.

Furthermore, there were foreign and Egyptian pharaohs who had residences in the eastern delta around 1950-1550 B.C. This would correspond to the time and location of the Patriarchs and their accounts of interacting with Egyptians.

### **Legal and Social Customs**

The characteristics of various covenants made in Genesis (Gen 14:13; 21; 26; 31), compare very well with several early second millennium treaties from Mari and Tell Leivlan. In some cases the terms of the contract matches early second millennium B.C. norms, such as shepherding arrangements found in Old Babylonian shepherding contracts (Gen 30:29-34).

In examining various Ancient Near East treaties of other periods, it can be firmly said that the Genesis covenants do not correspond to the treaty format of third millennium B.C., late second millennium B.C. or first millennium B.C.

Sarah's unusual offer of her handmaiden / concubine Hagar to Abraham to produce an heir (Gen 16), and Rachel and Leah's offer of their handmaidens Bilhah and Zilpah to Jacob (Gen 30:1-13) were consistent with marital practices of second millennium B.C. as exemplified by contracts of the period and the Law Code of Hammurabi (1795-1750 B.C.). A Nuzi adoption tablet serves as an example:

*Furthermore, Kelim-ninu has been given in marriage to Shennima. If Kelim-ninu bears (children), Shennima shall not take another wife; but if Kelim-ninu does not bear, Kelim-ninu shall acquire a woman of the land of Lullu as wife for Shennima, and Kelim-ninu may not send the offspring away. Any sons that may be born to Shennima from the womb of Kelim-ninu, to (these) sons shall be given [all] the lands (and) buildings of every sort.*

The prohibition of sending away the children of a concubine would be a reason for Abraham's reluctance to drive out Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:8-14).

The father's choice of the first born regardless of birth order has parallels with Ancient Near East documents as exemplified by a 1500 B.C. marriage contract from Alalakh on the North Syrian coast:

*If Naidu does not give birth to a son, then the daughter of his brother, Iwashura, shall be given Irihalpa [as wife]. If another wife of Irihalpa gives birth to a son first and afterwards Naidu give birth to a son, the son of Naidu alone shall be the firstborn.*

The choice of Isaac over Ishmael (Gen 21:10-13), Ephraim over Manasseh (Gen 48:2-22) is consistent with practices found in the Ancient Near East.

Disinheritance, which Reuben experienced (Gen 49:1-4), was the loss of the rights of a firstborn. This was not an arbitrary decision of the father, and it was consistent with early second millennium B.C. culture.

The Law Code of Hammurabi, among others, addressed this issue as the result of a serious offense against the family.

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Laban's daughters' complaint that their father "sold" them and "entirely consumed their money" (Gen 31:15) was very plausible during early second millennium B.C.

Old Babylonian texts and Nuzi tablets record that, on occasion, a father would withhold a part of the dowry. As additional evidence of the dating of the Patriarchs, the phrase "consume (our) money" appears in identical contexts in the Nuzi tablets.

Unusual behavior such as Rachel stealing her father's household gods (Gen 31:19, 30) does not seem out of the ordinary according to an adoption tablet from Nuzi:

*The adoption tablet of Nashwi son of Arshenni. He adopted Wullu son of Puhishenni. As long as Nashwi lives, Wullu shall give [him] food and clothing. When Nashwi dies, Wullu shall be the heir. Should Nashwi beget a son, [the latter] shall divide equally with Wullu but [only] Nashwi's son shall take Nashwi's gods. But if there be no son of Nashwi's then Wullu shall take Nashwi's gods.*

While it is not clear as to the purpose of owning the household gods, both the biblical and Nuzi tablet place an importance on it.

Based largely on the Nuzi tablets of 1500 B.C. and some earlier tablets, the evidence establishes that the socio-cultural details of the Patriarchs' lives fit more consistently within the context of the second millennium B.C. than any other period. Destructive critics who desire to date the Pentateuch's creation to the first millennium B.C. have very little archeological evidence to support their presumption.

While this is not fully conclusive, it can be said that the archeological evidence does seem to establish the fact that the Patriarchal narratives is an authentic reflection of the Ancient Near East during the early second millennium B.C. This would make it more likely that the Pentateuch was authored during this period, because many of its details such as social customs and city locations, would make little sense to an editor of the first millennium B.C.

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