

The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures

ISSN 1203-1542

<http://www.jhsonline.org> and

<http://purl.org/jhs>



Articles in JHS are being indexed in the ATLA Religion Database, [RAMBI](#) and [THEOLDI](#). Their abstracts appear in Religious and Theological Abstracts. The journal is archived by the National Library of Canada, and is accessible for consultation and research at the Electronic Collection site maintained by the [The National Library of Canada](#).

VOLUME 6, ARTICLE 6

**JUAN MANUEL TEBES, “YOU SHALL NOT ABHOR AN
EDOMITE, FOR HE IS YOUR BROTHER”: THE
TRADITION OF ESAU AND THE EDOMITE
GENEALOGIES FROM AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL
PERSPECTIVE**

“YOU SHALL NOT ABHOR AN EDMITE, FOR HE IS YOUR BROTHER”: THE TRADITION OF ESAU AND THE EDMITE GENEALOGIES FROM AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE*

JUAN MANUEL TEBES

UNIVERSITY OF BUENOS AIRES, CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF
ARGENTINA, NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL
BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 He is known as Jacob’s brother, the “first-born”, the preferred of Isaac, a “skilled hunter”, and ancestor of the Edomites; he is even called “my lord” eight times by Jacob (Genesis). But he is also hated by Yahweh (Malachi), and is accused of -among other things- with anger, wrath and violence against his brother (Amos). In the end, he was threatened with massacre and annihilation (Jeremiah, Obadiah). Esau is a character with multiple representations in the Hebrew Bible, which are as complex as they are difficult to decipher. Why such dissimilarities in the biblical images about Esau? What perspective must we adopt in the face of this pattern? With these questions in mind, we will examine the sociopolitical and ideological framework that gave birth to the biblical tradition of the brotherhood of Jacob, the Israelite patriarch, and his brother Esau. This analysis incorporates traditional approaches of biblical scholarship and current anthropological perspectives. It will also trace, albeit briefly, some topics that are relevant to this issue, e.g., the

* This paper incorporates part of my Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Its research and writing was carried out during 2004-2005 at the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research (AIAR) in Jerusalem, where I was George A. Barton Fellow, at the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) in Amman, where I was the Pierre and Patricia Bikai Fellow, and at the Department of Egyptology, National Research Council (CONICET), Buenos Aires, where I am a Doctoral Fellow. I am most grateful to these three institutions, especially to the staff, for their help, advice and friendship. I received much valuable advice from a number of people; I should especially mention Robert A. Mullins and Michael A. Daise. This does not mean that they accept the views expressed in this article. Responsibility for the ideas expressed herein is mine alone. The ideas exposed in this article were presented in a preliminary form in the *ASOR Newsletter* 55-4 (2005): 17 (http://www.asor.org/pubs/news/55_4.pdf)

tradition of the brotherhood as it appears in biblical scholarship, the question of southern Jordanian material culture in the Negev, and the issue of kinship, segmentation and orality in ancient societies.

1.2 My main hypothesis is that while the story of Jacob and Esau, and the Edomite genealogical lists, are rooted in concrete events and relationships, they should be understood in terms of the region and period in which they arose, in this case, the southern margins of the kingdom of Judah in the Late Iron Age. Archaeological research in the Negev has provided substantial evidence for the appearance of both imported and local southern Jordanian “Edomite” cultural traits (most notably pottery). As a result, this has been taken as evidence for the migration and settlement of southern Jordanian groups in this region. In light of this archaeological and theoretical background, I will suggest that the Jacob-Esau saga and the Edomite genealogies arose as a conflation of different, yet contemporary, oral traditions within the circle of local Negev population groups to mentally accommodate to this new sociopolitical and demographic situation.

II. THE JACOB-ESAU SAGA AND THE EDMITE GENEALOGIES

2.1 The language of kinship is an essential component of Israelite narratives concerning their own origins. Family relationships are used to explain the origin of various groups of peoples known by the biblical authors, whether nations, tribes or city-states. Above all, individuals belonging to a nation are regarded as descendants of one ancestral eponym, real or imagined. The Hebrew Bible maintains this parameter in almost all cases, without adding many explanations to the long lists of forefathers. Even so, there are occasions in which the biblical writers make further appeal to detailed stories, in the case of the traditions surrounding the origins of the neighboring Jordanian peoples -the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites. Given the close ties the Israelites had with their nearest neighbors, it is quite natural to find detailed accounts for the births of the eponyms of these peoples. What it is not so obvious is that the picture depicted by the Bible is completely different in the case of Edom.

2.2 An analysis of the biblical references to these nations shows that Edom was viewed from varied and multifaceted perspectives, while the representations of Ammon and Moab were similar and always hostile. Contrary to the short account of the origins of Ammon and Moab (Gen 19:30-38), the Hebrew Bible concedes a lot of attention to the story of Esau. Though historically the three peoples rivaled politically and militarily with the Israelites, there is a tendency in the Hebrew Bible (which probably reflects the authentic folklore of the people of southern Judah) to perceive the Edomites from a more favorable perspective. As we will see, this more favorable attitude towards Edom is exceptionally particular, inasmuch as the story of Esau, the alleged eponym of Edom, is intimately linked to that of his brother Jacob, ancestor of the Israelites.

2.3 Despite the relatively generous treatment that the Bible gives of the Esau tradition, there has been strong disagreement concerning its date of origin. The most easily datable passages are the references to several prophetic books that represent Esau as the brother of Jacob, or at least know the equation of Esau as Edom. The “brotherhood” of

Jacob and Edom was certainly recognized in post-exilic times, since the book of Malachi (1:2-4), generally dated to the fifth century B.C., acknowledges it. Here, the author makes Yahweh say that he still loves Israel, despite the accusations of Israelites to the contrary: "But you say, 'How have you loved us?' Is not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau" (1:2-3). That the author is referring to Edom is confirmed by the following statement that "[Yahweh] have made his hill country a desolation," to which "Edom" replies, "We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins" (1:3-4). These verses corroborate that the connection between Esau and Jacob was strong enough to make Yahweh opt between the two brothers.

2.4 The historical context in which the verses that refer to Esau are presented in Jeremiah (49:7-22) and throughout Obadiah is generally believed to have taken place during the fall of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C., or slightly later, when Edom allegedly assisted the Babylonians against the Judaeen kingdom, or at least profited from Judah's defeat. Jeremiah's two references to Esau (49: 8, 10) appear in the general context of the oracle against Edom (49:7-22). These include geographical allusions to Teman, Dedan, Bozrah, and the Red Sea. Obadiah's vision "concerning Edom" parallels some material from Jeremiah, and includes references to Esau, the mountains of Esau, the house of Esau, and Teman. Moreover, Esau and Edom are accused of "the violence against your brother Jacob" (1:10) and of having "gloated over your brother on the day of his misfortune" (1:12).¹

2.5 Possibly the earliest datable reference to the Esau tradition comes from the book of the prophet Amos: "Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity; he maintained his anger perpetually, and kept his wrath forever" (Amos 1:11). In view of the fact that Amos is traditionally dated to the eighth century B.C., and assuming the authenticity of this verse, this passage may reflect the continuous struggles that took place between the kingdoms of Judah and Edom ever since the latter's independence under the Judaeen king Joram (ca. 848-841 B.C.).² The genuineness of this oracle, however, has been rejected by several scholars who prefer to date it to a later period, maybe in reference to Edom's attitude in the face of the catastrophic events of 587/586 B.C. If Amos' allusion is a subsequent addition, then we cannot date the tradition of Esau prior to the early sixth century B.C.³

2.6 Although other biblical passages also reveal the same hostility towards the Edomites, the correlation between Edom and Esau, or the brotherhood with Jacob, are not present. See, for example, Isaiah (11:14; 21:11; 34; 63:1), Ezekiel (25:8, 12-14; 32:29; 35; 36:5), Joel (3:19),

¹ For an analysis of these biblical quotations, see J. R. Bartlett, "The Brotherhood of Edom," *JSOT* 4 (1977): 2-27; idem, *Edom and the Edomites* (JSOTSup Series 77; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); idem, "Edom in History," *ABD* 2: 292.

² M. Haran, "Observations on the Historical Background of Amos 1:2-2:6," *IEJ* 18 (1968): 207-11; B. Glazier-McDonald, "Edom in the Prophetic Corpus," in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite for He is Your Brother. Edom and Seir in History and Tradition*, ed. D.V. Edelman (SBLABS 3; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 25-26.

³ Bartlett, "The Brotherhood of Edom," 15-16.

Psalms (60:8-9; 83:6; 108:9-10; 137:7), and Lamentations (4:21-22).⁴ Yet this absence does not offer us any clue concerning when the stories of Esau originated, since the authors of these works did not consider it necessary to refer to the brotherhood tradition. Similarly, many of the prophetic books probably do not contain all the oracles of the corresponding prophet, oracles that certainly could have possessed references to the Jacob-Esau saga.

2.7 The “core” of the narratives concerning Jacob and Esau appears in the book of Genesis. Even though we do not know if the above mentioned prophets knew the story of Jacob and Esau as it stands now in Genesis, there is no disagreement about the story’s main points. Thus, Genesis can be confidently treated as the “source” for the other texts. The following discussion will focus on the most important passages in Genesis concerning Esau and Edom, and which can be grouped as follows:

1. The birth of Esau and Jacob, 25:19-28.
2. Esau gives his birthright to Jacob, 25:29-34.
3. Jacob receives Isaac’s blessing corresponding to Esau, 27:1-45.
4. Jacob and Esau meet again, 32:4-22; 33:1-17.
5. Esau’s descendants:
 - a. Esau’s wives and their sons, 36:1-5.
 - b. Esau departs to Seir, 36:6-8.
 - c. Esau’s offspring, 36:9-14.
 - d. Edomite chieftains, 36:15-19.
 - e. Seir’s offspring, 36:20-28.
 - f. Horite chieftains, 36:29-30.
 - g. Edomite kings, 36:31-39.
 - h. Edomite chieftains, 36:40-43.

2.8 The story of Esau and Jacob is largely a narration of familiar events that occur in a tribal, semi-pastoral society. Both brothers were born from the union of the patriarch Isaac and his wife Rebekah. Here the biblical author plays on the etymologies of their names: the first to be born was “red” (אֶדְמוֹנִי; a pun on Edom, אֶדוֹם), like a “hairy cloak” (שַׁעַר; a play on Seir, שַׁעִיר), and was called Esau (עֲשָׂו) (Gen 25:25). Jacob was the second to be born. The narrative describes both characters as having contrasting personalities. Esau is a “skilled hunter, a man of the open country”. Jacob was a “quiet man, staying at home among the tents” (Gen 25:27). Moreover, both parents disagreed in their preferences: Isaac preferred Esau, while Rebekah favored Jacob (Gen 25:28).

2.9 Later we are given an explanation for the other name by which we know Jacob’s brother: Edom. The story recounts how an exhausted Esau gave his birthright to Jacob (Gen 25:29-34) in exchange for a red pottage that the latter had prepared. Lentils are simply called “the red” (הָאֲדָם), and since lentils are brown, that they are called “red” may be a pun as well. The biblical author explains this as the reason why Esau was called Edom (אֶדוֹם) (Gen 25:30).

2.10 The pottage story is clearly a tradition that retrospectively reconstructs the political domination of Israel/Judah (Jacob) over Edom (Esau). This, however, does not preclude the appearance of

⁴ To this we can add other passages of Jeremiah (9:26; 25:21).

another story of the same type: the astute Jacob deceives his father in order to receive the blessing that was originally intended for Esau (Gen 27:1-45); another reference to the unfriendly relationships between the historical Israelites and Edomites (see further discussion below).

2.11 The content of Gen 36 can be divided into seven lists mostly comprising names of descendants of Esau and Seir. To begin with, we learn that Esau married Canaanite women, with whom had sons (vv. 1-5), and settled in the mountains of Seir (שֵׁעִיר) (vv. 6-8).⁵ Following this short introduction, there are several lists that are highly interrelated. Hence, a second version of Esau's descendants (vv. 9-14), is followed by the list of Edomite "chieftains" (אֱלֹפִים) (vv. 15-19), which is but a variation of the preceding list. By the same token, the list of the descendants of Seir, the Horites (vv. 20-28), is roughly similar to the list of Horite "chieftains" (אֱלֹפִים) (vv. 29-30) that goes afterwards. Lastly, there is a list of "kings" (מְלָכִים) who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites" (vv. 31-39), and a second record of the Edomite אֱלֹפִים (vv. 40-43). These lists share a lot of material in common and, as we will see, are to a great extent related to the history of the Israelites.

2.12 The other Pentateuchal passages concerned with the brotherhood of Edom are those that describe the dealings of the Israelites with Edom during the Exodus. In Num 20:14-21, Moses requests an unnamed Edomite king for permission to pass through his country, beginning his speech with the statement "Thus says your brother Israel" (Num 20:14). Similarly, Deut 2 has Yahweh saying to Israel that "You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir" (v. 4), so as not to engage in war with them; therefore, "we [the Israelites] passed beyond our brethren, the descendants of Esau who dwell in Seir" (v. 8). In addition, a short reference occurs in the descriptions of the Deuteronomic law: "You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother" (Deut 23:8). This statement contrasts strongly with what was previously said about the Ammonites and Moabites, who were prohibited to enter in the assemblage of Yahweh (Deut 23:3-6).

III. THE BROTHERHOOD OF EDM IN BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

3.1 Although the biblical passages concerning the Jacob-Esau saga have been the focus of several studies, there is still no consensus as to their dates and historical contexts. The diverse circumstances to which the brotherhood tradition has been attached has prompted scholars to offer multiple and varied proposals. However, scholars have generally agreed that the identification of Jacob with Israel and Esau with Edom is secondary. The original tenor of the story may have originally had to do with the wanderings of Jacob, here related only to Transjordan, whereas the Jacob-Esau tradition was only intended to account for the traditional encounters between herdsmen (represented by Jacob) and hunters (represented by Esau), so typical of the early colonization of Transjordan.⁶ So, where does this leave Esau? J. R. Bartlett concluded

⁵ In this regard another tradition states that, by settling in Mt. Seir, the Edomites expelled the Horites, who were the original inhabitants of the region (Deut 2:12, 22).

⁶ For this view see, with variants, H. Gunkel, *Genesis* (Göttingen:

that originally Esau was probably only connected with Seir (= Negev), and that only in a second stage, the folklore linked Esau/Seir with the eponymous ancestor Edom (= southern Jordan).⁷ This radical reversal of the story of Jacob and Esau as it stands in Genesis leads us to two major questions: why a saga of Israelite patriarchs was linked to Edom and when this transformation occurred. A number of hypotheses have been offered, and it is not unusual for one scholar to support multiple views. However, for greater clarity, we will cluster them into four groups: the textual, political, religious-cultic, and geographical-migratory hypotheses.

3.2 TEXTUAL HYPOTHESES. Some scholars have argued that the Deuteronomist's high regard for the Edomites can be explained by referring to the text of the Hebrew Bible itself. C. M. Carmichael argued that one should look to the brotherly affection with which Esau received Jacob after the latter's departure from Laban's home.⁸ M. Noth focused on Yahweh's arrangement for Edom in its own distinct area of settlement, so that a conflict between Israel and Edom would be unnecessary.⁹ However, these hypotheses are discredited on the grounds that they are self-explanatory, namely, they place too much confidence on the biblical text itself, without paying attention to the sociopolitical and ideological background in which the stories were produced.

3.3 POLITICAL HYPOTHESES. The fact that Jacob and Esau are portrayed in some parts of the Hebrew Bible as the eponymous ancestors of Israel and Edom has been taken by many to reflect the political relationships between the kingdoms of Israel/Judah and Edom from a retrospective point of view. Many variants of this thesis exist. W. W. Canon, for example, argued that the coalition of Levantine polities against Assyria during the time of the Judaeen king Hezekiah, in which both Judah and Edom participated, is the realpolitik behind the friendly tone towards Edom.¹⁰ Alternatively, Bartlett suggested in an early article that the biblical references to the brotherhood of Edom originated in the northern tradition, concerned as it was with the political relationship between the kingdom of Israel and Edom vis-à-vis a common enemy (Judah); only with the fall of Samaria was the brotherly status between

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1911), 296-97; S. Blank, "Studies in Post-Exilic Universalism," *HUCA* 11 (1938): 159 ff.; M. Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (Repr.; Chico: Scholars Press, 1981), 88-98, 192-93; G. von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (3rd ed.; OTL; London: SCM, 1972), 275-76; V. Maag, "Jakob-Esau-Edom," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 13 (1957): 418-29; V. G. Wallis, "Die Tradition von den drei Ahnvätern," *ZAW* 81 (1969): 20-22; T. L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (BZAW 133; Berlin & New York: de Gruyter, 1974), 325; idem, "Conflict Themes in the Jacob Narratives," *Semeia* 15 (1979): 14; Bartlett, "The Land of Seir and the Brotherhood of Edom," *JTS* n.s. 20 (1969): 9-18; idem, "The Brotherhood of Edom," 3, 17-18; idem, *Edom and the Edomites*, 177-79; U. Hübner, "Esau," *ABD* 2: 575.

⁷ Bartlett, *ibid.*

⁸ Carmichael, *The Laws of Deuteronomy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), 176.

⁹ Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien: die sammelnden und bearbeitenden Geschichtswerke im Alten Testament* (2nd. ed.; Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1957), 129-40.

¹⁰ Canon, "Israel and Edom: the Oracle of Obadiah. I.," *Theology* 14 (1927): 129-40, 191-200.

the two established in Judah.¹¹ More recently, E. Assis has suggested that the Edomite participation in the destruction of Jerusalem and the colonization of southern Judah in the early sixth century B.C. led to a common thought that Edom was the people chosen by God, and that it was this attitude that in reaction originated the fierce anti-Edomite bias of the prophets.¹² However, if Amos' oracle on Edom is authentic, then anti-Edomite feelings were present before the 587/586 B.C. events; furthermore, as it will be shown below, archaeological evidence demonstrates that the Edomite presence in the Negev is earlier than the sixth century B.C. G. Hoekveld-Meijer has hypothesized in an innovative, yet highly polemical study, that the narratives of Jacob and Esau represent the post-exilic political conflicts between different groups of Israelites, especially between those coming from Egypt (who supported a universal, "Edomite" concept of Yahweh) and Babylonia (who maintained a particularistic concept of Yahweh as the God of Israel).¹³

3.4 However the most convincing political hypothesis is that which claims a correlation between the Jacob-Esau saga and the relationship between Israel/Judah and Edom throughout the entire Iron Age. The construction of the "primacy" of Jacob over Esau is regarded as reflecting the state of Edom as a political minority with respect to Israel, in a period that, from the biblical perspective, can be placed between the tenth and ninth or eighth centuries B.C.¹⁴ Even though Edom appears as a polity in certain passages before the stories of David, it was during this ruler's campaign against Edom (conventionally, the early tenth century B.C.) that Israelites are said to have subjugated Edom for the first time (2 Sam 8:13-14; 1 Kgs 11:15-16; 1 Chron 18:12-13; Psalm 60). This situation may have lasted until the middle of the ninth century B.C., since under the reign of Jehoshaphat (ca. 869-848 B.C.), "There was no king in Edom; a deputy was king" (1 Kgs 22:47). Only during the reign of Joram (ca. 848-841 B.C.) were the Edomites apparently able to break away from Judah's rule (2 Kgs 8:20-22; 2 Chron 21:8-10). Later Judaeans attempted to re-conquer Edomite territory: Amaziah (ca. 796-767 B.C.) sent a successful expedition to Edom (2 Kgs 14:7; 2 Chron 25:11-12), followed by the recovery of Elath by his son Uzziah (also known as Azariah, ca. 767-740 B.C.) (2 Kgs 14:22; 2 Chron 26:2). These wars presumably brought Judah to a position of political superiority over Edom. However, Judah was not able to maintain its supremacy; thus, under Ahaz (ca. 732-716 B.C.) the Edomites took back Elath (2 Kgs 16:6), and may have even invaded Judaeans territory (2 Chron 28:16-18).¹⁵

¹¹ Bartlett, "The Brotherhood of Edom," 13-15. Bartlett seems to have abandoned this view later on.

¹² Assis, "Why Edom? On the Hostility Towards Jacob's Brother in Prophetic Sources," *VT* 5 (2006): 1-20.

¹³ Hoekveld-Meijer, *Esau: Salvation in Disguise. Genesis 36. A Hidden Polemic Between Our Teacher and the Prophets about Edom's Role in Post-Exilic Israel through Leitwort Names* (Kampen: Pharos, 1996).

¹⁴ Maag, "Jakob-Esau-Edom"; Haran, "Observations," 207-11; Wallis, "Die Tradition," 21; M. Fishbane, "The Treaty Background of Amos 1₁₁ and Related Matters," *JBL* 89 (1970): 315; Bartlett, "The Brotherhood of Edom," 18-19; idem, "Edom in the Nonprophetic Corpus," in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite*, ed. Edelman, 13-21.

¹⁵ See Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 103-45; J. Lindsay, "Edomite

3.5 There seems to be a deliberate attempt by the biblical authors to relate these political circumstances to the story of Jacob and Esau. This can be evident in an attempt by Genesis to make the theological point that the political supremacy of Judah over Edom was already dictated by the ascendancy of Jacob over Esau. It is in this sense that the political hypothesis fits well with the content of the story. Thus, Gen 25:21-28 relates how Yahweh said to Rebekah: “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger” (Gen 25:23). The story of the birthright selling (Gen 25:29-34) can be understood in the same context. The blessing of Isaac on Jacob concluded with the obvious political statement, “Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother’s sons bow down to you” (Gen 27:29).

3.6 Even so, the biblical authors knew that the ascendancy of Judah over Edom was a circumstance of the past. The context of Gen 27:40 leads one to this conclusion since, after Esau inquired about his birthright, Isaac said to his despised son that “By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck”. If this verse refers to the end of the Judean rule over Edom, then it provides a terminus post quem for the composition of the brotherhood tradition. Based on this reasoning, the tradition of Esau as the brother of Jacob could not have been written before the mid-ninth century B.C., when the biblical account mentions an emergent independent monarchy in Edom, or better, before the late eighth century B.C., when the Edomites recovered from their territorial losses in the previous decades.

3.7 This scenario is seemingly logical, as long as one accepts several assumptions not adequately supported by the evidence. First, there is the supposition that the verses concerning Yahweh’s and Isaac’s words, as quoted above, belong to the original tradition of Jacob and Esau. However, one cannot easily take this for granted, given the relative isolation of these passages in terms of their form and content, and in relation to the story as a whole. Second, some scholars have taken a rather naïve approach towards the context of the biblical composition, in particular the purpose of the biblical author(s) in writing the story of Jacob and Esau. Although the Bible often translated political situations into the language of kinship, it would be too simplistic to assume that the Jacob-Esau saga was composed only for the purpose of putting into plain words the political relationships between the kingdoms of Israel/Judah and Edom. That this was not always the case is elucidated by the biblical attitude towards the Ammonites and Moabites. According to a variety of biblical passages, these peoples (or significant parts of their territories) were dominated by the Israelites during their early histories, and only later did they develop into independent kingdoms. Yet a parallel version of the brotherhood of Israel with Ammon and Moab is clearly absent in the biblical text, making it clear that the correlation between politics and patriarchal stories should be demonstrated rather than assumed.

3.8 A third supposition on which the political hypothesis has been based is that the biblical traditions concerning Edom are highly

accurate; thus, they can provide reliable clues about its history. The historicity of many of these traditions is, however, questionable. Furthermore, it would be misleading to use late biblical historical data to support hypotheses and datings of Edom's early history. The lack of reliability of the biblical traditions concerning Edom prior to the seventh century B.C. has been consistently confirmed through data provided by numerous archaeological excavations and surveys conducted in the land of Edom in recent decades. These works indicate that intensive settlement in this area started in the late eighth century B.C., and that the most important Edomite sites were founded on bedrock only at this time.¹⁶ Some controversy has arisen as to the existence of earlier material, especially Iron I-IIA (1200-925 B.C.) pottery, which some scholars have adduced to be evidence of settlement before the eighth century B.C.¹⁷ Archaeological excavations have shown that only minor sites were present in the Iron Age I-IIA, mainly in the mining region of Feinan, in the lowlands of Edom.¹⁸ However, their relationship to the development of Edom is not yet clear. Regarding the character of the pre-eighth century B.C. evidence, it can be reasonably concluded that during the Iron I-IIA periods, Edom was dominated by groups that practiced a mixed economy of pastoralism and small-scale agriculture. Any evidence of statehood organization, or even social stratification, are conspicuously absent. At the same time, there is no archaeological indication of an Israelite political-military domination over Edom during the Iron Age. Though the presence of Israelite officials in pre-eighth century B.C. Edom cannot be discounted, their authority may not have been strong enough to adequately control the semi-nomadic groups that lived in the area. Similarly, the king-list of Gen 36:31-39 does not tell us anything about Edom's history in the Early Iron Age, and in view of the reference to Bozrah (modern Buseirah), it is unlikely that it predates the eighth century B.C.¹⁹

3.9 Local epigraphic data and Assyrian sources also suggest that the political development of Edom occurred no earlier than the eighth century B.C. The earliest reference to Edom in Assyrian inscriptions appears on the Nimrud Slab, a list of states subjugated by Adad-nirari III ca. 796 B.C. The next mention is a tribute list of Tiglath-pileser III that refers to events ca. 732 B.C. The list names the first known

¹⁶ P. Bienkowski, "The Date of Sedentary Occupation in Edom: Evidence from Umm el-Biyara, Tawilan and Buseirah," in *Early Edom and Moab: The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan*, ed. Bienkowski (Sheffield Archaeological Monographs 7; Oxford: J.R. Collis, 1992), 99-112.

¹⁷ I. Finkelstein, *Living on the Fringe. The Archaeology and History of the Negev, Sinai and Neighbouring Regions in the Bronze and Iron Ages* (Monographs in Mediterranean Archaeology 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 127-37.

¹⁸ T. E. Levy, R. B. Adams, M. Najjar, A. Hauptmann, J. D. Anderson, B. Brandl, M. A. Robinson and T. Higham, "Reassessing the Chronology of Biblical Edom: New Excavations and ¹⁴C Dates from Khirbat en-Nahas (Jordan)," *Antiquity* 302 (2004): 865-79.

¹⁹ Bartlett, "Biblical Sources for the Early Iron Age in Edom," in *Early Edom and Moab*, ed. Bienkowski, 14-15; cf. also idem, "The Edomite King-List of Genesis XXXVI. 31-39 and I Chron. I. 43-50," *JTS* n.s. 16 (1965): 301-14. E. A. Knauf ("Alter und Herkunft der edomitischen Königliste Gen 36,31-39," *ZAW* 97 (1985): 245-53) even dates this list to the early Persian period.

Edomite king, “Kaushmalaku of Edom [U-du-mu-a-a]”.²⁰ From that time on, references to Edom, or Edomite kings, in Assyrian sources are usual. The earliest local epigraphic material that can be confidently dated is a royal seal impression from Umm el-Biyara referring to a personality that has been identified as “Qos-Gabr, King of Edom” (*qws g[br]/mlk '[dm]*). This ruler is mentioned twice in Assyrian inscriptions from the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, which date to ca. 670 B.C. While this seventh century B.C. impression only provides us with a terminus post quem for the site and its pottery, since Umm el-Biyara is essentially a one-period site, the date of the settlement cannot be too much earlier.²¹

3.10 In summary, this examination of the manifold criticisms of the political hypotheses that have been proposed reveals some major flaws that cannot be ignored. Thus, while Yahweh’s and Isaac’s statements dealing with the primacy of Jacob over Esau can be analysed as retrospective views of the *general* political relationship of the Israelites with the Edomites during the Iron Age, these verses do not necessarily reflect the original subject of the story of Jacob and Esau, nor should they be used to reconstruct the early history of Edom, since they can be later additions.

3.11 RELIGIOUS-CULTIC HYPOTHESES. The second type of explanation, which we have called religious-cultic hypotheses, points out that the tradition of brotherhood between Jacob and Esau originated in the similar cultic practices of Israelites and Edomites. Hence it has been suggested that the two peoples shared a common religious framework, and in particular, that the gods Yahweh of Israel/Judah and Qaus (קוס) of Edom shared analogous characteristics.²² Indeed, according to some biblical passages a Judaeans could worship Edomite gods (e.g., Amaziah, 2 Chron 25:14) and an Edomite worship Yahweh (e.g., Doeg, 1 Sam 21:7; and the probable cases of Obed Edom, 2 Sam 6:10-12; 1 Chron 13:13-14; 15:18, 21, 24-25; 16:5, 38; 26:4, 8, 15; the post-exilic Barkos, Ezra 2:53; Neh 7:55; and the less likely Kushaiah, 1 Chr 15:17). More germane to the discussion are citations that describe Yahweh as coming from “Edom”, “Seir”, “Mount Paran”, “Bozrah” and “Teman” (Deut 33:2; Judg 5:4; Isa 63:1; Hab 3:3).²³ To these one should add the famous inscriptions of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, in the northeastern Sinai, several of which read *yhwh tmm* (Yahweh of Teman).²⁴ Do these references indicate an actual

²⁰ A. Millard, “Assyrian Involvement in Edom,” in *Early Edom and Moab*, ed. Bienkowski, 35-36.

²¹ Bienkowski, “The Date of Sedentary Occupation in Edom,” 99.

²² Bartlett, “The Brotherhood of Edom,” 6-7; idem, “Yahweh and Qaus: A Response to Martin Rose (*JSOT* 4 [1977]: 28-34),” *JSOT* 5 (1978): 35-38; M. Rose, “Yahweh in Israel – Qaus in Edom?,” *JSOT* 4 (1977): 28-34; cf. also L. Zalcman, “Shield of Abraham, Fear of Isaac, Dread of Esau,” *ZAW* 117 (2005): 405-10.

²³ Cf. L. E. Axelsson, *The Lord Rose up from Seir. Studies in the History and Traditions of the Negev and Southern Jordan* (Coniectanea Biblica. Old Testament Series 25; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987), 48-65.

²⁴ Z. Meshel, “Kuntillet ‘Ajrud,” *ABD* 4: 103-09. Quite recently, V. Sasson (“An Edomite Joban Text. With a Biblical Joban Parallel,” *ZAW* 117 (2006): 601-15) has suggested that an inscription written on a bowl unearthed at Horvat ‘Uza, in the northern Negev, is part of an Edomite version of the Book of Job. According to Sasson, the inscription points to the existence of *YHWH*

relationship between the Israelite and Edomite cults at an early stage of their histories? Although it is clear that there was an Israelite conviction that Yahweh belonged to, or originated from, a region considered to be part of the Edomite kingdom, to what extent this belief was based on real facts is still uncertain.

3.12 These biblical passages are usually related to New Kingdom Egyptian inscriptions found at Soleb (Amenophis III), Aksha and Amara West (Ramses III). In these inscriptions there occur two “Shasu” lands: *šsu yhw* (Yahweh?) and *šsu sʿrr* (Seir?), purportedly located in southern Palestine or Jordan.²⁵ However, this identification is not without its problems, especially since these same toponyms seem to appear, in other Egyptian sources, associated with places in Phoenicia and Syria, a long way from Edom.²⁶ Speculation has also arisen about four names purportedly prefixed with the divine name קוס in a topographical list of Ramses II at Karnak, and in a list of Ramses III at Medinet Habu.²⁷ Nonetheless, it is difficult to draw any useful conclusion from these references, since they are dated several centuries before the written composition of the story of Jacob and Esau. It is also unclear whether these names refer to localities, deities or tribes.

3.13 GEOGRAPHICAL-MIGRATORY HYPOTHESES. These argue that some southern Jordanian groups (tribes or clans) moved into the Negev at some time, most probably beginning in the late eighth century B.C., and then settled the area. As a result of these movements, close relationships were forged between the newcomers and the local Judaeen population. This would not only have lay behind the composition of the tradition of brotherhood between Esau and Jacob, but also the integration of other groups of non-Judaeen stock into the genealogies of Judaeen clans and families settled in the Negev.²⁸ This view is based on many biblical passages, often difficult to interpret, that first call attention to the identification of Edom and Seir with the Negev, and second, to the close kinship relationships between groups living east and west of the Wadi Arabah.

3.14 Let us study the first point in more detail. There are geographical references in the Hebrew Bible that seem to imply that the Negev and southern Jordan were not considered separate regions. As such, the Wadi Arabah was not viewed as a political boundary. In the Bible, Edom and Seir appear several times in close connection, even in parallel. More often than not they are used as similar, if not identical, geographical references. In the account of Esau’s offspring, Seir is repeatedly identified with Edom and viceversa (Gen 36:8-9, 21). The same can be said for other biblical passages (Gen 32:3; Num 24:18; Josh 24:4; Judg 5:4; 2 Chron 25:14; Isa 21:11; Ezek 35:15). This has led to a commonly held assumption, in late Jewish tradition as well as in modern biblical scholarship, that Esau and Seir were to be associated

worship in Edom.

²⁵ R. Givon, *Les bédouins sbosou des documents égyptiens* (Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui 18; Leiden: Brill, 1971), Docs. 6a, 26-28 and 16a, 74-77.

²⁶ Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 79.

²⁷ B. Oded, “Egyptian References to the Edomite Deity Qaus,” *Andrews University Seminar Studies* 9-1 (1971): 47-50.

²⁸ Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 192-93; Bartlett, “The Land of Seir,” 15-18; A. Zeron, “The Swansong of Edom,” *JJS* 31 (1980): 190-92; Axelsson, *The Lord Rose up from Seir*, 70.

with the traditional territory of the kingdom of Edom, that is, southern Jordan.

3.15 However, the question is difficult to solve, since according to other references, Seir and Edom appear to be located in the Negev, west of the Wadi Arabah.²⁹ In Deuteronomy, places like Kadesh-barnea, Hormah (both certainly located in the Negev), Elath and Ezion-geber seem to be located in, or by the way of, Mount Seir (Deut 1:2, 44; 2:1-8; cf. also 33:2).³⁰ The location of Seir is further elucidated in the summaries of the country conquered by Joshua, where Seir appears as the southernmost boundary, i.e. the Negev, as opposed to the northern limit at the Lebanon (Josh 11:17; 12:7; cf. Josh 15:10).³¹ Simultaneously, in other passages this same geographical location, the Negev, is identified as Edom. The book of Numbers refers to Kadesh and Mount Hor as being in the border of the land of Edom (Num 20:16; 20:22-23; 21:4; 33:37; cf. Judg 11:16-17), and in the same context the battle at Hormah with the king of Arad, “who lived in the Negeb” (Num 21:1-3). Additionally, from the descriptions of Judah’s borders, it is clear that Edom was located at the southern limit, unquestionably the Negev (Num 34:3-5; Josh 15:1-4, 21-32; cf. Josh 11:17; 12:7).

3.16 The second of our points is that many of the names of Esau’s and Seir’s descendants in Gen 36 reappear in the names of Judaeans and Simeonite families and clans living in the Negev that appear in the book of Chronicles. Much of this material comes directly from Genesis. Indeed, the Chronicler repeats, with some divergence, the lists of descendants of Esau and Seir in 1 Chron 1:35-54, though a lot of information is presented here for the first time.

3.17 For our purposes, it is convenient to focus on the genealogy of the tribe of Judah, and especially on some groups said to have settled in the northern Negev. Prominent among these were the clans of the Calebites and Jerahmeelites.³² It is extremely difficult to disentangle the genealogies of these Judaeans, since sometimes parallel genealogical lists appear to be the rule. The tribe of Simeon was situated among the Judaeans in the Negev, and apparently did not possess a specific territory.³³

²⁹ Bartlett, “The Land of Seir,” 5-7; B. MacDonald, *East of the Jordan: Territories and Sites of the Hebrew Scriptures* (ASOR Books 6; Boston: ASOR, 2000), 67-70, 185.

³⁰ The location of Kadesh, in or near Mount Seir, also occurs in the account of the military campaign of the four Mesopotamian kings (Gen 14:6-7).

³¹ Similarly, the tradition of a campaign of the Simeonites to Mount Seir (1 Chron 4:42-43) is more consistent with a geographical location in the Negev than in southern Jordan.

³² Geographically, the Calebites are related to an area comprising the hill country of Judah and the northern Negev, especially in the area of Hebron (Josh 14:6-15; 15:13-14; 21:12; cf. Judg 1:10) and Debir (Josh 15:15-19; Judg 1:11-15). Caleb apparently gave his name to a district of the Negev, the “Negeb of Caleb” (1 Sam 30:14). Similarly, a district of this area is known as the “Negeb of the Jerahmeelites” (1 Sam 27:10; 30:29). Cf. Y. Levin, “From Goshen to Gibeon’ (Joshua 10:41): The Southern Frontier of the Early Monarchy,” *Maarav* 10 (2003): 204-11.

³³ From the analysis of the town lists (Josh 19:1-9; cf. 1 Chron 4:28-32; Josh 15:20-30) it is evident that the tribe of Simeon was located in the western Negev and part of the southern Shephelah, though Simeonites are also said to have settled in Mount Seir (1 Chron 4:42).

3.18 Let us now return to the question of the descendants of Esau and Seir mentioned in Gen 36. To be sure, many of their names seem to refer to places or regions in southern Jordan. In some cases one can be sure that an identification in southern Jordan is highly likely; for example, Teman, Pinon ($\approx$ Faynan), Elah ($\approx$ Elath), Shobal ($\approx$ 'Ain Saubalah). In other instances, it is just a matter of speculation.³⁴

3.19 Even so, for the most part, the names of Esau's and Seir's offspring in Gen 36 are paralleled in the names of the members of the Judaeans, as well as in some Simeonite names.³⁵ Esau's offspring includes his son Korah (vv. 5, 14), who can be related to Calebite Korah (1 Chron 2:43), and maybe Levite Korah too (e.g., Exod 6:21, 24; Num 16:1; 26:58). Esau's grandson Kenaz (v. 11) can be linked to Calebite Kenaz (1 Chron 4:15). Another grandson of Esau, Shammah (v. 13), is similar to Jerahmeelite Shammai (1 Chron 2:28, 32) and two Calebites: Shammai *ben* Rekem (1 Chron 2:44-45) and Shammai *ben* Mered (1 Chron 4:17). Zerah is a third grandson of Esau (v. 13; also the name of the father of an Edomite king, v. 33), paralleled by Judah's son Zerah (1 Chron 2:4, 6; cf. Gen 38:30) and Simeonite Zerah (1 Chron 4:24; cf. Num 26:13).

3.20 On the side of Seir's descendants listed in Gen 36, his son Shobal (vv. 20, 23) has been related to Calebite/Hurite Shobal (1 Chron 2:50, 52), who in another passage is listed among Judah's sons (1 Chron 4:1-2). Seir's grandson Hori (חורי; v. 22), which by itself is a name strongly reminiscent of the Horite lineage, has been linked with Calebite Hur (חור), father of Uri (אורי) (1 Chron 2:19-20, 50; 4:1; 2 Chron 1:5; cf. Exod 31:2; 35:30; 38:22), who probably was the same Hur that assisted Moses (Ex 17:10-12; 24:14); however, in Num 13:5 a Hori appears as a Simeonite.³⁶ Another grandson of Seir, Ithran (יתרן; v. 26), bears a name similar to Jether (יתר) "the Ishmaelite", who was integrated into the nets of the Judaeans offspring of Ram (1 Chron 2:17; cf. 2 Sam 17:25; 1 Kgs 2:5, 32). His name also parallels Jerahmeelite Jether (1 Chron 2:32), Calebite Jether (1 Chron 4:17), the Ithrites (היתרי) sons of Shobal (1 Chron 2:53), and the town Jattir (Josh 21:14 etc.).³⁷ Another three of Seir's grandsons are Manahath (v. 23), reminiscent of "Hurite" Menuhot (1 Chron 2:52); Onam (v. 23), reminiscent of Jerahmeelite

³⁴ See B. Moritz, "Edomitische Genealogien," *ZAW* 44 (1926): 81-93; E. A. Knauf-Belleri, "Edom: The Social and Economic History," in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite*, ed. Edelman, 100-07; MacDonald, 'East of the Jordan', 188-94.

³⁵ For the next discussion, see E. Meyer, *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarrstämme* (Alltestamentliche Untersuchungen; Halle, 1906), 328-54; Bartlett, "The Land of Seir," 2-5; idem, *Edom and the Edomites*, 88; idem, "Edom in History," 288; M. Weippert, *Edom: Studien und Materialien zur Geschichte der Edomiter auf Grund schriftlicher und archäologischer Quellen* (Ph.D. diss.; Tübingen, 1971), 230-55; Axelsson, *The Lord Rose up from Seir*, 71-73; G. N. Knoopers, "Intermarriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity in the Genealogy of Judah," *JBL* 120 (2001): 23-28; idem, "'Great Among his Brothers,' but Who is He? Heterogeneity in the Composition of Judah," *JHS* 3 (2001). Since, in Gen 36, the lists of Edomite chieftains (vv. 15-19, 40-43) and Horite chieftains (vv. 29-30) are usually repetitions of the names of the descendants of Esau and Seir, we will not cite them.

³⁶ Also, the name Hur appears as the name of a Midianite king (Num 31:8; Josh 13:21).

³⁷ In addition, Moses' father-in-law was sometimes called Jether, a form of the name Jethro (Exod 4:18; cf. Exod 3:1; 18:1).

Onam (1 Chron 2:26, 28), and Judah’s son Onan (1 Chron 2:3; cf. Gen 38:4; 46:12; Num 26:19); Aran (v. 28), similar to Jerahmeelite Oren (1 Chron 2:25).

3.21 The Chronicler also lists diverse groups that are loosely related to Judah’s genealogy. Among them are the Kenizites and Kenites. The Kenizites were consistently linked with the Judaeen clan of the Calebites and with the Edomites (as we have seen, through Esau’s grandson Kenaz). Thus, outside the Chronicler’s account there is one tradition in which Caleb son of Jephunneh is called a Kenizite (Josh 14:6, 14; cf. Num 32:12), though in other places he is presented as brother of Kenaz (Josh 15:17; Judg 1:13; 3:9, 12). A second tradition, however, portrays Caleb as among Judah’s members, without mentioning any Kenizite connection (Num 13:6; 34:19). These two traditions are apparently reflected in the Chronicler’s lists, where more than one Caleb seems to appear: there is a Caleb *ben* Hezron (1 Chron 2:9; 18; cf. 1 Chron 2:9, where Caleb is called Chelubai), a Caleb brother of Shuhah (1 Chron 4:11), and a Caleb *ben* Jephunneh (1 Chron 4:15). The latter is listed after the lineage of the Kenizites (1 Chron 4:12-13), and one of his grandsons is called Kenaz (1 Chron 4:15).

3.22 Similarly, the Kenites seem to have had both Judaeen and Midianite backgrounds. In the former case, Kenites are listed after the sons of the Calebite “Hurites” (1 Chron 2:55). The Kenites (הקניזים) were probably associated with the descendants of Cain (הקניזי; Gen 4:1-25; 15:19; Num 24:21-22; Judg 4:11),³⁸ and in some texts, the Kenites are seen favorably by the biblical authors (Judg 4:17; 5:24; 1 Sam 15:6). Moses’ father-in-law, variously named Hobab, Jethro and Reuel, is sometimes called a Kenite (with the name Hobab: Judg 1:16; 4:11), but also a Midianite (with the name Jethro: Exod 3:1; 18:1; with the name Reuel: Num 10:29). This probably indicates that Kenites and Midianites, if not the same group, were at least strongly related. Some relationships with the Edomites might have existed as well, since Reuel is also the name of one of Esau’s sons (Gen 36:4, 10, 13). In geographical terms, the Kenites seem to have settled in the northern Negev.³⁹ Although the Chronicler does not relate the Midianites to the Israelites in kinship terms directly, some connections exist. To the instance of Moses’ father-in-law, one could add the case of Ephah, a name with Midianite reminiscences (Gen 25:4; Isa 60:6), who appears both as a concubine of Caleb (1 Chron 2:46) and as offspring of Calebite Jahdai (1 Chron 2:47). The homeland of the Midianites is not precise, though scholars have

³⁸ Knooppers, “Intermarriage,” 26. The suggestion that the offspring of Cain was associated with the Negev area or southern Jordan is supported by the fact that in Balaam’s last oracle (Num 24:21-22), the Kenites, here described as descendants of Cain, are listed after Edom and Amalek. Balaam’s words, “enduring is your dwelling place, and your nest is set in the rock”, is reminiscent of the prophets’ descriptions of the living place of the Edomites, “who dwell in the clefts of the rock” (Jer 49:16), and whose “nest is high as the eagle” (Ob 1:3-4). An interesting point in these contexts is that the “rock” (סלע) probably refers to Sela in Edom; cf. B. Halpern, “Kenites,” *ABD* 4: 18; W. M. Fanwar, “Sela (Place),” *ABD* 5: 1073-74.

³⁹ According to the book of Judges, Hobab’s sons inhabited the Arad area (Judg 1:16). In Samuel, David’s raids from Ziklag attacked an area known as the “Negeb of the Kenites” (1 Sam 27:10; cf. 30:29 MT; Judg 4:11). Another tradition, however, describes Heber the Kenite pitching his tent in Kadesh (Judg 4:11), probably the Kadesh-barnea of other passages.

located it variously in southern Jordan and northwestern Arabia.⁴⁰

3.23 The Amalekites were the last group related to the Edomites, and almost certainly living in the Negev area as well. In Gen 36, Amalek appears as the grandson of Esau, and son of Eliphaz and Timna (v. 12); however, no relationship with Judaeen clans are present in the Bible. The Bible portrays the Amalekites as nomadic tribes living or moving through vast territories.⁴¹ Despite the presence of Amalekite groups in the Negev and central Palestine, the Bible does not perceive them in friendly terms. To the contrary, memories of Amalekite attacks during the Exodus led to a permanent enmity and antagonism (Ex 17:14-16; Deut 25:17, 19; 1 Sam 15:2-3). Due to this, and/or because of other reasons as well, the Amalekites were placed under a permanent ban, despite their affiliation with the Negev as much as the other groups discussed above.

3.24 More examples of parallelism in the genealogical narratives could be mentioned, but these should suffice. What is clear from the texts discussed above is that in biblical times a strong relationship existed between groups living on both sides of the Wadi Arabah. The biblical authors expressed their views in terms of the language of kinship, that is to say, they created bonds of kinship between the descendants of Esau and Seir and those of the Judaeen and Simeonite groups.

3.25 All this is potentially interesting, but remains confusing and imprecise. We need to place this genealogical material within its historically specific context. In my opinion, these genealogies must be viewed in the light of the sociopolitical situation in the Negev during the Late Iron Age, and more specifically to the movements of semipastoral groups between southern Jordan and the Negev at that time. Current archaeological evidence, and the knowledge of how the ideology of kinship and segmentation functioned in ancient societies, support this conclusion. However, a question remains as to when the movements of these groups into the Negev began. In order to respond this question more adequately, we will discuss the current data concerning Edomite material culture in the Negev. We will review then the role of kinship, segmentation and orality in ancient society, as understood by current anthropological research.

IV. EDMITE MATERIAL CULTURE IN THE NEGEV

4.1 Over the last decades, the Negev has been one of the most intensively studied regions in present-day Israel. Numerous sites have been excavated and surveyed here, and have revealed a flourishing community during the Late Iron Age. The history of these sites goes back to the Early Iron Age, when a phase of initial settlement brought

⁴⁰ E. A. Knauf, *Midian: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Palästina und Nordarabiens am Ende des 2. Jahrtausends v. Chr.* (ADPV; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988), 1-6.

⁴¹ Amalekites are told to have been found in the Sinai (Num 17:8; cf. Deut 25:17); the Negev in general (Num 13:29; 1 Sam 15:7; 27:8; cf. 1 Chron 4:42-43, here "Mount Seir" probably denoting the Negev); and specifically at or near Kadesh (Gen 14:7), the Nahal Besor (1 Sam 30:10 ff.), Horma (Num 14:43-45; cf. Deut 1:44), the Arad neighborhood (Judg 1:16), the region of Gaza (Judg 6:4), the "city of Amalek" (1 Sam 15:5), and Ziklag (1 Sam 30:1), the last six locations probably in the northern and northwestern Negev; and also at the Jordan Valley (Judg 3:13; 6:33) and Ephraim (Judg 12:15). Cf. G. L. Mattingly, "Amalek (Person)," *ABD* 1: 169-71.

several medium and small-size sites into existence. However, the climax of Negev settlement took place during the late tenth or ninth century B.C. (according to the diverse chronologies employed), and especially during the eighth century B.C., when the Judean state established several administrative-military centers in the area. These settlements were concentrated in the Beersheba valley (northern Negev), with only a few sites south of this zone.⁴² One of the most significant features of these sites is the appearance of a material culture very similar to that found in contemporary settlements of southern Jordan, considered to be the traditional homeland of the Edomites. This material culture, which began to appear in the late eighth century B.C., and which lasted until the early sixth century B.C., was mainly composed of pottery and cultic objects, plus a number of inscriptions with Edomite names.⁴³

4.2 The most notorious component of this material assemblage is Edomite pottery, a mixture of distinctive ware types, found and manufactured in both southern Jordan and the Negev. This ware has traditionally, but perhaps misleadingly, been specifically associated with the kingdom of Edom.⁴⁴ Vessels with Edomite characteristics have been found in varying amounts at several Negev sites, especially throughout the Beersheba valley (see Fig. 1): Tel Malhata, Tel Arad, Beersheba (Tel Sheva), Tel 'Ira, Tel Masos, Tel Aroer, Horvat Qitmit and Horvat Radum.⁴⁵ They also occur at sites in the northwestern Negev, such as Tel Sera', Tell Jemmeh and Tel Haror. In the central Negev, Edomite pottery appears at Kadesh-barnea ('Ain el-Qudeirat), Horvat Rogem and Metsad La'nah. In the vicinity of the Wadi Arabah, it shows up at 'En Hazeva and Givat Hazeva.⁴⁶

⁴² Finkelstein, *Living on the Fringe*, 139-53; P. Bienkowski and E. van der Steen, "Tribes, Trade, and Towns: A New Framework for the Late Iron Age in Southern Jordan and the Negev," *BAJOR* 323 (2001): 21-27; Z. Herzog, "The Fortress Mound at Tel Arad: An Interim Report," *TA* 29 (2002): 94-102.

⁴³ See Finkelstein, *ibid*, 139-44; Bartlett, "Edomites and Idumaeans," *PEQ* 131 (1999): 102-06; MacDonald, 'East of the Jordan', 187; I. Beit-Arieh, "The Edomites in Cisjordan," in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite*, ed. Edelman, 33-39; *idem*, "Judean-Edomite Rivalry in the Negev," *Qadmoniot* 36-126 (2003): 66-76 (Hebrew).

⁴⁴ M. F. Oakeshott, "The Edomite Pottery," in *Midian, Moab and Edom: The History and Archaeology of Late Bronze and Iron Age Jordan and North-West Arabia*, eds. J. F. A. Sawyer and D. J. A. Clines (JSOTSup 24; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 53-64; E. Mazar, "Edomite Pottery at the End of the Iron Age," *IEJ* 35 (1985): 253-69.

⁴⁵ I. Beit-Arieh, "The Excavations at Tel Malhata-An Interim Report," *Qadmoniot* 115 (1998): 35-36 (Hebrew); *idem*, "Horvat Radum," *NEAEHL* 4: 1555; L. Singer-Avitz, "Arad: The Iron Age Pottery Assemblages," *TA* 29 (2002): 184-92; *idem*, "Beersheba- A Gateway Community in Southern Arabian Long-Distance Trade in the Eighth Century B.C.E.," *TA* 26 (1999): 33-36; L. Freud, "The Iron Age," in *Tel 'Ira: A Stronghold in the Biblical Negev*, ed. I. Beit-Arieh (MSIA 15; Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 1999), 226-27; V. Fritz and A. Kempinski, *Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen auf der Hirbet el-Mšāš (Tēl Māšōš) 1972-1975*, vol. 1, *Textband* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), 129; A. Biran and R. Cohen, "Aroer in the Negev," *EI* 15 (1981): 265 (Hebrew); L. Freud and I. Beit-Arieh, "Pottery," in *Horvat Qitmit: An Edomite Shrine in the Biblical Negev*, ed. I. Beit-Arieh (MSIA 11; Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 1995), 209-57.

⁴⁶ E. D. Oren, "Haror, Tel," *NEAEHL* 2: 584; *idem*, "Sera', Tel," *NEAEHL* 4: 1333; Bartlett, "Edomites and Idumaeans," 104; R. Cohen and Y. Yisrael, "The Iron Age Fortress at 'En Hazeva," *BA* 58 (1995): 224-28; R.

4.3 Other archaeological finds, seemingly of a religious nature, also point to possible Edomite presence or influence. At 'En Hazeva (Stratum IV), a major fortified site at the junction of Wadi Zin and the northern Arabah valley, a small structure identified as a shrine was uncovered, and next to it, a favissa (a cultic pit) containing sixty-seven clay objects, that were presumably used for cultic purposes.⁴⁷ Similar vessels have been found at Horvat Qitmit, with incised inscriptions bearing Edomite names.⁴⁸ Both places have been called "Edomite" shrines,⁴⁹ though other scholars have recently denied the Edomite character of these assemblages.⁵⁰ In addition, ostraca, incised inscriptions and a seal relating to Edom or Edomites, were found in other Negev sites, e.g., Tel Aroer, Tel 'Ira, Tel Malhata, Tel Arad and Horvat 'Uza.⁵¹

4.4 The presence of these cultural traits in the Negev has given rise to a number of hypotheses. Some scholars have pointed out that the Edomite cultural traits followed on the heels of Edomite territorial expansion in the area.⁵² The adherents to this theory argue, on the basis of several biblical passages, that the Edomites exercised at least some degree of military control in the Negev (cf. 2 Kgs 16:6; 2 Chron 28:16-18). To be sure, in some locations, Edomite pottery constitutes an important part of the entire pottery assemblage (Tel Malhata, Horvat Qitmit, Kadesh-barnea); and in others, purportedly Edomitizing cult activities are present as major features (Horvat Qitmit, 'En Hazeva). But in the remaining Negev sites, only a few sherds of Edomite type, or a few Edomite inscriptions, testify to the presence of Edomite people. While destruction levels, a major feature of military campaigns, are present in several Late Iron Negev sites, their connection to the alleged military campaigns of the Edomites is in most cases hypothetical.

4.5 More tempting is the suggestion by other researchers that the presence of Edomite material culture west of the Arabah reflects either a cultural phenomenon or the trade patterns of that time.⁵³ It is important to note that the occurrence of these traits is not even in all the Negev sites, with their distribution more typical of cultural expansion or commercial activity than it is of military occupation. In fact, the distribution of the Edomite archaeological traits suggests that the Arabah valley was not a cultural border. In this regard, P.

Cohen, "Excavations at Kadesh-barnea 1976-1978," *BA* 44 (1981): 100; R. Cohen and R. Cohen-Amin, *Ancient Settlements of the Negev Highlands*. Vol. 2: *The Iron Age and the Persian Periods* (IAA Reports No. 20; Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004), 13*; J. Gunneweg, T. Beier, U. Diehl, D. Lambrecht and H. Mommsen, "'Edomite', 'Negevite' and 'Midianite' Pottery from the Negev Desert and Jordan: Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis Results," *Archaeometry* 33 (1991): 240, Table 2.

⁴⁷ Cohen and Yisrael, *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Beit-Arieh, *Horvat Qitmit*.

⁴⁹ Cohen and Yisrael, "The Iron Age Fortress at 'En Hazeva," 223-35.

⁵⁰ Bienkowski and van der Steen, "Tribes, Trade, and Towns," 28.

⁵¹ Cf. n. 43.

⁵² I. Beit-Arieh and B. Cresson, "Horvat 'Uza: A Fortified Outpost on the Eastern Negev Border," *BA* 54 (1991): 134; Beit-Arieh, "The Edomites in Cisjordan"; *idem*, "Judean-Edomite Rivalry in the Negev"; D. V. Edelman, "Edom: A Historical Geography," in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite*, ed. Edelman, 1-11; Lindsay, "Edomite Westward Expansion".

⁵³ Mazar, "Edomite Pottery," 269; Finkelstein, *Living on the Fringe*, 140-41; Singer-Avitz, "Beersheba," 53-54.

Bienkowski and E. van der Steen have recently proposed that the mixture and variety in the pottery assemblages of the Late Iron Negev and southern Jordan reflect the constant movements and interactions of pastoral groups looking for grazing grounds.⁵⁴ An important supplementary point raised by these and other scholars is the inaccuracy of the term Edomite pottery, coined in the early years of “biblical archaeology”. The typological diversity and geographical distribution of this ware does not fit with an exclusive ethnic group.⁵⁵ In my opinion, these are the most adequate working hypotheses for analyzing both the material culture of the Negev and the traditions of Jacob and Esau.

V. KINSHIP, SEGMENTATION AND ORALITY IN ANCIENT SOCIETIES

5.1 In the above discussion we have tried to elucidate the “historical” facts behind the story of the brotherhood between Jacob and Esau. However, several questions remain: why and how did the movements of pastoral tribes between southern Jordan and the Negev contribute to the development of this tradition? In other words, why and how did the biblical authors “translate” the sociopolitical situation of the Late Iron Age Negev into the language of kinship? The answers to these inquiries lie in the study of the ideological framework that was common in the Judaeen society during the Late Iron Age. Within this framework, three analytic concepts are central: kinship, segmentation and orality. The following discussion will deal with these issues, as elucidated in archaeological research.

5.2 KINSHIP. The biblical text, especially the book of Genesis, is strongly embedded with the language of kinship. Much of its narrative uses kinship relationships as terminology as well as a subject. In fact, all the characters are related by kinship. In this sense, the accounts of Genesis are primarily family stories.⁵⁶ The function of kinship in the ideology of the Hebrew Bible is paralleled by what is known in other ancient and ethnographic societies.

5.3 With the beginnings of Anthropology as an autonomous discipline, and with the initial speculations of H. S. Maine and H. Morgan in the second half of the nineteenth century A.D., the analysis of kinship constituted the main field of study—especially in those contemporary societies considered “primitive”. Given the bias against historicity in many of these analyses, postulates concerning “primitive” societies were also considered pertinent for ancient ones. The role of kinship in these kinds of societies became crucial for the functionalist perspective, especially in the writings of the British scholar A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. According to him, the main characteristic of “primitive” societies was that the individual behavior was regulated by kinship rules. Moreover, kinship obligations in “primitive” communities guided activities that are formally separated in modern societies into the political, economic and religious fields.⁵⁷ The assumptions of

⁵⁴ Bienkowski and van der Steen, “Tribes, Trade, and Towns,” 36.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 39.

⁵⁶ R. B. Robinson, “Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis,” *CBQ* 48 (1986): 595-608; D. L. Petersen, “Genesis and Family Values,” *JBL* 124 (2005): 5-23.

⁵⁷ A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, “The Study of Kinship Systems,” in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (London: Cohen, 1952).

functionalism developed into an almost generally accepted anthropological belief, namely, that social institutions in ancient societies were “embedded” into the nets of kinship practices. What is more, functionalist analyses viewed social systems in an inevitable state of equilibrium, inherent to themselves. In this sense, kinship, as a central organizing concept for society, imposed the boundaries inside which individuals behave, thus creating the consensus and social order necessary for the reproduction of the social system.

5.4 This view, of course, was not without its critics, especially those who pointed out that the individual could not have been the mere passive object of the lineage.⁵⁸ This type of criticism led to other suggestions, that diminished the leading role of kinship over other systems, particularly economic ones. Yet for many theorists, kinship continued to be a central factor in “primitive” and ancient societies. This is especially true of approaches that focused attention on the formation and development of primary state societies. Whether from neo-evolutionist or non-evolutionist perspectives, these anthropological studies have demonstrated that kinship remains at the center of the debate, whether in the economic,⁵⁹ juridical or political realms.⁶⁰

5.5 SEGMENTATION. For our purposes, analysis of kin-based segments is particularly important. In their landmark study on African political systems, M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard offered one of the most detailed investigations concerning the relationship between political organization and kinship in the so-called “primitive” societies.⁶¹ They placed African political systems into two fundamental categories: primitive states, which possessed centralized authority and governmental institutions, and stateless societies, whose organization was regulated by segmentary lineage systems. In the latter case, political organization is regarded as a state of equilibrium between a number of opposing segments, determined by their lineage and location. These concepts were widely developed in the classic work by Evans-Pritchard on the Nuer people of Sudan.⁶² This stateless community was organized into tribes and different levels of tribal segments based on lineage, that operated according to the fission-fusion principle. In other words, members of ones segment will wage war against same-level adjacent segments, and will join forces with the members of same-level adjacent segments against higher-level segments. This segmentary model has been utilized to describe similar stateless societies in Africa and the Middle East.⁶³

⁵⁸ Thus, e.g., E. R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma. A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1954).

⁵⁹ M. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (London: Tavistock, 1974).

⁶⁰ E. R. Service, *Origins of the State and Civilization* (New York: Norton, 1975).

⁶¹ Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, “Introduction,” in *African Political Systems*, eds. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 1-23.

⁶² Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic Tribe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).

⁶³ See the review of S. Baştuğ, “The Segmentary Lineage System: A Reappraisal,” in *Changing Nomads in a Changing World*, eds. J. Ginat and A. M. Khazanov (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1998), 94-123, with relevant literature.

5.6 However, the proliferation of this line of argument has led several scholars to become suspicious about the applicability of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard’s model to other societies.⁶⁴ In fact, research has shown that the reality is much more varied than the model assumes, particularly with respect to the degree of uniformity between the several segments. The main controversy has nevertheless focused on the relationship between the territorial system and kinship. First, because contrary to the assumptions of several scholars, segmentation and unilateral descent are not identical principles, given that the former can be structured by principles not restricted to the rules of kinship. Second, it has been observed that, in daily practice, individuals normally do not behave in the manner anticipated by the kinship ideology they purportedly follow.⁶⁵ Actually, several ambiguities arise out of the fact that both systems (segmentation and unilateral descent) originate in different fields with different functions. They are, however, commonly aggregated within an enormous theoretical combo. As a result, these systems are very often confused as one.⁶⁶

5.7 For our purposes, the significance of kinship in its role as an ideological factor operating at the level of territorial segments should be emphasized. In societies where kinship has a predominant function, the principles of descent operate in two ways: managing the construction of real genealogies and providing a notion of common descent. The latter creates a bond that coalesces the members of the society, thereby ideally legitimizing relationships between groups. Let us now turn our attention to the latter instance.

5.8 Ethnographic studies in contemporary pastoral groups have shown that individuals within them visualize the local political and geographical situations in terms of kinship relations. They specifically conceptualize territorial organizations as groups inside which people are united by agnatic descent. Middle Eastern Bedouin, for example, usually believe that groups descend from a common ancestor who acquired the rights to the land they occupy. Moreover, when two or more groups have a common interest, especially due to geographical proximity or joint use of the land, they are usually regarded genealogically related. It is in this sense that political and geographical relationships are expressed through the kinship language. Therefore any change in the local state of affairs often brings about a change in the terminology of kinship. This is why recently arrived neighbors are considered, through the language of kinship, as “relatives” within few generations.⁶⁷ The reader must bear in mind, however, that the relationship between location and kinship is not always as direct as this ideal model depicts.

5.9 Even so, segmentary organization provides a social framework that ensures co-operation between groups inhabiting expansive

⁶⁴ E.g., H. Munson Jr., “On the Irrelevance of the Segmentary Lineage Model in the Moroccan Rif,” *American Anthropologist* 91 (1989): 386-400.

⁶⁵ E. Marx, “The Tribe as a Unit of Subsistence: Nomadic Pastoralism in the Middle East,” *American Anthropologist* 79 (1977): 343-63; Munson, “Rethinking Gellner’s Segmentary Analysis of Morocco’s Ain ‘Atta,” *Man* (N.S.) 28 (1993): 267-80; idem, Reply to Gellner, “Segmentation,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1 (1995): 829-32.

⁶⁶ Baştuğ, “The Segmentary Lineage System: A Reappraisal,” 95.

⁶⁷ Marx, “The Tribe as a Unit of Subsistence,” 351-53; A. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World* (2nd ed.; Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 141-43.

territories without a centralized government. In those cases in which nomadic groups are distributed in or migrate throughout discontinuous territories, kinship provides a stable institution that enables segments to organize themselves in a flexible way.⁶⁸ To a large extent, the segmentary form of social organization helps to sort out problems like ecological diversity, transportation issues and diversity of political conditions. One special issue for members of segments distributed in a territorially discontinuous manner is that the segmentary organization provides access to pastures of distant regions where members of the same segment are located, as well as to their brides.⁶⁹

5.10 In the Hebrew Bible, kinship and political terminologies, which from a modern perspective constitute differentiated spheres, appear as separated and interchangeable fields. The biblical text presents Israelite society as composed of units based largely on kinship links. Ideally, the largest territorial unit was the שבט or מטה (“tribe”), which was composed of several משפחה (sing. for “clan”). The basic unit was the בית אב (family, lit. “father’s house”), an extended family comprising all the descendants of a single living ancestor in a single lineage.⁷⁰

5.11 The importance of kinship and segmentation in the Hebrew Bible can be paralleled by what is known of Iron Age Jordanian societies. Only recently, scholars have come to recognize that the ancient kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom were societies in which the political structure was heavily dependant on kin-based lineages and segmentary systems. In addition, these scholars have also highlighted the important role of pastoral tribes in their territories.⁷¹ The importance of kin-based lineages and segmentation increased from north to south, as the terrain became rougher and the weather arider.

⁶⁸ P. C. Salzman, “Does Complementary Opposition Exist?” *American Anthropologist* 80 (1978): 53-70; idem, “Ideology and Change in Middle Eastern Societies,” *Man* (N.S.) 13 (1978): 627.

⁶⁹ E. Gellner, “Segmentation: Reality or Myth,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1 (1995): 822, 825.

⁷⁰ C. U. Wolf, “Terminology of Israel’s Tribal Organization,” *JBL* 65 (1946): 45-49; C. J. H. Wright, “Family,” *ABD* 2: 761-62; K. van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel. Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (SHCANE 7; Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1996), 190-205; L. G. Perdue, J. Blenkinsopp, J. J. Collins and C. Meyers, *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

⁷¹ E. A. Knauf, “The Cultural Impact of Secondary State Formation: The Cases of the Edomites and Moabites,” in *Early Edom and Moab*, ed. Bienkowski, 47-54; Ø. LaBianca and R. W. Younger, “The Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom: The Archaeology of Society in Late Bronze/Iron Age Transjordan (ca. 1400-500 BCE),” in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, ed. T. E. Levy (First paperback ed.; London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 399-415, 590-94; LaBianca, “Salient Features of Iron Age Tribal Kingdoms,” in *Ancient Ammon*, eds. B. MacDonald and R. Younger (SHCANE 17; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 19-29; Bienkowski and van der Steen, “Tribes, Trade, and Towns”; B. Routledge, “Evolution is as History Does: On State Formation in Iron Age Transjordan,” in *One Hundred Years of American Archaeology in the Middle East. Proceedings of the American Schools of Oriental Research Centennial Celebration, Washington, DC, April 2000*, eds. D. R. Clark and V. H. Mathews (Boston: ASOR, 2003), 231-61; B. W. Porter, “Authority, Polity, and Tenuous Elites in Iron Age Edom (Jordan),” *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 23 (2004): 373-95. Cf. also N. Wazana, “Natives, Immigrants and the Biblical Perception of Origins in Historical Times,” *TA* 32 (2005): 220-44.

The kingdom of Edom was therefore the last Iron Age Jordanian polity to develop, and was the most “tribalized” society of the three. By the same token, in Edom, pastoralism and semi-pastoralism seem to have predominated as economic activities, making mobile tribes a significant factor, if not the most important factor in the area.

5.12 ORALITY. Whatever function the segmentation principle performs in ethnographic and ancient societies, the form in which it appears in the political-ideological sphere depends heavily on the form of its transmission to the members of the society. It is in this sense that the topic of orality is a central point in the study of segmented lineages. Interest on this issue arose firstly in the field of the classical studies, and the study of orality rapidly became a major point of investigation in the anthropology of contemporary tribal societies.⁷² Contrary to the presuppositions of earlier generations of scholars, it became obvious to modern anthropologists that the pre-literary folklore, the oral expressions of ancient societies, are not identical to written texts, since orality possesses very different features and is governed by its own, distinctive rules.

5.13 There is no room here for a comprehensive account of the characteristics of the oral tradition; even so, some major points must be highlighted. First, orality lacks the character of permanence that literacy possesses. This “transitory” character is grounded on the fact that oral folklore reflects the cultural values of a given society, that is to say, it is not a consequence of a useless curiosity for the past. When the object of the narrative no longer corresponds to the real experience of the listeners, its meaning and/or content changes or disappears.⁷³ Furthermore, in these sorts of oral accounts there are as many minor variants with respect to a myth as there are repetitions of it, because the contents are re-organized rather than replaced by new material.⁷⁴ Yet this does not mean that oral folklore is always about fiction. For instance, in African oral epics there is an amalgam of myth and historical facts in which the main characters and basic episodes are often historical, especially those dating to the last two centuries, while the story as a whole may be fictitious.⁷⁵

5.14 Already in the early days of modern biblical scholarship, the importance of pre-literary traditions in the composition of the Hebrew Bible was recognized (H. Gunkel, M. Noth); however, only since the second half of the twentieth century C.E., under the influence of studies

⁷² Cf. the important works of A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); M. Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. A. Parry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); J. Goody and I. Watt, “The Consequences of Literacy,” in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. J. Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); J. Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word* (English original, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1982; Spanish trans., Buenos Aires: FCE, 1997). The merits and limitations of these early studies are summarized by W. A. Foley, *Anthropological Linguistics: An Introduction* (Repr.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 417-34.

⁷³ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 53-54.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 47-48, 143.

⁷⁵ M. M. Mulokozi, “The African Epic Controversy. With Reference to the ‘Enanga’ Epic Tradition of the Bahaya,” *Fabula* 43 (2002): 11; S. M. Ndege, “‘Myth’ as a Historical Basis of the Meru Folktales,” *Fabula* 43 (2002): 35-5.

on orality in other fields of study, has research on orality in biblical studies become a major issue.⁷⁶ These and other researches have acknowledged that ancient Israel was largely non-literate, as in the case of other ancient Near Eastern societies. Literacy, it is argued, was confined to the narrow world of palace and temple scribes, and the thin circle around them. The extent of the development of literacy has been generally paralleled to the development of state institutions in Israel, which acquired their fullest form during the late Judaeen monarchy (eighth-seventh centuries B.C.)⁷⁷

5.15 While the analysis of orality is a field in its own right, for the purposes of this paper, we will examine the characteristics of oral genealogies. Biblical scholars have found many analogies for the use of genealogies and eponyms in the literature of other ancient Near Eastern peoples, including Sumerian, Assyrian and Babylonian royal inscriptions, as well as Hellenistic sources.⁷⁸ The most comprehensive study to date is the classic work of R. Wilson, in which the formal features of oral genealogies are listed.⁷⁹ Wilson differentiates between two types of oral genealogies: “segmented genealogies”, which articulate more than one line of descent from an ancestor, thus exhibiting several segments or branches from the same source; and “linear genealogies”, which express only one line of descent from a forebearer. The form of a genealogy is determined by the function it plays in the society; thus, genealogies may function in three spheres: domestic, religious and politico-jural. When genealogies function in the domestic field, they are used to define the personal status, rights and obligations (in biological, economic and geographical terms) of the people that are members of that lineage. Within the religious function, individuals are defined according to their relationship with certain institutions of the religious sphere (of which the most frequent are the ancestor and royal cults)

⁷⁶ E. Nielsen, *Oral Tradition. A Modern Problem in Old Testament Introduction* (4th ed.; London: SCM, 1961); F. E. Deist, “Orature, ‘Editure’, Literature – Reflections on Orality, Literariness and First Testament Literature,” *JNSL* 20 (1994): 155-63; S. Niditch, *Oral World and Written World: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996); A. Dundes, *Holy Writ as Oral Lit: The Bible as Folklore* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); W. M. Schniedewind, “Orality and Literacy in Ancient Israel,” *Religious Studies Review* 26 (2000): 327-32; idem, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁷⁷ Although this date is not widely accepted; see the review of Schniedewind, “Orality and Literacy”.

⁷⁸ Cf. the works of A. Malamat, “King Lists of the Old Babylonian Period and Biblical Genealogies,” *JAOs* 88 (1968): 163-73; R. R. Wilson, “The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research,” *JBL* 94 (1975): 173-78, 182-88; idem, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (Yale Near Eastern Researches 7; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977); idem, “Between ‘Azel’ and ‘Azel’”. Interpreting the Biblical Genealogies,” *BA* 42 (1979): 11-22; idem, “Genealogy, Genealogies,” *ABD* 2: 929-32; T. J. Prewitt, “Kinship Structures and the Genesis Genealogies,” *JNES* 40 (1981): 87-98; R. S. Hess, “The Genealogies of Genesis 1-11 and Comparative Literature,” *Bib* 70 (1989): 241-54; N. Steinberg, “The Genealogical Framework of the Family Stories in Genesis,” *Semeia* 46 (1989): 41-50; G. A. Rendsburg, “The Internal Consistency and Historical Reliability of the Biblical Genealogies,” *V/T* 40 (1990): 185-206; G. N. Knoopers, “Greek Historiography and the Chronicler’s History: A Reexamination,” *JBL* 122 (2003): 627-50.

⁷⁹ Wilson, *Genealogy and History*, 18-55.

and/or with religious organizations or hierarchies.

5.16 The most important function for our purposes is the politico-jural, which conveys the amount of power possessed by individuals and lineages, and thereby the political relationships between them. In societies with centralized government, genealogies are mainly of the linear type, because their purpose is to justify the holding, or claims of holding, of inherited offices in the political structure. For example, linear genealogies frequently express the father-to-son relationships in royal lineages. In “acephalous” societies, where centralized government is absent, and where the political system is based on lineage or unilineal descent groups, segmented genealogies are dominant. In this case, segmented genealogies are used to state political, economic and geographical relationships between peer groups like tribes, clans or families.

5.17 As Wilson puts it, “A lineage system uses the biological family as a model and then expresses *all* social relationships as kinship relationships”.⁸⁰ Occasionally genealogies have operated in more than one of these three spheres. This has very often caused the proliferation, within a given society, of several apparently conflicting genealogies, each of them being congruent in its own terms and functions.

5.18 The two types of genealogies (linear and segmented) share two important features: depth and fluidity. Depth, the number of generations of a given lineage, is not rigid and varies from one genealogy to the other. Moreover, the depth of a lineage can be changed from one recitation to the other. Fluidity is perhaps the most perplexing characteristic for the modern way of thinking, modeled as it is on the written text. The oral nature of genealogies signifies that they can change rapidly, and these transformations may have distinct reasons. For our purposes here, we will focus on the changes in segmentary genealogies. First, changes may reflect alterations in the relationships between peer groups. The inclusion of a determined clan in a tribe, for example, can be echoed in the inclusion of the new clan’s eponym into the net of the segmented genealogy of the tribe. A related change between peer groups is that if a segment attains more power or status in the social structure, then its eponymous ancestor is expected to move to a higher position in the lineage genealogy (e.g. from son to father). On the contrary, when a segment loses power, its founder may be placed in a lower position in the genealogical scheme (e.g. from father to son). In addition, some lineages disappear from the genealogical structure when the corresponding group splits off from the local social structure or disappears altogether. In all these cases, a society may preserve different versions of the same genealogy, versions that may represent the actual or attempted realignments of the lineage segments in the face of new situations, or may mimic the conflicting claims for political power, social status or possession of lands.⁸¹

5.19 I raise these three issues (kinship, segmentation and orality), in order to provide several analytic tools that may enable us to better comprehend questions surrounding the tradition of the brotherhood between Jacob and Esau.

⁸⁰ Wilson, “Between ‘Azel’ and ‘Azel’,” 12.

⁸¹ Wilson, *Genealogy and History*, 21-37.

VI. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE JACOB-ESAU TRADITION

6.1 Thus far, we have discussed diverse topics in a limited and specific sense, without fully bringing them together in a complete picture. We are now in a position to say something more positive about the social, historical and mental contingencies that shaped the tradition of Jacob and Esau. I would argue that in order to really understand its origin and characteristics, we should view the Jacob-Esau tradition against the contemporary sociopolitical situation in which it was generated: the Negev region during the Late Iron Age, that is, between the late eighth and early sixth centuries B.C. Put simply, the assumption is that this period provided the historical *Sitz im Leben* for the origin and development of the brotherhood story in its pre-literary form, and that thereby its present arrangement can be dated to this period. At a later stage, the saga was transferred in written form into the Hebrew Bible as it stands today. Once this is recognized, many difficult to understand passages begin to fall into place.

6.2 We start with the central fact that during the Late Iron Age the areas encompassing both sides of the Arabah were culturally similar in many ways. Having seen the flaws of the political-military hypotheses, the most likely scenario has more to do with social and demographic circumstances than with formal political relationships. Demographically, the similarity of the material culture of the Negev with that of southern Jordan reflects the regular two-way movements of people across the Arabah valley. Our main evidence, the appearance of southern Jordanian cultural traits in the Negev, reveals a slow but persistent process of settlement of groups originating in southern Jordan (Edomites were the main, but not the only component, which probably included Kenites, Kenizites, Horites, Midianites, and other lineages as well). These groups followed the pastoral migration itineraries, and most likely, the trade routes as well. Thus, the distribution of the so-called Edomite ware should not be understood as mirroring the presence of Edomites alone because other local groups might have manufactured and used it as well.

6.3 Given this new situation among the Judaeen population of the Negev, a process of ideological metamorphosis was needed vis-à-vis the newcomers. Significant new questions arose, that were rooted in the sense of identity of the local population: how should we regard these new neighbors, with whom we share economic resources, and with whom we may very possibly begin to intermingle? The joint residence of people from both sides of the Arabah could be accommodated ideologically as long as it was compatible with the language of kinship. Due to a tendency to view the political-geographical situations in terms of kinship relationships, the emergence of folklore linking the eponymous ancestors of people originating west and east of the Arabah was expected. In a process that we know only by its closing stage, Jordanian Edom (which up to this point does not seem to have been more than a territorial designation for southern Jordan) merged with the older saga of Esau, an ancestor originally connected with the Negev (= Seir) -who was also a brother of Israelite Jacob. In this way, Edom and Jacob were regarded as brothers, the closest horizontal relationship between relatives.⁸² So why were they regarded as brothers and not

⁸² This process can be paralleled in other examples of “migrations” of people, which despite being attested by archaeological and historical sources

another kinship relation? It may be that the usual enmity between Edomites and Judaeans did not allow them to think in terms of Edom as a “son” of Jacob, and hence part of the people of Israel. Thus, “brother” became a more acceptable term of relationship.

6.4 By the same token, the appearance of segmentary genealogical lists relating southern Jordanian and Negev groups might not be surprising given the proclivity to express politico-jural relationships between groups through the lenses of kinship-based segments. Thus, the Judaeans of the Negev adjusted their own genealogies to fit the new situation. Not only was Edom linked with Esau, but also a whole series of kinship links began to appear connecting secondary characters, e.g., between Edomite or Edomite-related lineages (especially descendants of Esau and Seir), and Judaeans or Judaeans-related lineages (especially descendants of Caleb and Jerahmeel). In other words, the long segmentary genealogical lists of Genesis and Chronicles must be analyzed in the terms of their politico-jural function, which was to express the integration of the Jordanian newcomers into the nets of Judaeans or Judaeans-related peoples living in the Negev.

6.5 In the Chronicles’ genealogies some groups appear fully incorporated into the center of Judah’s social organization, while others are just placed in its periphery. Among the former were prominent clans of the Hezronite Calebites and the Jerahmeelites. In addition, some groups not fully incorporated into the Judaeans appear, especially the Jephunnite Calebites, Kenites, Kenizites, Horites and Midianites.⁸³ We would suggest that the second group comprises mostly southern Jordanian clans recently arrived at the Judaeans Negev. A complex and sometimes confused net of family relationships emerged, in which more often than not different, parallel versions of a genealogy coexisted. The example of Caleb is just the most perplexing case. As we have seen, conflicting genealogies are a common feature of oral societies, and these different versions may buttress conflicting social, political and economic claims.

6.6 Even so, the clue of the genealogical relationships may be misleading in certain cases. Conceivably, the biblical attitude towards the Amalekites demonstrates that kinship relationships did not necessarily reflect the socio-historical situation of that time. Rather, they reflect the Judaeans point of view of the geopolitics of the Negev region.

6.7 The prehistory of the material that we have reconstructed so far can account for the fact that the same genealogical name may relate to a modern toponym in southern Jordan or to an “Edomite” descendant, and at the same time appear as a Judaeans or Judaeans-related clan in 1 Chronicles. This can be explained in two ways. First, the dual appearance may mimic the nomadic movement of the group from southern Jordan to the Negev. Second, it can be that one group had segments on both sides of the Wadi Arabah. On this latter point, the

suffer from a cultural amnesia that selects the elements it considers more convenient. For the case of the Israelites, see T. E. Levy and A. F. C. Holl, “Migrations, Ethnogenesis, and Settlement Dynamics: Israelites in Iron Age Canaan and Shuwa-Arabs in the Chad Basin,” *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 21 (2002): 83-118. For an African example, see Ndege, “‘Myth’ as a Historical Basis of the Meru Folktales”.

⁸³ Knoopers, “Intermarriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity in the Genealogy of Judah,” 27.

distribution of segments along discontinuous territories is, as we have seen, a major feature of nomadic societies with a segmentary organization, which ensures access to ecologically diverse environments.⁸⁴ It would not be going too far to suppose that when there is evidence of a group with strong connections with southern Jordan and the Negev, a case can be made of this group comprising segments both east and west of the Arabah (e.g., the Edomite Kenizites and the Calebite Kenizites).

6.8 From the above argumentation it seems obvious that this ideological change might not have been possible without the fluidity that is characteristic of oral genealogies. A major implication is that the first expressions of the Jacob-Esau story, and of the genealogical relationships relating Negev and southern Jordanian groups, might not have been the written narratives that we find in the books of Genesis and Chronicles, but rather the oral tales that were common in the Late Iron Negev.

6.9 As is well known, traditional scholarship developed the idea of different, consecutive documentary strands (J, E, D, P) that made up the content of the Pentateuch. While multiple repetitions, doublets, juxtapositions, differences and discrepancies between some parts of the Pentateuch can be attributed to such documents, this pattern can also be explained by the original oral background of the biblical narrative. As noted above, in the oral folklore there are as many minor variants respective to a myth as there are repetitions of it. If we concede that some material in Genesis is a materialization of the traditional oral folklore of southern Judah, then it is possible to understand the co-existence of different and juxtaposed versions of the legend of Esau: his different names with their different etymologies, e.g., Esau in the birth story (25:25), Edom in the pottage account (25:30); and the different and conflicting genealogies, such as those inside Gen 36, and between Gen 36 and 1 Chron 1-4.⁸⁵ These diverse popular traditions may have co-existed, and yet were kept apart in oral form, to be later conflated when Edom was attached to the tradition of Esau, finally making their way into the literary corpus of the Pentateuchal tradition. In this way, the traditions lost their transitory character and gained a more permanent character.⁸⁶ These stories came to be disseminated in wider circles among the Judaeen population, and the prophetic works that we have reviewed made free use of them in the face of the events of the late pre-exilic and exilic periods.

6.10 This approach has a major implication in chronological terms. Indications of southern Jordanian material culture west of the Arabah cannot be earlier than the late eighth century B.C.; therefore, this can be considered as the terminus post quem for the oral development of the brotherhood tradition and the consequent genealogical links.

6.11 Of course, this is not to say that the tradition remained unchanged during its transition from oral to literary form. If the saga

⁸⁴ Gellner, "Segmentation: Reality or Myth," 822, 825.

⁸⁵ Cf. Wilson, *Genealogy and History*, 180-81.

⁸⁶ Of course, this is not to say that the southern Jordanian groups did not bring with them memories of their own folklore. On this point, A. Zeron has argued that ancient sagas such as the stories of Cain, Lamech, Jabal, Jubal and Tubal-Cain were originally part of the heritage of the Edomite nomadic clans and later were incorporated into the Israelite corpus of traditions; idem, "The Swansong of Edom," 191-92.

found its place in the biblical canon, it is because it was suitable for the people who put it in writing; in this case, the scribal school of the Jerusalem temple of the late Judaeen kingdom. Since literacy was particularly (but not totally) tied to sociopolitical and economic centralization in Jerusalem,⁸⁷ the spread of writing during the late Judaeen monarchy may have shaped in many ways the oral traditions that were widespread in Judah at that time, especially to convey and legitimize the interests of the priestly class and the monarchy.⁸⁸ Even if the Jacob-Esau saga's plot and main characters were not changed when the tradition was transformed into a literary work, the saga's meaning did change in the new social setting. As W. M. Schniedewind put it in other context, “the meaning of the Bible will be embedded in the history of the people who wrote it, read it, passed it on, rewrote it, and read it again. It is closely tied to when the traditions were collected, written down, edited, rewritten, and finally coalesced into the book we call the Bible.”⁸⁹ In this regard, those Genesis passages concerned with the primacy of Jacob over Esau, such as Yahweh's words to Rebekah (25:23) and Isaac's blessing (27:27-29, 39-40), appear to be posterior additions by the priestly editors of Jerusalem who retrospectively viewed the story of Jacob and Esau as a reflection of the relationship between Israel/Judah and Edom. Ironically, whereas the ideological assimilation of Edomite groups into the Judaeen cohorts of the Negev originally arose in the society of the northern Negev, it doubtlessly served a larger purpose of legitimizing the domination of the Judaeen state over the entire Negev region.

⁸⁷ Schniedewind, “Orality and Literacy in Ancient Israel”.

⁸⁸ For the image of territory and kinship created by the late Judaeen monarchy, see S. Grosby, “Kinship, Territory, and the Nation in the Historiography of Ancient Israel,” *ZAW* 105 (1993): 3-18.

⁸⁹ Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 5.

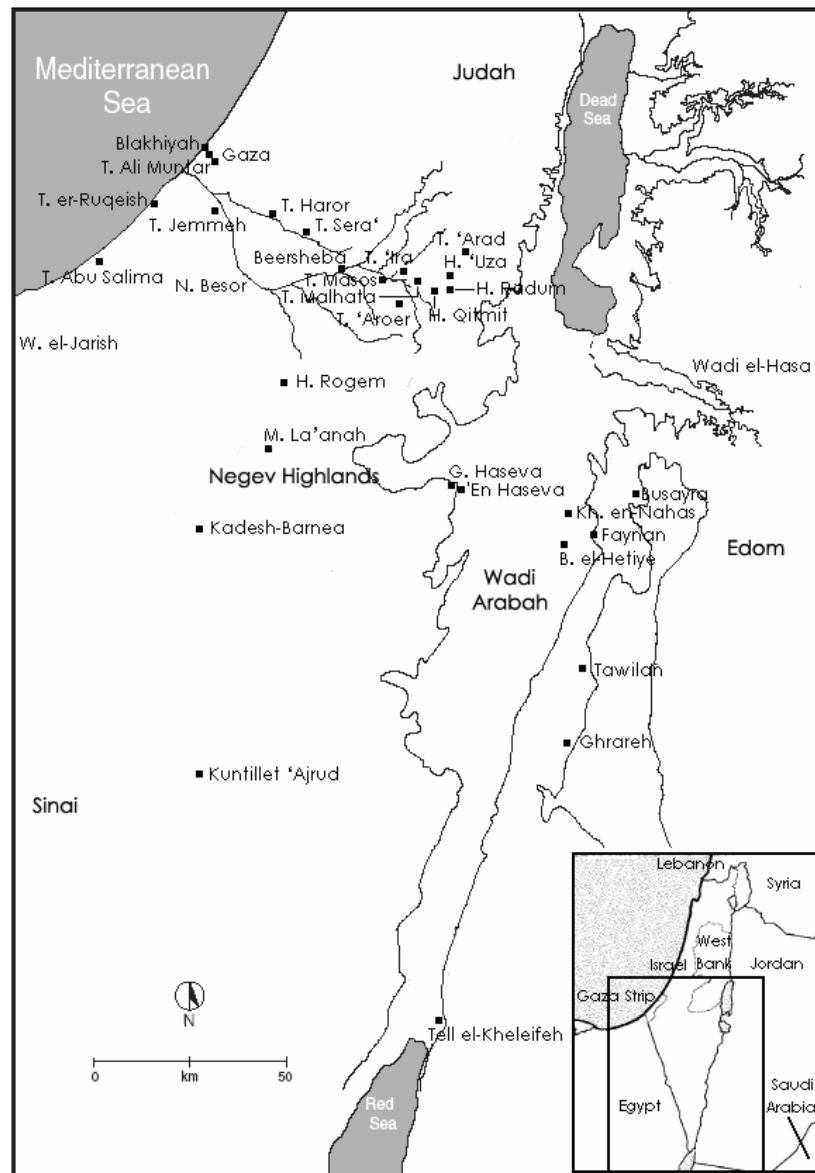


Figure 1. Late Iron Age sites in the Negev and Edom