The Hebrew Myths
and the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

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Abstract (not to exceed 200 words - any continuation sheets must contain the author's full name and full title of the thesis):

This project seeks to study the first expression of Israelite literature which would was elaborated under the shadow of the Neo-Assyrian cultural influence. This occurred approximately between the 9th to 8th centuries BCE, before a   transformation triggered off by theological viewpoints held in the southern kingdom of Judah between the 7th to 6th centuries BCE. Thus, we shall be considering the first eleven chapters of Genesis, consisting primarily of Hebrew myth, with a view to identifying Neo-Assyrian influence in the Israelite narrative.

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was at the peak of its power between the 9th and 7th centuries BCE. The northern kingdom of Israel became the most important loyal vassal and also the most favored for this Mesopotamian Empire by some cuneiforms sources. Perhaps, due to the Neo-Assyrian influences, the northern kingdom of Israel developed the full complement of the criteria of statehood with a developed bureaucracy in the administration, a sophisticated economic system of credit and records, an impressive building activity and a powerful military development.

Considering these records, it is possible to assume an important Neo-Assyrian cultural influence in the elaboration of the first examples of Israelite literature, but the problem lies in trying to find them, or some of their traces, within the biblical narratives. This is the very objective of this dissertation.

Contents

Introduction

This project seeks to study the first expression of Israelite literature which would was elaborated under the shadow of the Neo-Assyrian cultural influence. This occurred approximately between the 9th to 8th centuries BCE, before a   transformation triggered off by theological viewpoints held in the southern kingdom of Judah between the 7th to 6th centuries BCE. Thus, we shall be considering the first eleven chapters of Genesis, consisting primarily of Hebrew myth, with a view to identifying Neo-Assyrian influence in the Israelite narrative.

We have three reasons for choosing the Hebrew myths as expression of the oldest examples of Israelite literature:

- Firstly, a comparative study of the literature of ancient peoples reveals that mythical literature has been the first and the most common type of literary expression of ancient cultures.

- Secondly, it seems that the Hebrew myths were elaborated under the rule of the unified kingdom of David and Solomon –the Golden Age of Israel-following old Mesopotamian traditions, or they were simply imitating the Mesopotamian myths that they came into contact with when the Judahites were in exile in Babylon during the 6th century BCE. However, we believe that the first experiment in creating that Hebrew literature in the Bible did not belong to the Babylonian literary heritage of the 6th century, but rather to the Neo-Assyrian 7th century BCE.

- Thirdly, for many years, scholars (Hoffmeier & Millard 2004: 208) have not considered the Hebrew myths to be relevant as a type of history, primarily because a modern, positivist and *scientific* form of historiography will not admit myth and legend as forms of history. However, we will suggest that there is a history in Genesis 1-11 that can be recovered. We must endeavour to read the Bible exactly as we should read other Ancient Near Eastern text. It is not our aim to discuss the accuracy of the Biblical

narrative but to attempt to use it as a partial, though admittedly limited, source of historical data.

Academic consensus (Friedman 1997: 25) maintains that the Hebrew Bible was the result of the accumulation over time of many strata of literary work and the conflation of a variety of sources (J, E, P and D) and genres (laws, prophecies, poems, sagas, etc). It was a product of a continuous process of composition that stretched over hundreds of years. According to this point of view, this process should have finished between the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, in the Persian and Hellenistic periods, when most of the known writings of the Hebrew Bible had been composed.

However, nowadays there remains the unsolved problem of the beginning of this literary work. In other words, scholars want to know when the drawing up of the first examples of Hebrew narrative commenced and which these excerpts were. Since the 19th century some European specialists –Wellhausen, Gunkel, North and Von Rad- have suggested that it was under the unified kingdom of the David-Solomon dynasty that the literary work of the Hebrew Bible was born and that it finally ended between 4th and 3rd centuries BCE.

This notwithstanding, from 1970 onwards some scholars (Noll 2001:178) have critiqued both the historic existence of the unified kingdom of Israel of the 10th century BCE and the truth behind the biblical narratives. The main problem for these scholars lies in the deep discrepancies between the descriptions in the Hebrew Bible of ancient Israel (the biblical Israel) and the one reconstructed on the bases of the archaeological data from the Syro-Palestinian region (historical Israel). This means that there is a cultural archaeological void in the Palestine of the 10th century BCE that prevents accepting the existence of an important ancient kingdom able to elaborate any kind of national literature.

Also in the last decade, important archaeological and historical works developed by scholars (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001: 6) have cast light on the dichotomy between the biblical and the historical Israel. Following the archaeological data, they rule out the existence of the famous and powerful unified kingdom of David and Solomon. They identify, in the 9th century BCE, two different countries in the north and the south of Palestine which shared some cultural aspects such as settlement patterns, material culture, religion, language and possibly a common cultural past. However, they never

constituted a unified people as can be seen from their demographic composition, economic potential and relationship with their neighbours. Therefore scholars continue to refer to two discrete entities, "the northern kingdom of Israel" and "the southern kingdom of Judah" (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001: 153-154).

The northern kingdom of Israel enjoyed several advantages over the southern kingdom of Judah. For example, the northern hill country was always richer and richer in resources, its population was also relatively large (over 350,000 habitants) and it was a multi-ethnic society that mixed different ecosystems and a heterogeneous population of Israelites, Canaanites, Arameans and Phoenicians.

Although the 9th century BCE witnessed the emergence of many new states in Palestine, only the northern kingdom of Israel could have reached a high level of social evolution so as to become one of the most powerful kingdoms of the area. This was possible for two reasons: First, the northern kingdom of Israel was an active participant in the economic revival of this geographical area as a supplier of valuable agricultural products, principally oil and vineyards. Moreover it also controlled the most important overland trade routes of the Levant and had closer contact with Assyria and its culture.

The Neo-Assyrian empire was at the peak of its power between the 9th and 7th centuries BCE. The northern kingdom of Israel became the most important loyal vassal and also the most favoured for this Mesopotamian Empire by some cuneiforms sources. Perhaps, due to the Neo-Assyrian influences, the northern kingdom of Israel developed the full complement of the criteria of statehood with a developed bureaucracy in the administration, a sophisticated economic system of credit and records, an impressive building activity and a powerful military development.

Considering these records, it is possible to assume an important Neo-Assyrian cultural influence in the elaboration of the first examples of Israelite literature, but the problem lies in trying to find them, or some of their traces, within the biblical narratives. This is the very objective of this dissertation.

Theories about the composition of the Hebrew Bible.

1.1 The documentary Hypothesis:

One of the most complicated difficulties among scholars of ancient Israel has been deciphering *how* the Hebrew Bible was written and *when*. The academic consensus says that the Hebrew Bible was the result of adding many strata of literary work and mixing different sources and literary genres (laws, prophecies, poems, sagas, etc), as a product of a continuous process of composition that stretched over hundreds of years. Since the 19th century some specialists have suggested, following the descriptions of the Hebrew Bible, which was under the unified kingdom of the David-Solomon dynasty –the Golden Age of the ancient Israel in the 10th century BCE - when the literary work of the Hebrew Bible was born or started (Noll 2001: 174).

This reasoning had certain logic, at least according to an historical point of view, because it seems that ancient Israelites decided to write their own History in the 9th century BCE when they had already elaborated three important institutions: *a sole royal dynasty, a land of their own and a unique temple.* Following that, it seems natural to have elaborated a national narrative as a clear intellectual manifestation of social and political evolution, which came to be known as the "Solomonic Enlightenment". According to this point of view, this process should have finished between the 5th-2nd centuries BCE, during the Persian and Hellenistic periods, when the last books of the Hebrew Bible were composed (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001: 6).

Thus, the Hebrew Bible is a collection of 39 books divided in three principal parts:

-   The *Torah* or Pentateuch belongs to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis to Deuteronomy), whose date and form of elaboration has been and continue being a motive of discussion and speculation among scholars. Although there is an academic consensus (Soggin

1976: 14) that the writing should have started between 12th-10th centuries BCE. This section is the oldest and more important of the Hebrew Bible and should have been virtually complete in its present form around 4th century BCE.

- The *Nevi'im* or Prophets which is composed of two sections: the *former* (Joshua to 2 Kings) and the *latter* prophets (Isaiah to Malachi). The last one is a collection of teachings, bitter condemnations and messianic expectations of diverse group of people spanning a period of 350 years (8th-7th centuries BCE). Notwithstanding this, the former section has similar problems to the *Torah* with regard to its elaboration and chronology.

- The *Kethuvim* or Writings (Psalms to 2 Chronicle) which include several literary genres such as homilies, poems, prayers, proverbs and psalms. The majority of them are difficult to link with any specific historical events or authors. Moreover, these works were products of a continuous process of composition which stretches over centuries. However, the earliest material was redacted in the last period of the Judahite monarchy or soon after the destruction of Jerusalem (586 BCE); meanwhile most of the writings were composed in the Persian and Hellenistic period (5th - 2nd centuries BCE).

This view has been the result of a long process of studies by scholars as H. B. Witter, J. Astruc, J. G. Eichhorn, W. M. L. de Wette, H. Ewald and, specially, the German erudite Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918). Wellhausen was the author of the famous "Documentary Hypothesis", or "Higher Criticism", which has influenced biblical studies until now (Soggin 1976: 79-86). He identified four important sources in the Hebrew Bible, which are more notorious in the *Torah* or Pentateuch. The criteria used by Wellhausen for distinguishing each source, and organizing the different biblical narratives inside them, were principally the different names gave to the Israelite god, the style of writing and the environment described in the narratives:

- *Yahwist* (J): its name derived of "Yahweh", an ancient name for the Israelite god which has been found in some stories of the biblical books. This source was written between 10th - 9th centuries BCE, in a primitive

style and mentioned many places situated in the south of Palestine, better known as the southern kingdom of Judah.

- *Elohist* (E): its name derived of "Elohim", which was the other name gave to the Israelite god. It begins with Genesis 15 and was written two centuries after J although its style is less primitive. In this source there was a special mention of prophets in their stories, which suggests a redaction in a period when these characters were regarded as men of the Israelite god. Also the people, places and localities mentioned were predominantly in the north of Palestine. Owing to these characteristics, Wellhausen concluded that the *Elohist* was written in the northern kingdom of Israel between IX-VIII centuries BCE when the united kingdom of Israel of David and Solomon was over.

- *Priestly* (P): its name derived of "priest" because the greater part is made up of ritual priestly laws, which can be found in the second part of Exodus, in Leviticus and the first part of Numbers. Also it has little narrative material at the beginning of Genesis. For this reason, it was the easiest source to recognize because of its consistent and systematic vocabulary, solemn style, connection with liturgy and genealogies and its strong interest in the cult (Herriot 1961: 60). Besides, this source formed the final framework of the material collected in the sources J and E after the exile of Babylon in 5th century BCE.

- *Deuteronomic* (D): this source is practically identical with the greater part of the biblical book of the Pentateuch with the same name.[1] The former part is a Decalogue of five pairs of laws which would have constituted the nucleus or central section (chapters 12-28). Scholars

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[1] By the information in the Hebrew Bible itself (2 Kings 22), in the year 622 BCE, while the Temple of Jerusalem was under repair, a book of the Israelite law was found and brought to Judahite king Josiah. This discovery impressed to King Josiah who ordered a deep reform of the cult in the kingdom of Judah. The first task was to eliminate all the symbols of heathen worship and altars in all the country; afterwards he concentrated the lawful worship of Israelite god in one place: Jerusalem. In spite of no further details since the fifth book of the Hebrew Bible is the only one that made mentions of the Josiah's reforms, it is assumed with good reasons that this book of the law is to be equated with the book of Deuteronomy.

believe that a school dependent on D revised the next six books belonging to former prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings) under an ideological viewpoint. Also this source was redacted in two parts during two different periods: the first in 609 BCE (known as Dtr1) and the second one in 587 BCE (known as Dtr2).

It seems that the sources J, E and P were present through the first four books belonging to Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers). Notwithstanding, with the last one, Deuteronomy, there was hardly traces of these sources in these books. That is because Deuteronomy was written in an entirely different style with respect the other four books, specifically in vocabulary, expressions and phrases. For this reason, we agree that Deuteronomy was the fourth source of the Pentateuch.[2]

1.2 The modern point of view about the redaction of the Hebrew Bible:

However, nowadays there stands the unsorted problem concerning the beginning of the literary work belong to the Hebrew Bible. In other words, the scholars want to know *when* the draw up of the first examples of Hebrew narrative started and *which* these excerpts were. In this matter, the Documentary Hypothesis has shown to be weak in its own base because of some problems which have been point out by the scholars in the last decades.

Firstly, there is a problem with the methodology. The Wellhausen's school followed a literary-critical method, which distinguishes continuous literary sources (J, E, D and P) running through the Pentateuch. Notwithstanding, other scholars at the beginnings of 20th century considered that a form-criticism method should give better results (Rendtorff, 1990: 12). This implies that the point of departure for studying the biblical texts *should not be the final form of the written text* –as Wellhausen's school believed- but the smallest and originally independent and individual units. Thus,

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[2] In 1943 the German scholar Martin Noth held that, the tie between Deuteronomy and these six books that follow it (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings) looked to be so crucially integral, that Noth called the full seven book work as *Deuteronomistic history*. This kind of history presented the narrative as consistent in terms of *covenant* between Israel and its god, which is developed especially in many passages in the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and 1-2 Kings.

modern scholars could trace the process of their development right up to their final written form that it is possible to read nowadays in the modern Bible. Nevertheless, this attempt to progress by means of the tradition-historical approach has not yet developed fully by scholars in the last decades (Rendtorff 1990: 11-12).

Secondly, researchers as G. Gunkel, G. Von Rad and M. Noth have brought forward the question about the gaps between the study of these original smallest units, on one hand, and the final shape of the biblical narratives, on the other (Rendtorff 1990: 31). In the middle of this process, there was an intermediate stage between the smallest units and the final shape of the whole coherent biblical narrative complex. This intermediate stage allowed enrichments of the basic main themes of the Israelite tradition and, finally, connected them with other further literary material. Thus, these literary units were brought together at a later stage in the whole known as the books of the Hebrew Bible.

The last point could be corroborated if we study again the different sources of the Documentary Hypothesis, which clearly show the kind of problem with respect to the unity and specific nature of each one of these sources. Source J, for example, has a long literary pre-history because their individual narratives existed independently and orally at the beginning, before they became parts of larger written composition known nowadays as the books of Genesis or Exodus. For this reason, scholars have divided J up into various subsidiary sources (J_1, J_2, J_3, etc.) because the J source gathered together very old and independent traditional material inherited both orally and in written form (Kuhl 1961: 71).

Also modern scholars disagree with the Wellhausen' school because they do not identify any "Yahwistic style" or "Yahwistic language" in the stories belonging to the J source. As Rendtorff says "…the peculiar accomplished of the Yahwist consist not in the linguistic and stylistic shaping of the traditions handed on, but in the arrangement of the traditions and in putting certain emphases…" (Rendtorff 1990: 126). This means that in spite of a picture of events that we could read from Genesis to Joshua, the individual stories originally did not fit together well from a literary point of view. However, they were mixed by redactors in different periods of time.

Besides, both the J and E sources apparently were not written by individual authors but by schools of narrators who used a common basic source denominated by

scholars as "G" (*Grundlage*). This G source represents, by modern scholars, a common basis which depended on two different traditions: one of them oral (G1) and the other written (G2) which should have been elaborated after the death of Solomon or at the division of the kingdom. This G source should have been an old, traditional, cycle of stories about the patriarchs, exodus and other relevant stories about Israelite past, which were used as the basis of literary works belonging to J and E. Thus, when the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were established, the authors of J and E each adapted these collections to their respective interests (Friedman 1997: 85).

The major problem is trying to identify which one –J or E- was the first, because both of them tell about similar stories but privileging their own region (north or south) against the other. For this reason, we agree that the existence of either version in any kingdom would be likely to encourage the production of an alternative version in the other kingdom. Indeed, the real separation between J and E sources is too uncertain, because both of them were born together and should have existed in parallel form for many years.

Only when the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrian attack in 722 BCE, the material belonging to E passed to the southern kingdom of Judah and was mixed with the J source. Thus, the JE source or "Jehovite" –because it depended for the most part on J- was born. This also would explain why the E source exists in such reduced form. Indeed, there is a criticism about E as an autonomous source, because of its sparseness and also the fact remains that only a few fragments have come down to our knowledge. For this reason, in the present state of research, we cannot be sure where E started or ended.

In other words, if E once existed as an independent source, now it is preserved only in fragments. On behalf of this point, we agree with the view of Kuhl (1961: 759):

> …one must admit that in the condition in which it has been transmitted E can never have existed as an independent source. That, however, does not mean that what is available to us is the whole Elohist as it was written. On the contrary, we should rather consider that it was originally one large and complete record as is indicated by the fairly long and coherent sections in the Joseph story…

As for other matters, scholars as R. E. Friedman (1997: 87) hold that some information belonging to J describe the historical situation of the kingdom of Judah during the reign of the king Jehoram (848-842 BCE), which is useful for its date. Since the J narrative mentioned of the dispersion of Simeon and Levi but not the dispersion of the other tribes, its author should have written before the destruction of the kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE. In the same way, if J and E existed in parallel form, then the author and redaction of E should have been between 922-722 BCE.

With regard to the D source, we believe that its origins should be sought among certain Levites priesthood circles in the northern kingdom of Israel around the 9th century BCE. This is because certain important details are mentioned in this source about old sanctuaries placed in *Shechem* and Mount *Gerizim*, which were older and more important than Jerusalem in the south. Owing to this information, it is possible to suggest that any parts of the D source, especially old laws, have been written by Levites of the northern kingdom of Israel who had functioned at *Shiloh*. They were rural priests or local clergy who functioned at the various northern sanctuaries mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. These priests believed in the centralization of the religion but without relationship to the ark of covenant or the Jerusalem priesthood and its temple. Instead, they accepted having a king but with limitations on his rule and they insisted that only Levites were legitimate priests.

In this context, we believe that some characteristics of D also have been found in the same group that produced the E source. Both of them seem have been redacted by the same group, that is, the priests of *Shiloh*. However there are more similarities. They both use similar expression and names that there not existed in J or P, both of them place great emphasis on the role of prophets, both of them support the Levites as national priests, both of them regard Moses as good but give a negative account of Aaron (the legendary founder of the priesthood from Jerusalem). Under this point of view, we could suppose that the priests of *Shiloh* were a group with a continuing literary tradition, because they wrote and preserved texts over centuries (laws, stories, historical reports and poetry). For this reason, they were able to de associated with some kind of scribes' school in the north of Palestine between IX-VIII centuries BCE (Friedman 1997: 128-129).

However, there is another relevant aspect in this view. One of the principal elements in the theology of D source is the concept of "alliance" or "covenant" between Israel and its god. For this reason, some scholars consider that the origin of the D source could be a compilation made by scribes or priests from the northern kingdom of Israel during the 8th century BCE, influenced by the Assyrian vassal treaties of this period (Soggin 1976: 124). Afterwards, the norms of D passed to the south when this northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrian empire in 722 BCE, maybe at the beginnings or in the middle of the VII century BCE (Friedman 1997: 123).

Thus, in the south, that is the kingdom of Judah, the D source was transformed by the ideological process described in the time of Josiah, a Judahite king who started a religious reform of the Israelite religion, by restoration of the temple in Jerusalem, the proscription of other divinities and the reaffirmation of the Israelite covenant by the "discovery" –or check- of an old and hidden legal book that is known nowadays as the first stage of Deuteronomy or Dtr1 in the VII century BCE before the death of King Josiah in 609 BCE. The last edition and definitive check of D should be after the exile in Babylon in 587 BCE (Dtr2).[3]

With respect to the P source, the question about when it was written has been more complicated and controversial in recent years. Firstly, we have to consider that the P source is larger than J, E and D put together. This source includes its own creation story and flood at the beginnings of the Hebrew Bible. Also, it has stories about Patriarchs, Exodus and the journey through the wilderness. Secondly, most of these stories are doublets of the same stories found both J and E, but they are extraordinary

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[3] By R. E. Friedman the identity of the Deuteronomist author could be associated with the person of the prophet Jeremiah who was alive and writing in those years. He was a priest from *Shiloh* and also was in Jerusalem in the time of Josiah when the first redaction of D was done; and in Egypt in the period of the second redaction. However, there are more records. The book of Jeremiah has the same language as the Deuteronomistic history, the same favourite terms, phrases and metaphors. According to the information rescued in the book of Jeremiah itself, the figure of this prophet is associated with a particular scribe named *Baruch son of Neriyah* who is mentioned several time in this prophetic book. Baruch wrote much of the prose of the book of Jeremiah and he could be the author-editor of the Deuteronomistic history; meanwhile Jeremiah's conceptions were his principal inspiration. In this matter, in the year 1980 a sealed inscription was found by the Israeli archaeologist Nacham Avigad with the inscription *lbrkyhw bn nryhw hspr* ("belonging to Baruch son of Neriyah the scribe"), which has been dated to late 7th century BCE (Friedman 1997: 147-149).

different. Thirdly, P contains a huge body of laws, which cover about thirty chapter of Exodus and Numbers and the entire book of Leviticus.

Some scholars, such as the Israeli Y. Kaufmam, disagree with the traditional point of view belonging to Documentary Hypothesis, which saw the P source as the latest of the Pentateuch. For him, the P source had priority over the D source, because there is no proof that P presupposes Deuteronomy. Neither could P be post exilic because there are important pre-exilic sections which point up or make constant mention of the ark of the covenant, altars, cherubs and the tabernacle which are typical elements of the pre-exilic period. Instead, the Temple of Jerusalem never was mentioned once in P; meanwhile the Tabernacle is mentioned over two hundred times. Moreover, modern studies about biblical Hebrew developed at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, using new methods of linguistic analysis, have demonstrated that P was written in an earlier stage of biblical Hebrew, older than the book of Ezekiel which is situated in the period of the exile in Babylon (Friedman 1997: 163).

It is also important to consider that P could be written after J and E but the author of P in some way *was following* JE. In other words, P was telling similar stories and almost in the same order (about twenty-five cases of parallels) with respect to JE. This is very important for the data of P, because it allows us to know that the author of P wrote after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE by the Assyrians, possibly when E had already come to the south and mixed with the J source. In this matter, P was written *as an alternative* to JE, perhaps because its author was a priest who disagreed with the characteristics of the narratives that there existed in JE: angels, dreams, talking animals such as the snake of the Paradise and divine anthropomorphisms.

What could be the reason for this? Perhaps P was written in the same period of the Deuteronomistic history. Thus, they became parallel sources such as J and E in the past. The D source must have been known by the author of P and, for this reason, P was the answer to D: if D belonged to *Shiloh* priests who had come as refugees from the north and defended the priesthood of the tribe of Levi and the Levites as unique; P was produced by the priesthood from Jerusalem who considered themselves as the legitimate

descendents of Aaron and the only priests for Israel. In this matter, D and P represent two different approaches.[4]

Under this point of view, it is possible to identify the period when P was written. If we consider the relevance of the Judahite king Hezekiah in the narrative of P, this source should have been also written around the time of the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE. It was the same time when there was a flow of a new population from the northern kingdom of Israel coming as refugees into the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah, Jerusalem.

Besides, it was the period when the northern Levites were a new presence in the southern kingdom of Judah, when the E source arrived to the south, and also the period when J and E were mixed. Moreover, the reign of Hezekiah was known for being one of the great times of literary production in Judah: much of the books of Isaiah, Micah, Hosea, Proverbs, Kings and Chronicles. For this reason, P had to be written after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel but before Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the fall of southern kingdom of Judah in 586 BCE. It means that P also belongs to the 7th century BCE (Friedman 1997: 213).

Notwithstanding this, the Documentary Hypothesis had situated P in the post-exilic period. However, the modern view considers that in the core of P source there are many contradictions, duplicates and interpolation of composition which would reveal that some elements of P (the basic document belongs to the period of Hezekiah) were much earlier that the final redaction (known as R by scholars) or later supplements belong to the period after of the exile in the 6th century BCE). At this moment, the final

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[4] It is very important recognize that the Hebrew Bible has two works that tell the history of Ancient Israel. One of them is the *Deuteronomistic history* which was described before; the other history is presented by the books of 1 and 2 of Chronicles which were written under the influences of the P source. The Deuteronomistic history was written by the northern priests of *Shiloh*; the Chronicles history was written by the southern priests of Jerusalem descendents of Aaron. For this reason, both P and Chronicles share similar ideology: they distinguish between priests and Levites, recognizes only descendents of Aaron as legitimate priests and their duties and rituals. Another important factor is that the Chronicles history does not agree with the Deuteronomistic history with respect two different and important kings. Meanwhile D was the source of the period of the reforms belongs to King Josiah; P is the source of the reforms of the king Hezekiah. Both of them established religious centralization, but Hezekiah was the favourite of the Aaronic priesthood; meanwhile Josiah was the favourite of the priesthood from *Shiloh*.

process of redaction of the Hebrew Bible was done, perhaps by a figure such as Ezra, specifically with the fusion of these different sources –J, E, D and P- creating the Bible as we know it nowadays.

This modern analysis is very helpful if we want to find the first evidence of the Israelite literature. Indeed, the study and evolution of these different sources allow us to discover some common characteristics of these sources:

- J and E must have existed in parallel forms for many years, but they could have developed between 9th and 8th centuries BCE, until the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE by Assyrians, when the E material passed to the south and was fused with J and creating JE.

- D had a similar course with respect to E, because it originated with the Levites of the north and only after the destructions of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE passed to the south. In this matter, this source was "hidden" to be discovered and published during the restoration of the temple under Josiah in the 7th century BCE.

- P was developed –unless in its earlier version- in a similar process to D, because it was the result of the theological conflict with D after the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE. Indeed, P should belong to 8th and 7th centuries BCE.

There are some common elements or factors which should be very useful if we want to discover the first expressions of the Israelite literature:

- The former parts of these sources (J, E, D and P) were coincidently developed between 8th and 7th centuries BCE, which could be the time of the development of the first literature work in the Hebrew Bible.

- All these sources have been elaborated, modified or developed in contact with the northern kingdom of Israel.

- The impact of the destruction of this northern kingdom of Israel (722 BCE) by the Assyrians in the development of the biblical literature in the southern kingdom of Judah and the Hebrew Bible itself.

Thus, in this research, we will try to identify the following: first, the social reality of Palestine belonging to these 8th and 7th centuries BCE, when this literature was elaborated; second, the impact of the empire and culture of the Neo-Assyrian empire in this area; and third, which were the first expressions of the Israelite literature developed in this scenario.

Ancient Israel under the Shadow of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

1.3 The Problem concerning "biblical Israel", "historical Israel" and "Ancient Israel".

The first academic problem for discovering the *origins* and the *first expression* of the Israelite literature is to know precisely what Israel was. For many centuries, scholars precisely have adopted the information that they rescued in the Hebrew Bible for reconstructing this historical entity. However, nowadays, scholars have been more critical with this point of view establishing different kinds of concepts. Indeed, it is possible to identify no less than three different "Israel": biblical, historical and ancient Israel.

The biblical Israel is the Israel described in the Hebrew Bible. This Israel is a literary construct, the fruit of a process of ideological enterprise realized in the Persian period (6ᵗʰ century BCE) in the province of *Yehud* or Judah by some people who originally came from this Palestinian region. These people had lived exiled in Babylon, after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BCE, became immigrants when the Persian authorities transported them from elsewhere in the empire again to its homeland, Judah.

However, some of these ancestors had not once lived in Judah and they decided to write a history which explained their own post exilic society and also the privileges of these immigrants within the new society that they would create in Judah. In this matter, these people inherited a certain amount of literary material, oral traditions and other element from earlier times that have survived in pre-exilic Palestine (specifically, stories about kings, warrior, holy men, cultic songs and prophecies) and wrote their own ideological history of its society.

In this way, the Israel described in the Hebrew Bible was the final product, the *biblical Israel*. However, scholars recognize that there is a problem because this Israel is

a *literary* product, not historical, that emerged from a former society about which we know very little historically speaking. This means that the authors of the biblical Israel used old literary traditions which were incorporated, reformed and re-contextualized as part of a literary corpus that was created for ideological purposes by the ruling elite of the newly constituted province of *Yehud* in the Persian Period. However, this reconstruction is not very accurate as an historical source because it describes the ideological process of the 6th century BCE, not the historical facts about the origins and historical events of Israel itself.

For this reason, some scholars have created another entity, the *historical Israel*, which represents a historical entity that existed in the northern and central Palestinian highlands between 9th-8th centuries BCE. This is based on an archaeological point of view, referring to the Iron Age (1200-600 BCE). Its history is reconstructed, principally, by archaeological findings that allow us to know the historical evolution of an ancient society that has left traces in the soil of the Palestinian region for two or three centuries, until its destruction by the Neo-Assyrian Empire in 722 BCE. In the same way, it is possible to identify, by archaeological records, other smaller entities in the south, denominated Judah, which formed a secondary state also in the 9th century BCE with some kind of cultural relationship with Israel. This entity survived after the destruction of Israel for two more centuries until it was destroyed by Babylon in 587 BCE.

The main discrepancies between the *biblical Israel* and the *historical Israel* are the little relationship between them and the deep differences in their respective information. The *biblical Israel*, as we said before, is an ideological product elaborated between 6th-4th centuries BCE, which means, many centuries after the events that it described. In another aspect, many of the events described in the biblical narrative may have never been absolutely corroborated by extra-biblical sources or archaeological finds. The *historical* Israel, on the other hand, represents a historic reality reconstructed by the archaeological data in a very difference view with respect of the biblical one. Thus, the information rescued by archaeological digs gives important information about the evolution of this Israelite/Judahite society, especially in aspects which the Hebrew Bible never has given any description.

Indeed, if we try to find any kind of direct relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the archaeological data, the results are modest and limited, being restricted principally to some kind of monumental inscriptions:

- The stele of *Merneptha* (13th century BCE), which is the first external mention of a people who lived in Palestine around 1200 BCE who was denominated by Egyptians as "Israel". Notwithstanding, it offered no additional information about the exact location, size or nature of this people.

- The list of *Shoshenq* (10th century BCE) which is another Egyptian inscription that mentions the "highlands/heights of David".

- The stele of *Tel Dan* (9th century BCE) discovered in two different fragments in 1993 and 1994 and written in Aramaic. It details an Israelite invasion according to the version of an Aramaean king. It is the only inscription found made mentioned both of the kingdom of Israel, on one hand, and of the "house of David", on the other. It also it mentioned the death of two kings belonging to the northern kingdom of Israel (Jeroham) and the southern kingdom of Judah (Ahaziahu) by this Aramaean king who resided at Dan.

- The stele of *Mesha* (9th century BCE) is a Moabite stele which mentions the military defeat of the "house of David" belonging to the kingdom of Judah at *Horonen*. This inscription, like the *Dan* stele, is important because it validates a figure named David as the entity who became the founder of a dynasty of Judahite kings settled in Jerusalem.

- The Neo-Assyrian inscriptions (9th-8th centuries BCE) which mentioned about some Israelite kings also mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, such as the King Ahab in the battle of *Qarqar* (853 BCE) and the tribute of the King Jehu to Shalmaneser III.

Because of this shortage of evidence, some scholars have outlined that the only solution to this problem should be to elaborate another entity, *ancient Israel*. In a simple view, it is a scholarly creation which could be defined as an "amalgam of information" which belonging to both the biblical Israel and the historical Israel (Nicholson 2004: 7). The mix and complement of both entities allow, with different success, to light up and

reconstruct what Israel was in Antiquity, using information rescued from both archaeological sources and from biblical literary work.

The only problem has been the attitude of some scholars (Whitelam, 1996; Lemche, 1998: Thompson, 1999) who disagree with this notion of *ancient Israel*. For them, it is impossible to associate these entities if we consider that many events described in the Hebrew Bible –that means, the *biblical Israel*- were fictitious, invented or never happened. With respect to the *historical Israel*, the majority of the archaeological finds have no direct relationship with the biblical description and they are useless for *proving* the veracity of these narratives inside of a historical context.

Notwithstanding, this approach about simple "truth" and "falseness" –inherited of the German Von Ranke's school in the 19th century- should be considered obsolete inside historical studies. For this reason, in this chapter we try to discover our own answer, searching the origin of the first Israelite narrative inside its own historical evolution. In this way, we will try to put the archaeological base on a level with the biblical literary information.

1.4 The northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah in their historical context.

The consensus (Finkelstein & Silberman, 2001: 107) about the *historical Israel* agrees that a people identified as "Israelite" lived somewhere in the land of Canaan or ancient Palestine during the Iron Age I (1200-900 BCE). It is in this century that biblical scholars have situated the stories about a man called David who inaugurated a royal dynasty, creating a kingdom known as Israel (2 Sam 8). This kingdom should be expanded by his son, Solomon, who presided over a huge empire, stretching from the Euphrates River to the border of Egypt (1 Kings 5. 1) and became the Golden Age of the kingdom of Israel in Antiquity.[5]

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[5] The principal source about the period of the United Monarchy is not only the biblical book of Samuel, but also the two books of Chronicles. The first book of Chronicles more or less parallels the material found in Samuel; meanwhile the second one parallels the material found in the book of Kings. For this reason, some scholars believe that Samuel-Kings and Chronicles were *synoptic histories* or two different depictions of the same subject (Provan 2003: 195).

Thus, taking a chronological approach, David should have lived between 1000-960 BCE; meanwhile his successor, Solomon, lived between 960-920 BCE. For this reason, this period of David-Solomonic kingdom is called the United Monarchy; a term that derives from biblical studies. Unfortunately, this period has very little evidence of writing which could confirm the existence of this Unified Monarchy and of the events attributed to these kings. Indeed, only after the year 900 BCE, archaeologists have identified another period, Iron Age II (900-586 BCE), which has more epigraphic evidence than the former period to help the historical reconstruction.

However, most historians nowadays agree that at least portions of the biblical books of Samuel and Kings are based on real events that happened in the 10th century BCE. That means characters such as Saul, David and Solomon were real people who lived in this region in that period. Notwithstanding, their histories were manipulated by the creativity and the ideological approaches of authors of other centuries, who changed some elements for later ideological reasons. In other words, some of the stories that we read in the Hebrew Bible about these characters do not correspond with the historical people whose name they bear.

Thus, the origin of the historical Israel could be associated to the wider development of the eastern Mediterranean between 13th-11th centuries BCE. In this period there were several settlements of peripheral areas when the collapse of the urban culture in the entire Aegean/Anatolian/Syro-Palestine region at the end of the Bronze Age occurred. Also we have to consider the migration of large human groups in this region, such as the Aramaeans, on the boundaries of Mesopotamia in the same period. The consequence was that various groups reached Palestine and played an important part in the new settlement of this land, breaking the old Egyptian rule over it. Perhaps the famous Egyptian inscription of *Merneptah* which called "Israel", among other ethnicities, to some kind of human group of Palestine around 1200 BCE is an evidence of that historical event.

According to the point of view of some scholars, the origin of "Israel" or "proto Israel" was the result of the collapse of Late Bronze Age Canaanite culture in the lowlands, and the rapid proliferation of hill country villages during the Iron Age I. In these villages was developed a new use of hill-side terracing, plastered cisterns and stone lined silos. However, it seems that this "proto-Israel" did not have a foreign origin

but a Canaanite one because its material cultural was similar to other ethnicities living in this region, such as Moabites, Ammonites or Edomites who lived in Palestine during the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age, although the possibility of later human elements who came from outside the land of Palestine being incorporated exists (Provan 2003: 144).[6]

These groups also joined the local uprooted and pastoral group, which led to an increase in pastoral and bandit splinter groups –called the *shasu* or *hapiru* by the Egyptian sources- that upset the urban-nomad balance, especially when they attacked the Egyptian border. In some way, the biblical tradition about the patriarchal migration to Egypt, or the stories of coming out from there such as the Exodus, should be understood as vague remainder rather than routine migration of pastoral groups. In the same way, some of this human group could evolve into tribes or segmentary society. A group organized according to descent and kinship by the use of genealogies, such as the ones described in the Hebrew Bible.

By another approach, from an archaeological point of view, we have to consider that the 10th century BCE in Palestine as standing between two eras. On one hand, there was the Iron Age I which was a period of decentralized political units in the lowlands. However, with the collapse of the New Egyptian Empire, the region of Palestine saw a gradual process of rebuilding and increase of population. This new situation motivated that many small city-states emerged in Syria, the coast of Palestine (Phoenicia) and Palestine itself, but this phenomenon was more significant in the north and decreased as one went south (Noll 2001: 179).

Thus, during the Iron Age I the main centres began to recover, including though the development of trade with Phoenicia and Cyprus and new city states emerged which replaced those that had declined or disappeared at the end of the Bronze Age (Grabbe 2007: 119). Then, the highlands of Palestine were populated with unfortified villages which did not have any kind of political hierarchy. However, during

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[6] By Israel Finkelstein the majority of the cultures belonging to Iron Age I in Palestine (Ammon, Edom, Moab and Israel) had similar patterns of settlement, kinds of villages, houses and pottery. The only one element which was different among them, in the Israelite case, is the dietary habits because of the lack of bones belonging to pigs. The historical reason of this phenomenon is not entirely clear nowadays (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001: 120).

the Iron Age II, many of these small places became in states such as the cases of Israel, Judah, Ammon, Moab and Edom.

This view was illustrated by Noll (2001: 193):

As a matter of fact, if one plots on a map the changes to Syria-Palestine over the centuries of the Iron Age I and II, a clear pattern emerges. Urbanization and political hierarchies spread from the north and west to the south and east. First, the Phoenician and Philistine coasts emerged, then the northern Syrian city-states, followed by the emergence of Samaria-Israel in the Central Hills in the ninth century. Finally, Judah, Ammon and Moab began to develop. Edom was only emerging in the final generations of the Iron Age.[7]

Indeed, during the former period, the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BCE), some kind of human organization was developed in Syria and Palestine called *patronage society* inside societies with a certain degree of complexity, but without the development of bureaucratic states. The principal characteristics of this organization were its vertical organization which includes the *patron*, or a member of a leading lineage, and the *clients*, who are the ordinary men and their families. The bond between one and another is a personal one, because the client should have sworn allegiance to the patron and he sworn to protect his client.

This idea of *patronage society*, which is distinct to a tribal society, could explain the absence of state in Palestine during the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age I. The state is supposed to care for its citizens, and has been part of the ideology of many states in the Ancient Near East from Sumerian times to Hammurabi and the Assyrian and Babylonian kings in the first millennium BCE. In Palestine, the village system was hardly developed in the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I. Instead there was a system of small scale townships ruled by so-called kings, with a tiny political structure which did not need an intermediate organization but a rudimentary administrative system.

By Lemche (1996: 112):

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[7] In this aspect, archaeology suggests that Jerusalem, the capital of the Unified Monarchy of David and Solomon by the Hebrew Bible, was not developed neither in the 10th or 9th centuries BCE. Only between the 8th-6th centuries BCE the archaeology of Jerusalem shows a significant advance as the capital of a fully fledged state. Indeed, Jerusalem lacked a fortification wall until the middle VIII century, when there is plenty of evidence for Jerusalem as a great urban centre (Grabbe 2007: 126).

When we are studying the development of political structure in the Palestinian world from Late Bronze Age society to the Iron Age, the period of the so-called Hebrew kings, it becomes obvious that social solidarity was not part of the original socio-political ideology. A number of studies of Late Bronze Age society in Syria and Palestine have demonstrated that this system was formed around political centres which were organized as palatinate states, with the king as the general director of the business or industry which was really the palace, and the rest of the society his slaves. It is, on the other hand, very clear that the palace state was not a welfare state, and was never understood to be such a thing; it was very much a patronage society on the brick of developing into a feudal system.

However, it has been more complicated for scholars to try and reconstruct the following step, which means the transition from a patronage society to monarchy. This episode is known from the biblical stories of Saul, David and Solomon. Notwithstanding, scholars have not had much success in reconstructing this historical period, mainly because the archaeological data have not been very helpful for clarifying this matter.

Thus, the historical reconstruction of this period still depends to a large degree on the biblical testimony, specifically with respect to the birth of Israel as state. But it has not been possible to discover any powerful kingdom such as the Unified Kingdom of David and Solomon described in the Hebrew Bible in any extra-biblical texts of the Ancient Near East. Also we have to consider that both the *historical* Israel and Judah were two different entities, from an archaeological point of view, in the Iron Age II; and they did not exist during the Iron Age I. For this reason, some scholars have believed that these biblical stories were never historical facts, but literary fiction. Instead, other scholars have outlined that both David and Solomon could be historical characters whose events were exaggerated by scribes of a later time when the Hebrew Bible was finally redacted.

In this matter, Provan (2003: 230) says:

Is the notion of Davidic "empire" historically plausible or, as some revisionists scholars have claimed, an anachronistic retrojection by scribes familiar with the Persian empire? The answer to this question depends, of course, on what

we mean by "empire". If we have in mind something analogous to the Egyptian empire, or the Assyrian empire, or the Persian, or the Roman, then the answer will have to be no. the assertion that David ruled over such an empire is simply not historically credible. But the point to notice here is that the Bible never ascribes an empire of that sort to David in the first place.[8]

In the case of Solomon, the situation is more complicated. According to the Hebrew Bible (1 Kings 4) Solomon ruled over the land of Judah and Israel from *Dan* to *Beersheba* and his reign was organized on the basis of twelve districts. The area of influence of Solomon was from the Euphrates to the land of Philistines and the border of Egypt. However, we want to insist, there are no extra-biblical evidences in the Ancient Near East on this important kingdom. Moreover, the extant material remained from this Solomonic period was the subject of many objections to some archaeologists as Finkelstein.

For example, the Hebrew Bible describes many buildings such as the palaces and fortress in *Megiddo*, *Hazor* and *Gezer*, and stables which were built by King Solomon. However, according to Finkelstein and Silberman (2001: 141), the structure of palaces has many similarities with a distinctive type found in Syria during the 9th century BCE: the *bit ilani* plan. In another matter, the stables should have been built by a later Israelite, the king Ahab, in the same century, because a Neo-Assyrian inscription described the great chariot force of this Israelite king in the battle of *Qarqar* in the same century (Luckenbill 1968: 223).

If we follow the account given in the Hebrew Bible, when the Unified Monarchy of David and Solomon –which became the Golden Age of the biblical Israel- was over the kingdom was divided in two: *the northern kingdom of Israel* and *the southern kingdom of Judah*. Whereas we do not consider the Unified Monarchy as a historical reality, the archaeological data would confirm that during a long period of

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[8] We have to consider that the period of David and Solomon corresponds to the recession of the Egyptian and Middle Assyrian empires and the collapse of the Hittite empire. However, it was not a "dark age" but the temporary flourishing of "mini-empires" which comprised a heartland along with conquered territories and subject allies. These "mini-empires", such as *Carquemish* , *Aram-Zobah* and *Tabal*, grew at the end of the Late Bronze Age but none of them was supreme in Syria or Palestine. They disappeared gradually between 950-850 BCE when the kingdom of *Aram-Damascus* took over the rule in the region, before being itself conquered and absorbed by the Neo-Assyrian empire (Provan 2003: 231).

time, since the Early Bronze Age (3500-2200 BCE) and until Iron Age I (1200-900 BCE), there always *seemed* to have been *two* different entities –northern and southern- situated in the highlands of Palestine. They became the independent kingdoms of Israel and Judah. [9]

Moreover, a study of the settlements in the highlands of Palestine reveals clearly that these two different regions concentrated around two places: *Shechem* (the old capital of the northern kingdom of Israel) and Jerusalem (the traditional historical capital of the southern kingdom of Judah). Between them a dividing line or border remained for a long period of time that would mark the natural and historical frontier between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. We believe that both regions had similarities and differences. Both regions would have worshipped the same god Yahweh among other deities, shared many legends and heroes, a common past, spoke a similar language or dialects derived from Hebrew and the same writing system. On the other hand, the demographic composition was different, as was the economic potential and the relationship with their neighbours.[10]

The result of these differences was the greater development of the north compared to the south. The northern region was close to the *Jezreel* valley, which is an extremely rich agricultural area that also served as the principal overland route of trade and communication between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Besides, in the east of this region there was a desert steppe area which was less arid and rugged than further south; one could not allow the free movement of people or trade in this region, especially in the case of the ports of the Phoenician coast. For this reason, any territorial entity that arose in the north of Palestine had greater economic potential than those of the south.

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[9] A historical explanation for the rise of these two independent Hebrew speaking kingdoms could be found in three reasons. First, the increase of population in the Iron Age II (above 100,000), supported a population sufficiently large to organize a state first in the north and later in the south. Second, there was a large sedentary population, especially in the northern Central Hills. Third, there was an increase of major urban centres as Dan, Hazor, Gezer and Lachish; but the most important were *Shechem* and later Samaria in the Central Hills during the 9th and 8th centuries BCE and Jerusalem in the south during the 8th and 7th centuries BCE (Noll 2001: 201).

[10] Some Egyptian sources also mention the political geography of Palestine and identify two highland centres in *Shechem* and Jerusalem. Indeed, in one of the campaign of the Egyptian general Khu-Sebek there is a mention about the "land" of *Shechem* as one of the most important centres of the territory. Also a letter of *Tel-el-Amarna* mentioned two city-states and two kings: Abdi-Heba of Jerusalem and Labayu of *Shechem*.

In this historical scenario, this entity could become known as "Israel" or the northern kingdom mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. It was situated precisely in the region of the Central Hills of Palestine and became into a political power around the 9th century BCE. This means that the northern kingdom became a territory governed by bureaucratic machinery, social stratification, large building activity, and developed settlement system and prospering economic project thanks to trade with neighbouring regions, especially Phoenicia.

Indeed, from an archaeological point of view, during the 9th century BCE it is possible to identify this entity as *a small Phoenician satellite state* established first in the city of *Shechem* and subsequently at Samaria, which dominated the Central Hills and *Jezreel* of Palestine. It could be identified as Phoenician because Phoenicia was the richest and technologically most dynamic region in the coastal plain of Palestine during the Iron Age. Thus, following this archaeological evidence, there was a Phoenician core periphery political economy which became a politically and culturally dominant area exerting extreme influence over less developed peripheral regions. However, as one moves south and east, this level of material cultures diminishes gradually. For this reason, the central hills developed prior to the Judean Hill; the region of Ammon was advanced prior to Moab; and Moab prior to Edom. [11]

With respect to this historical entity, some scholars and ancient sources call it "Samaria" "Israel", "northern kingdom of Israel" or simply "the House of Omri". The last name is explained by the fact that at the beginnings of the 9th century BCE, a royal

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[11] We believe that the kingdom of Israel at Samaria appears to have emerged as a direct response to Phoenician investment in the Central Hills of Palestine, because once that kingdom was established, it gradually became a new core area, exerting influence to the south and east. Thus Jerusalem should have emerged as a major city at the end of the 9th century BCE or at the beginning of 8th century BCE, and Edom emerged last of all, in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE. Indeed, the dominance of Phoenicia in the material culture of Palestine during Iron Age I and II, demonstrated by the Phoenician style in pottery, the carving of ivory, the manufacture of metal products, the design of horse drawn chariots and the use of cedar lumber and dressed stones for buildings. All these influences reflect the leading role of the Phoenician culture. However, the most important legacy is in the Palestine writing, because of the style of alphabet adopted by Aramaic, Israelites, Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites derived from the Phoenician script. Also the archaeology confirm the influence of the Phoenician culture altogether with other such as Syrian and Neo-Hittite on the north of Palestine. Specifically, the Cypro-Phoenician pottery, the ivories found in Samaria with Phoenician influence, administrative and monumental building influenced by the Syrian *bit-ilani* structure and proto Aeolic capital and masonry often thought to be Phoenician imports (Grabbe 2007: 128; Noll 2001: 207).

family ruled this region and established as capital the city of Samaria. Thus, the Neo-Assyrian sources, for example, called this kingdom as *Bit Humri*[12]

By Provan (2003: 263):

The Omrides (named after the first of their line, Omri) were the first northern kings to establish a dynasty successfully after the period of relative instability that ensued following the division of the kingdoms. So identified with this dynasty did the northern kingdom become, indeed, that even after the Omride period the kingdom could be referred to in Assyrian records as "the land of Omri". Of Omri himself, however, we know very little, whether from biblical or other sources. Apart from the manner of his accession to the throne, we are informed in the biblical texts only about his purchase of the hill of Samaria and his building on the new northern capital there (1 Kings 16. 23-28).

However, the description of the Hebrew Bible presents the early history of this northern kingdom as one of great political instability attributed to the religious situation of this kingdom because their rulers –the Omrides- imitated and adopted foreign cults (1 Kings 16. 31) with violence, idolatry and greed. This is a great historical problem because the authors of the biblical book of Kings were much more interested in the religious situation of the northern kingdom –introducing foreign gods, murdering faithful priests and prophets and violating the Israelite sacred traditions with impunity- that information about the political situation. Besides, we have to consider that their authors wrote one or two centuries after the events that they were describing and, eventually, they never lived in the northern kingdom of Israel but in the southern kingdom of Judah.

By Finkelstein and Silberman (2001: 177 and 186) the biblical stories about the Omrides:

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[12] In this respect, there is a coincidence with the biblical narratives which made mention of this royal family, after the end of the Unified Monarchy of David and Solomon, who ruled the north of the country. They were called Omrides because of the King Omri and his descendants Ahab, Ahaziah and Jeroham. However, other successors as the general Jehu, who massacred the Omride family, also were considered as members of this royal family. From the Neo-Assyrian point of view, *Bit Humri* was *the* power of the Central Hills of Palestine. Indeed, as Jehu was pledging that power's fealty to the Assyrians, they were willing to declare Jehu as a legitimate king of *Bit Humri*. In this way, by Neo-Assyrian political adoption, Jehu became a son of Omri.

…is so thoroughly filled with inconsistencies and anachronisms and so obviously influenced by the theology of 9th century BCE writers, that it must be considered more of a historical novel than a accurate historical chronicle (…) the Omride archaeology was usually considered just a sidelight on the main agenda of biblical archaeology given less attention that the Solomonic period. The earliest architectural parallels to the distinctive palaces dug at Megiddo and initially attributed to Solomon) came from northern Syria –the supposed place of origin of this type- in the 9th century BCE, a full century after the time of Solomon. This was precisely the time of Omrides.

Why would the biblical authors transfer details of King Omri's capital at Samaria in the early 9th century BCE back in time to the story of King Solomon's capital at Jerusalem in the 10th century BCE? The answer to this question can be inferred from two observations. First, social anthropologists –who study the way in which stories about famous men of the past are told in traditional cultures- who have noted that there is a common tendency to these tales: to allow details from a less famous person's story 'migrate' toward a more famous person (Noll, 2001: 206).

In this case, the Hebrew Bible was written by people who lived in Jerusalem sometime during or after the Iron Age II. These authors did not live in Samaria, and their interest in a king of the Jerusalem of earlier times would be much greater that any interest in a king of Samaria in earlier times. Second, it should be noted that Solomon is a hero for the author of the Hebrew Bible, albeit an ironic one, but Omri was a king whom the biblical storytellers appear to have disliked intensely. The natural tendency in such circumstances would be to permit favoured portions of the story to 'walk' from Omri to Solomon.

Second, the northern hill country was always richer and more resourceful, its population was also relatively large (over 350,000 habitants) and it was a multiethnic society which mixed different ecosystems and a heterogeneous population of Israelites, Canaanites, Arameans and Phoenicians. Although the 9th century BCE witnessed the emergence of many new states in Palestine, it seems that only the northern kingdom of Israel could have reached a high level of social evolution so to become one of the most powerful kingdoms of the area.

This was possible because the northern kingdom of Israel was an active participant in the economic revival of this geographical area as supplier of valuable agricultural products –oil and vineyard- and owner of the most important overland trade routes of the Syro-Palestine region (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001: 193). On the other hand, its connection with the maritime trade in the Eastern Mediterranean region, especially by the Phoenician harbour cities which connected with Greece, Cyprus, Anatolia, Egypt and Aegean isles. This explains the strong Phoenician artistic influence in the Israelite culture, the large quantities of Cypriot-Phoenician style vessels found in Israel and some biblical reference about royal marriage between Israelite kings and Phoenician princess as the story of the King Ahab.

However, this prosperity also produced the rivalry between the northern kingdom Israel and other neighbouring kingdoms of the region. Such was the case of the Aram-Damascus, an Aramaic kingdom which had ambitions for the resources of Israel. For this reason, the Aramaean king Hazael made some incursions into the territory formerly controlled by Israel (2 Kings 10. 32-33). The immediate consequence was the Aramaean control of the upper Jordan valley devastating major Israelite administrative centres, losing effective control of its most fertile agricultural region.

Meanwhile, a new political and imperial entity appeared in this time: the *Neo-Assyrian empire*. The origin of this Assyrian state has been situated in the area around the modern Mosul. It became an imperialistic military empire as the result of having been overrun by the Mitanni empire in the middle of the second millennium BCE. As a consequence, Assyria developed a policy of military expansion, conquering neighbour states which provided booty, taxes and tributes useful for preserving the imperial system. This process was repeated for a long period 1400-700 BCE, with one interruption around 1000 BCE, when the Assyrians were overstretched as a result of the historical situation that existed at the end of the Bronze Age (Lambert 2004: 352).

Thus, a study of the historical reality during the Iron Age II shows that the most important political power in this period was precisely the Neo-Assyrian empire. Around the 9th century BCE, Assyria had secured its hold over the northern and southern of Mesopotamia. After that, they started an expansion westward for securing the income from the lucrative international trade on the Mediterranean and the land routes from Egypt and Arabia. For this reason, the Neo-Assyrian empire needed to bring the entire

Syria-Palestine region under its rule. Notwithstanding, it was not an easy project. Indeed, the Neo-Assyrian sources reveal that many of the Syro-Palestine powers buried their differences and created military coalitions against the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Van de Mieroop 2007: 225).

These Syro-Palestine powers decided to create a coalition against this new power coming from Mesopotamia, facing in the battle of *Qarqar* in 853 BCE, where the Assyrian army defeated a coalition army of the Syro-Palestine region led by the Aramaean King Hadadezer of Damascus, son of the King Hazael. One of the most important allies of Hadaddezer was the Israelite king Ahab who supplied with a large number of chariots and troops. This would prove that *Bit Humri* was an important element in the historic reality of the Syro-Palestine region during the Iron Age II, before Assyria secured the victory and could impose an *Assyrian Peace* at the end of this period.

The defeat of the Syro-Palestine coalition produced a gradual internal weakness of the Israelite state. This would explain the real situation described in some epigraphic evidence as the *Mesha* stele and the *Tel Dan* inscription. Both monuments reflect the Israelite weakness which controlled some neighbour states as Dan and Moab but, suddenly, they became free thanks to Israelite defeat in *Qarqar*. Notwithstanding, the local kings from Syria and Palestine usually retained their thrones by pledging fealty to their new suzerain, the king of Assyria. Indeed, the Neo-Assyrian empire was an intricate network of provinces –"the land of Assur"- and vassal kingdoms – "the yoke of Assur"- on all sides of the Assyrian heartland (Van de Mieroop 2004: 241).

In fact, local kings who were vassals of Assyria were viewed by their Neo-Assyrian lords not as governors on behalf of Assyria, but as real kings of their own lands and over their subjects. That means, a vassal kingdom under Neo-Assyrian rule was a kingdom that remained politically independent of the Assyrian king, but paid taxes and tributes to this power. Besides, the vassal kingdom was obliged to supply troops and resources for the Assyrian king's army and pursue political policies that were in the best interests of the empire.

We have to consider that this policy of vassalage was common in many periods of Antiquity because its political structure was useful for all parties involved. It was better for an imperial power to allow conquered people to have their own government

instead of dismantling that government and transform the conquered kingdom into an imperial province. In this case, a vassal kingdom paid taxes and tribute in the same form that a province contributed to imperial coffers, but it was far less trouble to maintain. Thanks to this policy, many vassal kingdoms could and did flourish under the control of the Neo-Assyrian empire, and many local kings of Syrian and Palestine sought Assyrian suzerainty as they struggled with local rivals (Van de Mieroop 2004: 228-229).

Thus, the Israelite King Jehu decided to change the orientation of the external policy of his kingdom, especially because of the defeat of the Syro-Palestine coalition. After the end of the regional hegemony of Aram-Damascus, King Jehu decided to become loyal to the Neo-Assyrian empire and, in the same way, his kingdom became the most favoured vassal of the Assyrian power. Owing to this new external policy, the northern kingdom of Israel recovered the territories that it had been lost before during the confrontation against the Aramaean power, extending the boundaries of Israel well into the former territories of Aram-Damascus.

It is possible to consider this period of renaissance of the northern kingdom of Israel, under the influence and the protection of the Neo-Assyrian empire, was a period of unparalleled prosperity in the Israelite kingdom in the 8th century BCE. In this matter, there was an unprecedented expansion of olive oil and vineyard production developed in Samaria which helped in the development of the Israelite economy. Thus, with no significant military threat, the population of the northern kingdom of Israel expanded dramatically, and by the late of the 9th BCE, the highlands of Samaria and the northern valleys were the most densely settled regions in the whole of Palestine.[13]

However, the creation of this powerful Israelite state produced conflicts in the old Israelite order and had forced aside the egalitarian ideal of the period before these important changes. Suddenly, a prosperous stratum of landowner, officials, military and merchants had set themselves above the traditional small farmers who survived on self-

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[13] The archaeological evidence proves that in this region there were settlements built on rocky spurs, with scores of olive presses and other processing installations that were cut in the bedrock around the villages of this region. Possibly, many of them were royal estates built for this purpose. In the same period was elaborated the famous "*ostraca* of Samaria", a 63 ink inscribed pottery piece written in Hebrew in the time of the Israelite king Jeroboam II, which recorded the shipment of oil and wine from these villages to the capital of the kingdom. It is important to consider that Jeroboam II is the earliest Israelite monarch from whom we have an official seal, found in Megiddo, with the classical design of lion typical of the 8th century BCE (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001: 207).

sufficiency. This creeping social development became more critical when, in the 8th century BCE, many small farmers were forced to the brink by the tougher economic conditions.

There are two phenomena that testify for that situation. First, the appearance in Israel of an increase of monetary transactions and the number of exchanges transaction overall. This increase is not good for subsistence peasants because the payments they must make to the outside world, taxes, loan repayments, payment for goods, are assessed in monetary unit mostly after the harvest when the prices of their produce are at their lowest, while the loans that they take out are necessarily made when prices are high. Second, the prevalence of jars handles inscribed *lmlk* from shows that the Israelite crown was disposing of large quantities of oil and wine, either heavy taxes or from its own estate (Houston 2004: 138).

These politics had one objective: the only remaining source of finance was agricultural production, and taxes levied on it must have started to increase at this point. The more prosperous families would have been able to deal with the threat by specializing in higher value crops as the oil. But the less prosperous families were faced with a serious situation in going into debt to their patron or state. Thus, the 8th century BCE in Israel offered the right conditions for the development of economic pressure on the peasantry sufficiently severe to be seen as an internal social crisis.

There are very important consequences of this situation. On one hand, it is at the height of prosperity of the northern kingdom of Israel under the rule of Jeroboam II that it is possible to identify the full complement of the criteria of a statehood. That means bureaucracy administration, specialized economy, professional army and the first expression of literacy. On the other hand, these advantages were useful for the first protest against this new order.

Thus, the oracles of the first prophets such as Amos and Hosea belong to this period.[14] Their scathing denunciations of the corruption and of impious aristocracy of

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[14] We have to consider that the geopolitical viewpoint of the book of Amos belongs to the 8th century BCE, for this reason, the "Israel" of Amos is, really, the northern kingdom of Israel, although some later editors included Judah in some verses (Amos 3. 1). Thus, the accusations by Amos against Israel that we found in Amos 2. 6-8 are an integral part of the oracles against the nation series, which have been identified as being historical reality of the 8th century BCE. Unfortunately, the book of Amos is more

the northern kingdom of Israel have served both to document the opulence of this era, and also to express the first ideas that would have a profound effect on the crystallization of the documents that became the sources –such as the E and P- of the Hebrew Bible in the future: critiques about the social injustices, idolatry and domestic tensions that international trade and dependence on Neo-Assyrian empire have brought.

However, this period also produced a change in the imperial ideology of the Neo-Assyrian empire. In the first half of the 8th century BCE this empire had lost its capacity to campaign outside its borders. Owing to this situation, many provincial governors and vassal states were able to act with a great deal of independence with respect to Assyrian authority. For this reason, the Assyrian state was restructured internally, campaigned almost annually outside its borders for incorporating foreign territories to its empire as provinces and deporting peoples for avoiding future resistances of the local populations.

Thus, Assyrian kings Tiglat-piliser III and Sargon II transformed Assyria into a brutal and predatory state with direct control over old vassal states, such as the northern kingdom of Israel after an attempt at rebellion (Luckenbill 1926: 276 and 279; 1964: 40). Whereas the Assyrian conquest of this kingdom was temporary and localized to major urban centres, in 727 BCE most of the territory of the northern kingdom of Israel had been annexed directly to the Neo-Assyrian empire. This involved a large level of destruction in the region of Samaria judging by the archaeological data found in the excavations of *Taanach*, *Dothan*, *Tell el-Far'ah*, *Gezer*, *Lachish* and *Raphia* (Houston 2001: 157).

One important phenomenon, in the case of the intervention of Sargon II, was the deportation of the inhabitants of the northern kingdom of Israel, and their replacement with new groups from rebellious areas of the south of Mesopotamia. They were settled in Samaria and in the strategic area around *Bethel*, producing some effects in demographic, ethnic and religious aspects. Indeed, the biblical book of Kings (2 Kings 17. 24-17) made mention of foreign people who were sent to Palestine bringing their

interested in the religious conflicts and social injustices of the northern kingdom at this time than describes achieves of this northern kingdom.

own gods and cultic customs. This led to the religious pollution of the Israelite religion with intrusive elements of foreign religion.[15]

On the other hand, the former northern kingdom of Israel was divided into a number of different Assyrian administrative districts. Two of the regional capitals were located in Megiddo and Samaria, and perhaps another two in *Dor* and *Gilead*. Assyrian influence is reflected in Assyrian-type palaces, residences, inscriptions, seals, and pottery. In the last case, a special type of pottery carrying cuneiform signs was found at some sites in the highlands of Samaria which have been related to this newly arrived people from Mesopotamia.

In spite of that, there is no evidence of the dismantling of the northern kingdom of Israel and its replacement by a system of Assyrian provinces proving destructive to the survival of the native Israelite culture.[16] Specifically, there is no compelling evidence that Neo-Assyrian power systematically imposed its own religious practices on subject peoples. Meanwhile these peoples paid tributes and taxes to the New-Assyrian administration; the Mesopotamian empire neither interfered with local customs and practices nor demanded that local population abandon their customs and religious practices (2 Kings 17. 24-32).

Indeed, during the reign of Sargon II and his successors, the Neo-Assyrian empire was more interested in controlling the Syro-Palestine region, encouraging the development of more trade with the Phoenician cities, Cyprus, Arabia, Egypt and other places in the west. After defeating the Aramaean and the Israelite states, the Assyrians could enlarge their markets for trade. Under this point of view, the policy of forced

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[15] However, there are some discrepancies with this view. By some scholars, such as Coggins and Schur, the foreign immigrants were placed or confined to one area, in the city of Samaria itself, but they did not mix with native Israelites to form a new amalgam and syncretistic religion. Also some of the prophets of 6th century BCE, as Jeremiah and Ezekiel repeatedly refer to northern Israelite and the wish of reunification of the north and the south. There are not mentions about strange people as having displaced the original Israelite tribes of the north (Houston 2001: 159).

[16] We have to consider that the expedition of the Assyrian King Sargon II (Luckenbill 1964: 2-70) did not mention how many people were transported to Samaria by him or other Assyrian kings. Also the Assyrian records present a complex picture of the conquest of Samaria, because they speak of siege, victory and deportation; notwithstanding this the texts speak of maintaining an equal amount of tax and tribute from Samaria, besides the integration of a Samarian chariot contingent into the army of Sargon II. According to this point of view, the Neo-Assyrian royal inscription indicates a conquest and integration rather than devastation.

population movement had several geopolitical purposes: conscription into the armed forces, weakening of local region, providing labour in needed areas, maintaining psychological control over rebellious states and securing the western border against Egypt.

It could have been the end of the northern kingdom of Israel and its culture. However the Assyrian destruction of Samaria and the dismantling of its institutions produced a flow of refugees –included priest, prophets and scribes- who searched shelter in some cities and towns in the south of Palestine where other entities had emerged in parallel to the northern kingdom of Israel. It was a dynasty of chiefs who consolidated its power at Jerusalem and will become a complex state only a few generations after the Omride dynasty in the north. They were known in the Bible and in an ancient inscription as *Bet Dawid* or "the house of David". The history and the Hebrew Bible called it the *southern kingdom of Judah.*

Archaeological evidence suggests that just with the coming of Tiglatpileser III and the direct Assyrian control over Palestine, the southern kingdom of Judah and its capital, the city of Jerusalem, became an Neo-Assyrian vassal state. It was able to flourish and became the economic and political centre of Palestine, enjoyed the direct imperial support from Assyria.[17] Thus, like the northern kingdom of Israel in the 8th century BCE, at the beginning of the 7th century BCE the southern kingdom of Judah became a fully fledge state under the influence of the Neo-Assyrian dominance. Its capital, Jerusalem, expanded from 10-12 acres to 150 with a population of 15,000 inhabitants.

This period was the time of the King Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, who remained as a loyal vassal under Neo-Assyrian rule. The archaeological evidence demonstrates that the southern kingdom of Judah enjoyed this period of Neo-Assyrian domination, especially thanks to its participation in the Arabian trade and the Neo-Assyrian

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[17] Whereas the Hebrew Bible describes a miracle which permitted that the southern kingdom of Judah and its king Hezekiah survived the siege by the Assyrian Sennacherib (2 Kings 19. 32-37), there is not archaeological evidence that Jerusalem was invested by the Assyrian army by a siege mound and an Assyrian army camped outside its wall. Perhaps it was blocked by their communication routes, but the nearest evidence of the Assyrian army was at *Ramat Rahel* which is four kilometres from Jerusalem. That means, the southern kingdom of Judah did not suffer the destiny of its neighbour and relative kingdom of Israel (Grabbe 2007: 177).

support.[18] The final result was a long period of peace and prosperity. We have to consider that his name appears occasionally in Neo-Assyrian records belonging to the period of Esarhaddon (680-669 BCE) and Ashurbanipal (668-630 BCE).[19]

However, it is strange that the Hebrew Bible describes Manasseh as an evil king (2 Kings 21. 1-18), despite the fact his subjects apparently lived in one of finest moments of Jerusalem. The reason could be found in the archaeological data found in the south of Palestine such as the sudden increase of the quantity of written objects belonging to the 7th century BCE. In this matter, they consisted basically of seals, *ostraca* and inscribed weights.

This phenomenon is apparently not found in other neighbouring New-Assyrian provinces or vassal states. For this reason, it is possible to see this period of the 7th century BCE as that of a major increase in the production and use of written objects in the southern kingdom of Judah, and also asthe period in which the earliest version of the Hebrew Bible –with the combination of J, E, JE, D and P- was written (Noll 2001: 226).

We know that around 720 BCE, when the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed and the southern kingdom of Judah was surrounded by Neo-Assyrian provinces, the southern kingdom of Judah suffered a dramatic internal development because of the thousands of refugees from the conquered kingdom of Israel who fled to the south. It seems that in this historical context that the monotheistic tradition of the *Yahwism* was born.

It was expressed in the cycle of stories belonging to Elijah and Elisha which were set down in writing after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel and also in the

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[18] Using the Neo-Assyrian sources as evidence, it is possible to suggest the importance of the southern kingdom of Judah in the trade route from Arabia. The Assyrians considered Gaza to be an important trading centre for the empire and built some forts in *Qadesh-Barnea* and *Haseva* for the protection of this trade. Also we have to consider the centre of production of olive oil in the old Philistine city of *Ekron*, which was not part of Judah, but this kind of product only could come from the Samarian and Judeans highlands. That means Assyrians, Arabs, Phoenician, Edomites and, finally, Judahites, were involved in this thriving commercial activity (Grabbe 2007: 174).

[19] Manasseh is listed in a record as one of the king from the Syro-Palestine region who provided forced workers for the purpose of transporting materials to the new palace of Essarhadon built in Nineveh and the new Assyrian city of Kar-Esarhaddon on the Phoenician coast. In the second case, Manasseh sent his troops as support of Ashurbanipal during the Assyrian campaign against Egypt in 667 BCE and also gave him gifts (Luckenbill, 2004: 265).

works of the prophets Amos and Hosea. That means, in the movement originated among dissident priest and prophets in the last days of the northern kingdom, who share some common ideas: they were against the idolatry and the social injustice developed during the Neo Assyrian period in the northern kingdom of Israel.

However, Manasseh wanted to integrate Judah into the Neo-Assyrian world economy, specifically the trade in exotic luxury goods and the mass production and distribution of olive. It seems that Manasseh apparently calculated correctly that the economic recuperation of Judah depended on the interests of Assyria. Looking at this from another point of view, if Manasseh wanted to recover the Judahite economic, he needed the cooperation of the networks of village elders and clans who had different modes if worship at long venerated local high places, such as the cults of other gods as *Baal*, *Asherah* besides Yahweh. This could be the reason for his later evil image as a blasphemer and apostate in the biblical narratives (2 Kings 21. 3-7), apart from his friendship with the Neo-Assyrian empire. (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001: 265).

In another matter, this period is also the time of the decline of the Neo-Assyrian empire. This Mesopotamian power had become too large to maintain and many vassal kingdoms went on the warpath against their suzerain. When the Assyrian king Assurbanipal died in 630 BCE, the Neo Assyrian empire entered into a extended period of civil wars and general strife. In the same period, Babylon emerged as new power in the region. Thus, the city of Assur was destroyed by Media in 614 BCE; meanwhile Babylonians destroyed the great cultural city of Nineveh, which had been the capital of Neo-Assyrian empire since the days of Sennacherib.

Thus, the situation of the southern kingdom of Judah was very special. Palestine was far from the centre of these events, and owing to this, the influence of the Neo-Assyrian empire declined between 639-630 BCE, because this empire was not capable of exercising effective control in this region. In other matters, it is interesting that such a biblical author as Nahum was pleased about the destruction of the Neo-Assyrian power; meanwhile another, Jonah, speculated about the fate of Nineveh and the possibility of its salvation. Perhaps it is the manifestation of the ambiguous relationship between the southern kingdom of Judah and the Mesopotamian power, because Judah cooperated with and even integrated itself into the global economy of the Neo-Assyrian empire.

Notwithstanding, the appearance of the Judahite King Josiah and his religious reform was decisive for the destiny of the southern kingdom of Judah with respect to the Neo-Assyrian empire. What could be the historical reason of this religious reform? Perhaps it was motivated by the Neo-Assyrian decline in the region and the feeling of freedom of the Neo-Assyrian yoke by the King Josiah. Indeed, King Josiah is clearly envisaged as seeking to reform worship both in Judah and also in the territory that had belonged to the northern kingdom of Israel what was indeed an Assyrian province (2 Kings 23.4-20; 2 Chronicles 34. 3-7).

Another important aspect is that both the biblical books of Kings and Chronicles portray Josiah as one who pursued what was a new vision of the old Israelite religion. A purer form of *Yawhism* in line with the Law of Moses such as the one contained in the book of Deuteronomy is the quest for the imposition –or "restoration"- of the Davidic dynasty over all Israel; the unification of the land belonging to Israel and Judah under one king ruling from Jerusalem; and the destruction of the cult centres in the north and the centralization of the Israelite cult in Jerusalem.

The archaeological findings in the lands of both Israel and Judah reveal the existence of clay figurines, incense altars, libation vessels and offering stands in many high places before and after the period of King Josiah. Historians conclude that all these artefacts are part of complex rituals intended to appeal to heavenly powers for fertility. It was a kind of religious cult which was very popular in the Syro-Palestine region during the Late Bronze and Iron Age. The practice and rituals were highly varied, geographically decentralized and certain not restricted to worship of Yahweh only in the temple of Jerusalem, as the Israelite religion is known nowadays.

Indeed, the rituals for the fertility of the land and the blessing of the ancestors among the clans throughout the Syro-Palestine region differ and we can suppose that local customs and traditions –such as the biblical narratives of the Patriarchs- insisted that Israelites or Judahites inherited their houses, land and tombs from their God and their ancestors. For this reason, the sacrifices were offered at shrines within domestic compounds, at family tombs and at open altars.

These elements reflect that an ancestral worship was not considered apostasy at the beginning; it was part of the timeless tradition of the first settlers of Israel and Judah who worshiped Yahweh along with a variety of gods and goddesses known and adopted

from the cults of neighbour peoples. In the same matter, Yahweh was worshiped in a wide variety of ways perhaps motivated by the Neo-Assyrian policy of religious freedom in its provinces and vassal states (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001: 242).[20]

However, after the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel, some people who followed an exclusivist idea of the Israelite god Yahweh in this kingdom fled southward to promulgate their ideas, joined with other priestly circles connected with the Temple of Jerusalem. They wanted to achieve a religious and economic control over the increasingly developed southern kingdom of Judah. In this way, both factors played an important part in the Judahite court after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel, when these refugees, the Judahite priests and a royal character as King Josiah decided to work together. In the same matter, but under a political point of view, this reform was useful for ruling a kingdom. Specially because the old idolatry was a symbol of chaotic social diversity, inherited by the leaders of the ancient Israelite and Judahite clans in the outlying areas who conducted their own system of economic, politic and social relations with no control by the court of Jerusalem. Such as Noll says (2001: 134):

> It is argued that by centralizing sacrificial liturgies in the capital city, Josiah was trying to accomplish at least two goals, one political and one economic. Politically, he was issuing a religious propaganda designed to win the hearts of people living in the Assyrian province of Samaria (the Central Hills, a region that had been occupied by the Kingdom of Israel prior to 722 BCE). The propaganda promised to restore the ideal empire of King David and Solomon, bring the former Kingdom of Israel back to life as a Kingdom of Israel-Judah in Jerusalem, make Jerusalem the religious centre for all worshipers of Yahweh and *therefore*, make all worshipers loyal to the king in Jerusalem –the king who happened to be, not by coincidence, Josiah. Economically, the centralization program would close outlying temples, thus forcing people to bring their religious offering, which were a form of tax, to Jerusalem. That would mean greater revenues for the crown.

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[20] The Hebrew Bible itself confirms that even during the period of Solomon, worshiping of other gods as *Chemosh* of Moab and *Ashtoreth* of Sidon was common inside the kingdom (1 Kings 11. 5: 2 Kings 23. 13). Also Jeremiah says that the number of deities worshiped at Jerusalem equalled the number of bazaars (Jer. 11. 13). Finally, in Ezekiel 8 describes all the abominations that its author sees inside of the temple of Jerusalem, including the worship of a Mesopotamian god Tammuz.

It was in this historical context that the old literacy material, wrote both in the northern and southern kingdoms, was joined and assembled, producing the first version of the Hebrew Bible (the fusion of the sources J, E, JE, D and P). For this task, some scribes compiled ancient literacy works, which were revised, rewritten, and complemented with different kinds of contributions. But it was only after the exile in Babylon, in the 6th century BCE, when the last redaction (R) was made and the Hebrew Bible, such as it is know nowadays, was born.

1.5 The development of the biblical literature in the northern and southern kingdoms.

We have to remember that writing was originally a system of records developed by ancient agrarian societies and used to record economic transaction such as receipts, letters or economic documents. For this reason, the group dedicated to the art of writing, the scribes, became a class employed by the rulers in administrative centres such as temples and palaces. Perhaps because of this administrative work, and the expertise accumulated, the scribes were indispensable as medium of diplomacy. Indeed, producing inscriptions, annals and treaties became an important task for this kind of specialists.

In a similar way, the scribes accumulated and codified knowledge for their lords and perpetuated their own craft by education. Also they developed on their own account, creating different works which exposed their stories, values and interests. As Davis says (1998: 19):

Hence, thought the scribe was an indispensable part of the administration, he was not of the ruling elite itself. Scribes absorbed the culture of the regime that they served, and also, to a much lesser extent, perhaps that of the rural population as well. In that sense, written texts, though overwhelmingly the product of the scribal *hand*, are not necessarily all products of the scribal *mind*. And the necessity of serving rulers to whom they may have regarded themselves as intellectually superior no doubt instilled in the scribes the techniques of satire

and ambiguity: the ability to inscribe on the surface of a political text their own traces.[21]

Some civilizations of the Ancient Near East, such as Egypt and Mesopotamia, developed a scribal class which reached high levels of sophistication. That implies the existence of scribal schools, an educational system, reading of other languages, principles of archiving and some administrative function. However, there are some doubts whether the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah could have developed their own school of scribes in this level of development during the Iron Age I and II or whether this was only a later practice belonging to the Persian or Hellenistic periods.

It seems that the oldest epigraphic evidence for the Northwest Semitic or Proto-Canaanite alphabet could be dated between the 14th-11th centuries BCE; meanwhile other kinds of alphabets such as Aramaic and Mycenaean have been dated in Palestine about the 11th century BCE. However, with the exception of the Phoenician examples in cities as Byblos, there is a dearth of monumental and other inscription that could be associated with a functioning state in the 10th century BCE, such as we have seen in the historical context of these kingdoms. Indeed, there is a limited evidence of writing in the period of David and Solomon, which were short and functional inscription with no relationship with any kind of administrative character (Grabbe 2007: 117).

From an anthropological point of view, we have to consider other matters as well. A scribal school needs requirements such as a monarchic state, administrative class, population concentration, monumental architecture, luxury goods, commercial trades and economic production. According to this, it was possible that the major Canaanites cities of the period of the Israelite settlement had scribal schools. In the same way, under David and Solomon as well, and that new royal schools were set up in many cities as *Arad*, *Qadesh-Barnea* and *Kuntillet 'Ajrud*. Thus, it is possible that other kinds of schools dedicated to prophetic and priestly literature were developed in other

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[21] Thus, as pointed out by Davis himself, the scribal tradition involved a range of activities such as archiving (possession and control of the present), historiography (possession and control of the past), didactic writing (maintenance of social values among the elite), and predictive writing (possession and control of the future). For this reason, the traditional ethos that we can find inside this class created – including the Israelite scribe class- works about instruction, speculation on the meaning of life, social ethics and cosmology (Davis 1998: 75).

areas of the kingdom and they helped to form the future biblical literature existing in the J and E sources.[22]

However, other scholars (Noll 2001: 174) disagree with this point of view. The main objection is that even with the development and increased simplicity of the Phoenician alphabet used by the first Hebrew writing belonging to the period of David and Solomon, literacy never succeeded in passing beyond the possession of specialized groups. Also it is important to consider that the concept of literacy could be restricted to an ability to read some signs or to write business transactions, but not necessarily to the ability to compose and develop its own literature, such as the sources J or E.

An epigraphic study of the ancient Syro-Palestine region confirms that between 1200-587 BCE the West Semitic epigraphy, to which Israel belonged also linguistically, had two specific periods. The first one was developed since the beginning of the Iron Age until 830 BCE and consisted principally of some inscriptions, generally confined to Phoenician culture in Byblos, or slight evidence of writing activity in Palestine during the 10th century BCE. In the Palestinian case, it was a small poem about agricultural seasons composed in the city of Gezer. It is called *Gezer Calendar*, and it was not composed in biblical Hebrew, but it bears minor resemblance to archaic portions of the Hebrew Bible (Noll 2001: 74).

From the end of the 9th century BCE until 587 BCE, the North West Semitic inscriptions become more numerous inside the historical context of the Ancient Near East, which included Egypt, southern Anatolia, Syro-Palestine and northern Mesopotamia. According to this evidence the development of the first writing in the ancient kingdom of Israel and Judah could also have developed the first expressions of biblical literature especially between 8th-7th centuries BCE.

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[22] This kind of evidence could be restricted to three levels: epigraphic, scriptural and comparative. The first consist of bits of writing on *ostraca*, which consists in pieces of pottery commonly used as writing material used as abecedaries; the second is supported by allusions in the canonical literature to book and writing; and the last one is applied in comparison with the evidence of school education in Egypt and Mesopotamia which are adduced as an analogy to Israel and Judah, specifically as support of a very early and extensive schools in these kingdom. Also some scholars consider the biblical reference in 2 Samuel 8. 16-18; 20. 23-26 and 1 Kings 4. 1-6 where are mentions about characters who work as scribes, priests and administrators (Davis 1998: 80).

Although we do not have material evidence of the biblical narrative during this period, the study of the different sources of this period allow us to assume that the courts of Israel and Judah had knowledge of written material –either national or foreigner- for different kinds of activities such as archives, administrative records, commemorative inscriptions and, possibly, literature. The main is the existence of some important inscriptions rescued by archaeological digs which could be associated with the biblical narratives in some manner:

- The stele of *Mesha* is a good example of West Semitic royal historiography of the 9th century BCE. Meanwhile the stele of *Dan* identifies the royal house of Judah, which formed part of the diplomatic language of this region. Besides, both inscriptions reveal that royal historiography and propaganda were well developed among the neighbours of Israel and Judah during the second half of the 9th century BCE. For this reason there is apparently no reason why it should not have been the same in the Hebrew kingdoms.

- The stele of *Zakkur* belonged to king of *Hamath* in northern Syria which mentioned the king Barhadad son of Hazael and king of Aram-Damascus. Also this stele is an example of North West Semitic royal historiography which mentioned prophetic oracles which have some parallel with that found in the biblical book of Kings.

- The Aramaic prophetic inscription from *Deir 'Alla* (8th century BCE) is a clear example that Aramaean culture influenced Hebrew culture, confirming the importance of prophecy in the West Semitic world.

- The Aramaic stele from *Bukân*, in Iranian Afghanistan composed of thirteen lines of two fragments with traditional curses against anyone who would damage the stele. It is very instructing that some of these curses are similar to the curses in certain biblical formulations in Leviticus and Jeremiah. By André Lemaire (2001: 372) this example "illustrates well the closeness of the Aramaean and Hebrew cultures, even though the texts come from places several hundreds km distant from each other".

- The inscriptions from *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* and *Khirbet el-Qom* which were written in Phoenician alphabet but in Hebrew language on the surface of a

wall and on fragments of large storage jars. This inscription made reference to the cult of the god Yahweh and his consort *Asherah* ("by the Yahweh of Samaria and by his *asherah*"). It seems that they are connected with both Hebrew kingdoms in the 8th century BCE, prior to the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah and the religious reforms which the biblical tradition attributes to them.

- The seals and *bullae* found in Palaeo-Hebrew writing belonging to 8th century BCE. Some of them mentioned servants or ministers of kings from Israel and Judah. Indeed, the number of *bullae* inscribed in the same kind of writing has grown from several dozen to about one thousand. All this testifies to the development of the use of writing in both Hebrew kingdoms in the same period, corroborating some parts of the book of Jeremiah and 2 Kings which mentions some persons whose names have been identified in some of these inscriptions.

To sum up, all this evidence should confirm that Hebrew inscriptions were not unknown in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah before 587 BCE. Indeed, royal historiography, political propaganda, prophetic literature and administrative inscriptions are well attested in the neighbouring kingdoms and pre-exilic Israel, at least from the second half of the 9th century BCE. Thus, even if all the original biblical narratives that we found in the Hebrew Bible, and more so all the parchments of the monarchical period, written in papyrus, disappeared for ever, we would have to conclude that writing was well known in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah before 587 BCE.

Another important detail is the *historical context* when these inscriptions were elaborated. We know that the literary work in Israel and Judah should have started between 9th-7th centuries BCE. Also we are able to probe that in these centuries the writing was developed both in Israel and Judah by the archaeological inscriptions. Finally, we know that these centuries represent the period of the Neo-Assyrian empire which dominated the Syro-Palestine region with its respective political, economic and cultural influences over many cultures, such as the Israelite and Judahite.

That is important because one of the aspects less known about the Neo-Assyrian civilization is its strong interest in literature and scholarship under the auspices of the palace. Indeed, one of the most important archaeological discoveries in

the 19th century was the library of the Neo-Assyrian king Assurbanipal which was collected in his capital of Nineveh. The number of tablets that belonged to this library has been calculated as approximately 5,000 literary and scholarly texts; there were many letters and administrative documents that detailed many aspects of the state. According to some scholars, this library represents an accurate reflection of all Mesopotamian learning and literature up to that time.

It is possible that many of these texts were acquired, bought or confiscated mostly from the private libraries of Babylon or other places. Also the manuscripts were not merely collected, but in many cases were copied out according to a standard format for the library, because the cuneiform script and the tablet layout were uniform and each tablet had identification as belonged to the Assurbanipal's library. The compositions preserved in Nineveh were of a very varied nature. For example, approximately 300 tablets contained omens, 200 lexical lists, 100 bilingual Sumerian-Acadian texts of varied characters, 60 medical texts and 40 epics and purely literary compositions.

Notwithstanding this, the library of Assurbanipal was not the only one in the period when Israelites and Judahites composed their own literature in the Hebrew Bible. Other Neo-Assyrian cities such as *Kalhu* contained collections of literary and scholarly tablets. Also private houses of this period held collections of tables or libraries. This should prove the importance of the literary culture in the New-Assyrian period. Whereas it is clear that this literacy knowledge derived from Babylon as cultural legacy, the Assyrians had no doubt in incorporating it as an element of their own culture (Van de Mieroop 2004: 250).

Then, could be the first Israelite/Judahite literatures have been developed at the same time under this Neo-Assyrian influence? Indeed, some of the best known stories of the Hebrew Bible belonging to one of the oldest book –Genesis- seems to demonstrate it:

- The story of Joseph mentions camels as beasts of burden and caravan carrying gum, balm and myrrh (Gen. 37. 25). The camel was not domesticated until the 2nd millennium nor was it widely used in the Ancient Near East until after 1000 BCE. Moreover, the main products of the lucrative Arabian trade only flourished under the supervision of the Neo-

Assyrian empire between the 8th to 7th centuries BCE according to the Neo-Assyrian sources themselves.

- The story of the meeting between Isaac and Abimelech, king of Philistines (Gen 26. 1) and the mentions of the city of *Gerar* (Gen 20. 1) have some kind of relationship with the site of *Tel Haror* which was a small and insignificant village in the Iron Age I. But it became a strong and heavily fortified Neo Assyrian administrative stronghold, perhaps under a Philistine administration, between 8th-7th BCE.

- According to Israel Finkelstein & Silberman (2001: 38-39) the genealogies of the patriarchs "…their trysts, marriages and families relations (…) offer a colourful human map of the Ancient Near East from the unmistakable viewpoint of the kingdoms of Israel and the kingdom of Judah in the 8th-7th BCE. These stories offer a highly sophisticated commentary on political affairs in this region in the Neo-Assyrian and the Neo-Babylonian periods".

- The mentions of Aramaeans in the stories of Jacob/Leah/Rachel and Laban have a straight relationship with the Aramaean people who are not mentioned as a distinct ethnic group in the Ancient Near East before 1100 BCE. However they became a dominant factor on the northern border of the Israelites in the 9th century BCE. Thus, the story of Jacob and Laban (Gen 31. 51-54) established a border at east of Jordan which reflects the territorial partition between the kingdom of Aram-Damascus and the northern kingdom of Israel in 9th century before the Neo-Assyrian control of this region between 8th-7th centuries BCE.

- Mentions of people such as Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites (Gen. 19. 30-38; 25 and 27) also reflect events belonging to 8th-7th centuries BCE. We have to consider that during the 9th century BCE Israel dominated the region of Moab until its defeat described in the stele of *Mesha*. Edom did not exist as a distinct political entity until a relatively late period. However, according to Neo-Assyrian sources, we know that there is no Edomite state before the 8th century BCE when it appears in ancient records as a distinctive entity after the conquest of the region by Assyria. Indeed, the capital of Edom in

the Iron Age II –*Bozrah*- grew to become a large city only in the Neo-Assyrian period.

- The mention of the *kedarites*, descendents of Ishmael (Gen. 25. 12-15), who occur for the first time in Assyrian records of the late 8th BCE and also during the reign of Ashurbanipal. One of Ishmael's sons, Tema could be the great caravan oasis of *Tayma* in northwest Arabia which is mentioned in Assyrian and Babylonian source of the 8th-7th centuries BCE. These names were not relevant in the historical experience of the people of Israel before the Neo-Assyrian period. Thus, this kind of biblical genealogy could only be elaborated between the 8th - 6th centuries BCE.

- According to the Egyptologist Donald Redford (1992: 408-419), many of the details of the Exodus story also could be dated in the 7th century BCE. Indeed, this century was the last period of the imperial power of the ancient Egypt under the ruler of the XXVI Dynasty.[23] Two of their pharaohs, Psammetichus I (664-610 BCE) and Necho II (610-595 BCE) were active in building projects in the Delta with foreign workers or migrants from Judah (Jer. 44.1; 16. 14). The city of *Pithon*, mentioned in the Exodus story, was rebuilt in a prominent form in 7th century BCE.

- Finally, we can consider that the story of the conquest of the Promised Land by Joshua also has some reminiscences of the 8th-7th centuries. This is because the northern territories described in the book of Joshua correspond to the vanquished kingdom of Israel and later Assyrian provinces. This book was written under the creative period of literacy production in the southern kingdom of Judah in the 7th century BCE. For this reason, the lists of towns (Josh. 15. 21-62) corresponds to the borders between the vanquished

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[23] We have to consider that, according to Israel Finkelstein, Egypt was transformed by the pharaoh Psammetichus I in an international power after a long period of decadence. He occupied former Neo-Assyrian territories –Philistia, Phoenicia and the former area belonging to the kingdom of Israel- establishing a permanent Egyptian rule in them. In the same period, King Josiah tried to unify his kingdom in Judah with the religious reform –one temple, one state and one dynasty- and also trying to take advantage of the Neo-Assyrian collapse. Perhaps the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh mirrored the momentous confrontation between the young King Josiah –who died in battle fighting against Egyptian forces in Megiddo- and the newly crowned Pharaoh Necho I (Finkelstein & Silberman 2001: 71).

kingdom of Israel with the southern kingdom of Judah under the rule of Josiah, when they were occupied in the final decades of the 7th century BCE. For Judah they were considered the divine legacy of the people of Israel reclaimed by a new Joshua: the King Josiah. Indeed, some characteristics of Joshua such as leadership (Josh. 1. 1-9), successor of Moses (Josh. 1. 16-18), Covenant renewal (Josh. 8. 30-35) and defender of the Law (Josh. 1. 8-9) have parallels with the characteristics of Josiah.

Considering these approaches, both historical and literary, we will study one of the oldest examples of Israelite literature, the Hebrew myths of Genesis 1-11, in our attempt to identify the first expressions of Israelite literature and how they were composed, mixed and redacted under Neo-Assyrian influences.

The Hebrew Myths of Genesis 1-11 and Neo-Assyrian influences.

1.1 The importance of the book of Genesis as an historical subject.

The relevance of the first book of the Hebrew Bible lies in its name. It means the "beginning", the first part of this literary work which has two major parts: *the primeval history* (Genesis 1-11) and the *patriarchal history* (Genesis 12-50). The material concerning to the second part is connected to the story about Patriarchs and their descendants, which differs from the first one in many aspects. This is because the patriarchal history could be placed within a historical context in the Ancient Near Eastern cultures belong to 2nd millennium BCE.

On the other side, the primeval history is composed of myths and legends which have not been situated historically until now. Notwithstanding, it constitutes the earliest stage of the literacy work of to the Hebrew Bible together with some ancient prophetic books. Furthermore, the primeval history of Genesis is the best example of a collection of the literary sources described in the first chapter. For this reason, after the analysis of the historical context of the previous chapter, we will try to identify which of these stories were redacted under Neo-Assyrian influences.

1.2 The Myth of the Creation.

It is possible to identify two different traditions in the first chapters of Genesis. The first is Gen. 1. 1-2. 3, known as the myth of Creation and Gen. 2. 4-3. 24, known as the myth of Garden of Eden. Both of them should have been written in two different periods and put together at a later date during the 6th or 4th centuries BCE. It seems that many details of one of these myths have a distinctly polemical thrust in their own right against other religious ideas that were associated closely with Mesopotamian myths.

The academic consensus says (Friedman 1997: 246) the tradition of Gen. 1. 1-2. 3 is more recent than the other and should have been redacted around the 6th century BCE, following the principles of the Documentary Hypothesis. The principal elements that identified this tradition as belonging to *Priestly* (P) source lies in some theological expressions, which denoted the monotheistic thought of the Jewish religion, belong to the period during an after the Exile in Babylon. That means, before the return of the Jews to Palestine from Babylon. Indeed it was not written at one single time; but, rather, it looks to have been carefully enriched over centuries.

Indeed, it is possible that the Jewish priestly redactor of this myth used some common elements from Mesopotamian creation myths, as cultural legacy and literary influence that Jews could adapt from this culture during the Babylonian exile. In this respect, scholars support the influences of Mesopotamian literacy work inherited ultimately from Sumerian and transformed in cosmographies included in *Enuma Elish* and the *Epic of Atrahasis*, which were written between 1600-110 BCE. These works tell a cosmology very similar to Genesis: watery origin of the world, separation of land, creation of man and other living species and destruction by flood.

As Roux (1992: 94) says:

In general the Sumerian believed that the primeval ocean, personified by the goddess Nammu, had begotten alone a male sky and a female earth intimately joined together. The fruit of their union, the air-god Enlil, had separated the sky from the earth and, with the latter, had engendered all living creatures. The theory that the ocean was the primordial element from which the universe was born, that the shape of the universe had resulted from the forceful separation of heaven from earth by a third party was generally adopted in Sumer, Babylon and Assyria and forms the basis of the most complete and detailed story of creation that we possess: the great Babylonian epic called from its opening sentence, *Enuma Elish*, 'When on high…'.

That is also true the biblical myth which summarises the same topic: the conception of a vault between the waters to separate them (Gen 1. 6-8), the creation of the earth and the sea (Gen 1. 9-10), the earth which produces growing things, fruits, plants and seeds (Gen 1. 11-12), the light in the vault to separate day from night and for

serving as signs for festivals, season and years (Gen 1. 14-18), and the creation of the living creatures of the sky, sea and earth (Gen 1. 20-23).

Notwithstanding, there are also many differences which prove the interest for elaborating something new and different from this myth. For example, the image of the man follows a divine design and the possibility to subdue the earth. Thus, men will be free from the nature's tyranny and idolizing objects. All these elements are described as part of the divine creation of the Jewish god, against the common vision of the ancient neighbour of Israel who saw them as divinities.

Firstly, it is important to consider that the stars are considered as creatures and dependent on God's ordering creative will. They could not be named "sun" or "moon" because, for the common Semitic culture, words for "sun" and "noon" were also divine names and also because in the ancient world it was often considered that time and individual destiny were determined by the cyclical course of the stars.

Secondly, there is a mention about the creation arisen out of nothing; a topic that also exist in other later biblical books as Maccabes (2 Mac 7. 28) and it could be interpreted as another later influence in the final redaction of the Hebrew Bible. Thirdly, this version of the creation does not depict a battle between God and Chaos as other Mesopotamian myths do. That means it could be interpreted as a speech against the classical Mesopotamian myths about clashes between supernatural elements. So, it seems there is a new mythical perspective elaborated by Jewish priests of the 6th century BCE, who knew the Mesopotamian theology and decided to elaborate a new and different one.

However, there are other elements that allow us identify a Jewish priest author in the 6th century BCE and not two centuries before. First, there is a mention about the relevance of *Shabbath* in the last day of the universal creation (Gen 2. 1-3), which is a very important fact the religious order that was born during or after the period of the Babylonian exile of the 6th century BCE. Indeed, it is a data that this story was written by priests who were interested in the relevance of the sacred day for the Jewish religion.[24] Second, the six days of Creation of this version find a parallel in the six

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[24] It seems that the name "Shabbat" is a Babylonian term for the 15th day of the month –*Šapatu*- which is the day of the full moon. Notwithstanding, in Mesopotamia the 7th, 14th, 19th, 21st and 28th days of

periods of Creation described in the Zoroastrian scriptures of the Persian period, alongsides the idea of a God who created and separates light and darkness.

To sum up, the myth of Creation is the classical story redacted during the Exile in Babylon by Jewish priests who adopted a foreign myth and transformed it under their own theological concept, whereas the P source was redacted in two periods, before and after the Exile in Babylon. Therefore this myth should belong to the 6th century BCE.

1.3 The Myth of the Garden of Eden.

The tradition of Genesis 2. 4-3. 24, known as the myth of the Garden of Eden is a very different one, because it is older than the preceding myth. It presents a *narrative*, not a theological doctrine as does the myth of Creation of P. Also it has been considered by scholars as a highly organized combination of older traditions with some direct relationship with the following stories of Genesis (the murder of Abel and the family of Cain).

It summarises in the first verses the creation on the earth by the divine wish of the Israelite god. After that, the human being was created, establishing a connection with the name of the man with the earth. The Israelite god is denominated *Yahweh-Elohim* in this section and the scholars are not sure if this narrative belonged to *Yahwist* (J) or *Elohist* (E) sources (Wenham 1992: 56). Perhaps it could be a construct relation when someone mixed J and E producing the source JE after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel.

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every month were regarded as unlucky days. However, it seems that the Israelite Shabbat was introduced as a deliberate counterblast against this Mesopotamian lunar regulated cycle, because this day was quite independent of the phases of the moon and it was blessed and sanctified by the Israelite god. However, although this epic could be a long poem of seven tablets wrote in the old Babylonian period (2nd millennium), all the copies found until now belong to 1st millennium. The last date could confirm an approach to the New-Assyrian period. That means, the ancient Israelite could know the general idea of this myth by a Neo-Assyrian source. Indeed, there is an Assyrian version of *Enuma Elish* where the god Asshur, the national god of Assyria, substitutes to Marduk of Babylon. (Wenham, 1987: 35; Roux, 1992: 95).

This myth also has a close similarity with other primeval myths of the Ancient Near East such as we saw in the myth of the Creation, but there is not a confrontation with these foreign myths as P. Indeed many of these myths were very old and had been common topics in all the Ancient Near East since the 2nd millennium. In regard of this, the Israelites could know and have adopted them literally, such as the *Atrahasis Epic* and the Sumerian flood story which made mention of the creation of the man and the animals, the development of agriculture and the nakedness of the man.

Also the name of the garden is *Eden* and its root looks derived of the Akkadian *edinnu* or the Sumerian *edin* which means "plain" or "steppe" or the old Aramaic root *'dn* "enrich". A Mesopotamian myth, the story of *Adapa* –a character whose name looks similar to Adam- who was the first of the seven sages (*apkallus*) of Mesopotamia, who were contemporaries of the antediluvian kings. He was summoned to heaven where the god Anu invited him to eat of the bread and water of life.

Also the topic about a fruit or plant of life and the serpent are also common in the Mesopotamian literature, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, especially when they are associated with the idea of immortality. In this epic, Gilgamesh found a plant thought to make it possible to avoid death, but while he was swimming in a pond a snake came out and swallowed the plant, depriving him of the chance of immortality. Both the biblical myth and the Epic of Gilgamesh have common ideas: a snake, man, plants and the promise of life.

Notwithstanding, we believe that these myths were adopted during the 8th-7th centuries BCE when the Israelite culture was under the Neo Assyrian influences or and the end of this period. This explains the last edition of this myth under the form of the JE source a literary work which had been done after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel. In this aspect, we could consider the following records:

- It is possible to establish a parallel with the Assyrian Bilingual Account of Creation, which was a text in Sumerian and Acadian from 1100 to 800 BCE. It started with a brief cosmology about the establishment of heaven and earth, the principal gods and the fixing of the Tigris and Euphrates with their canals. Then, the major gods held counsel and decided to make humankind from the blood of some slain craftsman gods for providing the necessary workers for

agricultural work and building sanctuaries. After that, they created the first human couple.

-         There is an important mention about the place of the Garden of Eden by some geographical coordinates of the area belonging to Ancient Near East (Gen 2. 10-14): the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, *the region of Asshur* and the land of *Kush*.[25] That means, the Israelite authors placed the Garden of Eden inside of a Mesopotamian context, somewhere near the sources of Tigris and Euphrates in Armenia or the country of Assyria.

-         In our opinion, this note about the relevance of the land of Assyria or *Asshur* reveals that this city was an important religious place of the region when this myth was written. Besides, by Wenham (1992: 64) "Some older writers suggested these verses are a late interpolation into J whereas recent opinion inclines to see them as an early tradition incorporated flowing east of the city of *Asshur*, which may indicate that it is an old geographical note, possibly dating from the era when *Asshur* was capital of Assyria".

-         The Sumerian tradition told about a paradise island on *Dilmun* at the head of the Persian Gulf with an abundance of life thanks to water springing out the earth. This island was a paradise isle and a land of life and immortality where people from surrounding areas were buried in an attempt to ensure eternal life. The Neo-Assyrian tradition could also associate the idea of Paradise with the island of *Dilmun* if we considered that this place was an Assyrian vassal in the 7th century BCE. The juxtaposition of the rivers described in Genesis could suggest that Eden and *Dilmun* could be the same place for some old traditions.

-         The scene of a sacred tree is an important motif in the Neo-Assyrian art, because the relative absence of it in the Babylonian art suggests that was of minor relevance to other Mesopotamian cultures. Whereas in the Assyrian case the sacred tree was represented in many different media: cylinder seals belonging to 9th-8th centuries BCE; wall carvings from the Northwest Palace at *Kahlu*, which was the royal resident of the Neo-Assyrian king Assurnasirpal II;

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[25] With respect to *Cush*, it has been associated by some scholars with the city of *Kish* –although some scholars identify it with Ethiopia or Africa- or the land of the Kassites, to the east, in Mesopotamia.

ivories, ornaments and jewellery. In all these representations it is possible to associate the stylized tree as a symbol for expressing abundance with other similar pattern formed by chains of walking gazelles, flowering tree and fruiting date.

-        Besides, during the Neo-Assyrian period the artistic idea of combination alternating fruiting palm tree and conifer along with male and female animals and humans, specifically in garden "paradise" scenes was very common. In this case, an important approach with the biblical case is the representation of the sacred tree as date palm which represented to *Ishtar*, the Mesopotamian goddess of love and war, as symbol of abundance and female fertility.

-        The presence of a conifer might also relate to the king as much as the land of Assyria. This association between landscapes of trees and the sexual love between males and females also was a common subject of the Neo-Assyrian literature (Collins 2006: 102). In another representation, in the Neo-Assyrian relief of *Nimrud*, the "sacred tree" was depicted in isolation or flanked by approaching male genies that action had been interpreted as the fertilization of the female flowers of the date palm with the male flower cluster.

-        It is interesting that, whereas the Genesis speaks about two different trees at Eden, the Neo-Assyrians also spoke about two different trees: the "tree of abundance" (*iṣ mašrê*) and the "tree of riches" (*iṣ rašê*). Meanwhile the Genesis made mention to "the tree of life", which confers immortality and "the tree of knowledge of good and evil", which gives access to wisdom. [26]

-        another important Neo-Assyrian element is the notion of "garden". From the 9th century BCE onwards, the Assyrian cities followed a royal town planning

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[26] However, it is not clear what the sacred tree meant for the Neo-Assyrian culture and what was the real impact over the Israelite literature. Indeed, the Assyrians themselves abandoned this artistic symbol gradually during the period of the Neo-Assyrian kings Shalmaneser III and Sargon II. A possible explanation could be that the stylized tree was an emblem of agricultural abundance inside of the Assyrian kingdom. Notwithstanding, when these people became an imperial power during the Neo-Assyrian period, the kingdom was growing less dependent of the resources of its own land but on tribute and booty of other countries. As Porter (2003: 26) says: "Maintaining that prosperity though force of arms was now the king's main responsibility, and later palace iconography reflects this, surrounding the king with scenes of warfare and not with trees".

programme which included some common characteristic features. One of these innovations was the extra urban royal garden and zoo, where plants and animals were brought from all conquered countries. These gardens and zoo were meant to represent all the known parts of the world, besides the population of the New-Assyrian cities, which included deportees from all countries. As Novák (2005: 182) points out, the last Neo-Assyrian capital, Nineveh, rebuilt by Sargon's son Sennacherib, was transformed into an artificial paradise. Because descriptions and illustrations of the garden exist, their position and design can be reconstructed: pavilions with columned entrances were built within botanical gardens that were irrigated with the help of aqueducts. Inside of it, wild animals were kept and killed in ceremonial hunts and the artificial paradise gardens were a symbol of the whole empire, and hence of royal power.[27]

- After the banishing from Eden, there is a mention of the *cherubim* by God to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3. 23-24). They are semi divine creatures which have been described in the biblical narratives as winged lions with human heads that preserve sacred areas. However, the *cherubim* are a Hebrew version of the Assyrian *lamassu* which represent a winged human headed bull sculpted as guardian usually in the gates of palaces belonging to Neo-Assyrian kings.[28] Following the biblical case, these figures were closely related to a notion of protection as a benevolent spirit attached to an individual, a group, a place or an entrance in order to protect the access.[29]

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[27] In a similar way, in the Neo-Assyrian empire, it was common to represent distant places by familiar literary figures and exotic animals in maps and cartographies which reflects the general interest for distant areas. Besides, the Assyrians were very interested in the construction of *kirimahu* or "botanical garden", which was filled with the flora and fauna of distant lands controlled by Assyrians. It is corroborated by the reigns of Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esrahaddon, Ashurbanipal and Shalmaneser III when were organized expeditions to the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates and the composition of cartographies by the royal Neo Assyrian administration (Horowitz 1988: 165).

[28] Archaeologists have used the names *lamassu* and *šedu* for describing this kind of Assyrian sculpture. It seems that both concepts have a Semitic root that symbolized the expression of "vital strength", although some scholar believe that the term *lamassu* involucres the name of a female deity, meanwhile alad-*šedu* is associated to the male deity (Danrey 2004: 134).

29 In the specific case of the Neo-Assyrian period, the term *aladlammu* was used for describing this special hybrid animal which flanked the palace gates. During the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the *lamassu* could be introduced to Israelite culture because the archaeology of the Ancient Near East confirms the

To sum up, the myth of the Garden of Eden reflects a direct dependence of Neo-Assyrian topics and influences of the 8th-7th centuries BCE which could be described as one of the former mythical Israelite narratives.

1.4 The Myth of Cain and Abel.

The historical background of the material of this narrative (Gen. 4. 1-16) is strange. The attribution of this story to J rests on its frequent use of the name Yahweh and on similarity of its language and ideas with the last chapters 2-3. It has long been supposed that Cain cannot be separated from the tribes of the *Kenites* mentioned many times in the Hebrew Bible (Num. 10. 29–32; Judg. 1. 16; 4. 11).

This story personifies a classic conflict between the settled farmers and the semi nomadic shepherds, but it has been difficult to associate this myth with any other Mesopotamian narrative, especially belonging to the Neo-Assyrian period. By another approach, in the following verses (Gen. 4. 17-26) there is a description of the descendants of Cain who became a sort of antediluvian heroes who founded the art of human civilization (city building, herding, metal working and music).

This information has a parallel with the Sumerian *apkallu* and the flood story mentioned in the last Israelite myth. Indeed, it is possible to find some etymologic names of the Cain's descendants whose eponyms could represent an original primitive Israelite genealogy inserted in this narrative but with no relationship with the Neo-Assyrian period.

To sum up, this myth has some genealogical aspect that could be associated with a very old pre Israelite oral tradition, perhaps from 12th-10th centuries BCE, which was included among the myths of Genesis.

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development of this icon from Iran to Armenia. Indeed, during the Persian Empire this symbol was adopted by the new administration who placed them in the palace of Persepolis because the Persian authorities attempted to recover the strong aura and prestige of the great Neo-Assyrian kings (Dansey 2004: 138).

1.5 The Myth of the descendants of Adam.

The section (Gen. 5. 1-31) belongs to P and was composed as an add-on to those in the *Yahwistic* table of Kenites, with minor orthographic changes and a modification in the sequence with respect the other one. Also in this chapter it is possible to identify Babylonian influences that help us to date this story in the 6th century BCE. That is because there are connections between this list of descendants and another one with ten Sumerian primeval kings, who are said to have ruled until the Flood.

This story mentions the nine kings who reigned before the flood for an exceptionally long time. The first two kings reigned in *Eridu* and the last one was Ziusudra, the hero who survived the flood, as Noah in the biblical version. For this reason, this list of seven to ten antediluvian kings has often been compared with this story of Genesis and should have been adopted when the Jews were in Babylon.

Thus, the narrative looks like a self-contained unit with some connection with the Myth of the Creation elaborated previously by P. It tries to explain the decreasing life span of the human race by a list of remote ancestors who lived 800 years in average. It was a common record of peoples of Ancient Near East who attributed a great antiquity to their remote and mythical ancestors.

Notwithstanding, there are also differences between the biblical myth and the Sumerian story: the names are different, the genealogies have different starting points and length, and one is interested in humankind whereas the other in kings. That is a dissimilar characteristic with respect to the literature of other cultures which is common in the narratives of P.

Another interesting element is the following section of Gen. 6. 1-8. This section describes the marriage between the "Sons of Gods" –*nephilims*- with the daughters of the men. However, there is no consensus among scholars whether this story could belong to J or P or it ought to be ascribed to a later or final editorial layer (5th or 4th centuries BCE). In the quest for any kind of Ancient Near East sources, which could be used by any of the Israelite author, has not been successful. ´

Neither in the *Atrahasis* epic nor in the Sumerian flood there is any mention about intermarriage between gods and men, although Gilgamesh is identified as descended from such a union. In another approach, marriages between men and gods were well known feature of Greek, Egyptian, Ugaritic, Hurrian myths, but we are not sure if it is a common element of the Neo-Assyrian mythology (Wenham 1992: 138).

To sum up, both myths should be later additions of 5th and 4th centuries BCE when the literary work of both Genesis and the Hebrew Bible itself were almost complete.

1.6 The Myth of the Great Deluge.

The biblical story of the Deluge was an ingenious interweaving of the two sources J and P. However, it seems that the redactor worked both texts together in such a way that both Flood stories have remained almost intact. Indeed since P story (Gen. 6. 9-22; 7. 6, 11, 13-16, 17, 18-21, 24; 8. 1-2, 3, 4-5, 7, 13, 15-19) was larger and it is also literary younger, it became essentially definitive for the form and content of the final redaction.

One of the principal differences between both versions lies in that the P version speaks about the word *mabbul* which does not mean "flood" or "inundation" but it is a technical term for a part of the ancient world structure, namely, heavenly ocean. The *mabbul* is above the firmament and empties downward through latticed windows in a similar way that the version P of the myth of Creation.

For this reason, the version of P represents a catastrophe that involucres the destruction of the entire cosmic system according the biblical cosmogony which apparently was a Jew adaptation of the Babylonian myths during the Exile in Babylon. However, in the light of Mesopotamian parallels to the flood story it is strange that certain elements from the flood tradition are missing from P and JE.

P omits the command to enter the ark, the closing of the door, the opening of the windows, the reconnaissance of the birds, the sacrifice; whereas JE omits the buildings of the ark, the ark landing on a mountain and the exit from the ark. To sum up,

both versions lack features of the common tradition, but when combined create an account which resembles it.

This biblical narrative has important influences from the Mesopotamian literature, specifically the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which describes a local catastrophe in the Tigris-Euphrates valley. By some scholars, the direct dependence of the biblical version with respect the Mesopotamian is no longer assumed, because both versions were independent arrangement of a still older tradition, which itself stemmed perhaps from the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* in the early 2nd millennium BCE.

Indeed all the basic components of the Babylonian flood story is represented in the biblical version, with the notable exception of the rivalry among the gods –Enlil and Enki- and the final immortal destiny of the survived hero.[30] However, it seems probable that the full account of the flood was not incorporated into the Gilgamesh epic until 1600 BCE and may be based on the flood story of *Atrahasis*.

According to some scholars, these myths were known in the Syro-Palestine region around 1400 BCE because the Mesopotamian culture was widely diffused in the West (Van de Mieroop 2007: 178). Indeed a fragment of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* was found in Megiddo and other piece about the flood at *Ras Shamra*. After that, the invasion of Sea People and Aramaean tribes produced a break in this international cultural interchange. Thus, the ancient Israelites should have absorbed these Mesopotamian myths after this upheaval, assimilated it into its religious ideas. Notwithstanding, in Genesis there is another version which was older that P. By the Documentary Hypothesis it belonged to J but, again, there is a problem because this older version uses a mix of both divine names –*Yahweh-Elohim*- which suggests that this story was the final mixed version known as JE elaborated after the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Indeed, if it is possible to discover inside the biblical story two different versions and some duplication and divergences, it is also possible to consider a Babylonian legacy in the P narrative and a Neo-Assyrian influence in JE narrative. That

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[30] In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the flood hero was Ziusudra or Atrahasis. This name went by the Acadian Ut-napishtim or Uta-naʾishtim, which means *He found life*. However, a connection is possible with the biblical Noah if we consider the Acadian name (Uta)-*naʾish*(tim); where *naʾish* could be an abbreviation which later turned into Noah.

means, the Israelites could have known first this Sumerian or Babylonian myth by the Assyrians themselves between 8th and 7th centuries BCE before the Exile. After of this, Jews could incorporate more elements that they knew at Babylon by other sources or Mesopotamian myths producing the myth of deluge as it is known nowadays.

That is quite possible if we consider as Wenham (1992: 159):

Stories of a great flood are known from cultures around the world, but as might be expected, the closest parallels to the biblical accounts come from Mesopotamia (…) the fullest, thought latest, Mesopotamian version of the flood story found in the Gilgamesh epic, tablet 11. The standard late recession of the Gilgamesh epic dates from the Neo-Assyrian period (650 BCE), although it was compiled in the Kassite period.

It is a fact that the most best known and complete Mesopotamian version of the deluge was found in 1848-1849 by archaeologist Austen Henry Layard. It was found precisely in the royal library of Assurbanipal at the ancient Neo-Assyrian city of Nineveh which should prove the Neo-Assyrian knowledge and interpretation of this mythical story.[31]

Thus, the biblical version could be adapted to the Neo-Assyrian dialect, with the deities and main characters named slightly different. Also there is an Assyrian literary work called *Erra Epic* which is considered by scholars as a classical work of the 7th century BCE. In this narrative there is a speech by Marduk, the god of Babylon, which tells about how he once brought a flood upon humankind although nothing is said about how humanity was saved.

To sum up, this myth is composed of two different traditions. One of them should belong to the Neo-Assyrian period (JE); the other (P) could have been composed

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[31] It is important to consider that both the hermeneutical reflection and the scholarly discussion were important roles for the intellectual life in Assyria and Babylon during 1st millennium BCE. In this aspect, the most important texts belonged to the ancient Mesopotamian culture. As the Myth of the Flood or the Epic of Gilgamesh, were used, transmitted and studied deeply as creations of human authors of a golden age. Besides, in the same period, the *commentaries* were common as a tool for understanding ancient texts, such as the *Enuma eliš* which established links between the text itself and certain ritual acts and thus provides at least one *interpretatio assyriaca* (Frahm 2004: 48).

when the Jews were exiled in Babylon and decided to improve and complement its old tradition of JE with some details from Sumerian and Babylonian traditions.

1.7 The Myth of the Covenant with Noah.

This narrative (Gen. 9. 1-17) represents the first covenant established by the Israelite God with the humanity. Also it outlines the future covenants that Yahweh will establish with the Ancient Israel in mayor details in other biblical books. This kind of covenant between a divinity and a specific people were very common in the antiquity. In a similar manner, some countries of the Ancient Near East established a pact or covenant whose prototype is the royal grant. It was a transaction in which a party, generally a suzerain, gave a gift or property and rule to some weaker party, generally a vassal. Could it be a narrative inspired in a Neo-Assyrian covenant?

By Soggin (1976: 128):

The structure of the vassal treaties of the Ancient Near East, which begin with the Hittite treaties (…) and go down to the Assyrian and Aramaean treaties from the first half of the first millennium, follows a constant pattern, so that it is legitimate to talk in terms of a 'vassal treaty formulary' or a 'formulary of alliance' depending on whether or not the parties are of equal status.

This kind of treaty started with a preamble which presents a great king –as the king of Assyria or Babylon or a great god as Yahweh- with some kind of lesser ruler or minor figure who is for the moment in an inferior position. However, the treaty is evidently more an imposition of the strong over on the weak than a bilateral agreement with equal laws and duties for both parties.

The preamble is followed by the history of the relationship between them, a general declaration of the features that indicate the duties and rights of each, a detailed list of these duties and rights, an invocation of one or more deities as witnesses and guarantors and, finally, a series of blessing and curses for anyone who is faithful or unfaithful to this treaty.

To sum up, the myth of the covenant could be interpreted as one of the older legal traditions wrote in the Hebrew Bible. Also it seems to have its own roots in the

treaties done by the New-Assyrian empire during 8th-7th centuries BCE. Besides we have to consider that both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah should have known these kinds of treaties as vassal kingdoms.

In other way, the story of the curse of Cam (Gen. 10. 1-32) looks like a note inserted in the general narrative of Genesis 1-11, used as an explanation of why the descendent of one of Noah's son (the Canaanites) will be slave or dominated by the descendent of Sem (that means, the Israelite). Perhaps, this story attempts to explain the later conquest of Canaan in theological terms in the 6th century BCE by the Priestly tradition but with no connection with the Neo-Assyrian period.

1.8 The Myth of the Table of Nations.

This myth was also a combination of the sources J (or perhaps JE) and P in a similar way to the myth of the deluge. The scholars are not sure whether J was the base of the myth and it was completed with some additions belonging to P; or perhaps the P version formed the basis of the myth and a redactor used parts of a J version to fill it out with more details (Van Sters 1992: 175).

The original tradition of this section belongs to J (or JE) tradition (Gen. 9. 18-19; 10. 1, 8-19, 21, 25-30), which tried to link certain genealogies known by the author of this narrative to its own time, but not to show the repopulation of humankind onto the earth as the *Priestly* tradition. Indeed, J only divides the humankind in two main branches: the son of Ham and the sons of Shem. There is no mention about the descendent of Japheth, but there is more information about one special character called *Nimrod*.

Nimrod is a descendent of *Cush* and he became the first wielder of power on earth, the first ruler of historical significance and the first in the series of great men who will become determinative for the fate of the entire nation. Indeed he belongs to those who are inventors of culture (Gen. 4. 20-22; 9. 20) for his deeds and for his founding of kingdoms and cities. It seems that *Cush* could mean that Nimrod was the ancestor of the Kassites, although some scholars associate this name to Ethiopia. Notwithstanding, according to Van Seters (1992: 178) this kind of identity is based upon the similarity of

names with some ancient peoples, such as the Greek associated the Greek heroine Medea with the mother of the Medes and Perseus with the father of the Persians.

Although the Hebrew Bible itself does not give any explanation of this character, he has been connected with the god Marduk, the patron god of Babylon and with Ninurta, the god of hunting and war. Other scholars (Wenham 1992: 223) believe that this character represents a historical king from Mesopotamia, such as Sargon I of Akkad or Tukulti-Ninurta I of Assyria. Other scholars have seen the literacy figure of Gilgamesh behind Nimrod. In any case, Nimrod is the archetype of Mesopotamian ideals of kingship that were fond and proud of their achievements in buildings, fighting and hunting. Indeed, the Assyrian kings, especially in the Neo-Assyrian period, also display their prowess in palace beliefs.

However, the description of Assyria as "the land of Nimrod" in a prophetic book such as Micah (5. 5) may support a direct relationship between both entities.[32] For this reason, some of these eponymous described in this chapter have a close relationship with some cultures from Mesopotamia and, specifically, Assyria:

- The kingdom of Nimrod which consisted of *Babel (Babylon), Erech (Uruk), Akkad (Agade)* and *Calneh (Kulnia)* and expanded to Assyria and built *Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Kalah (Kalhu)* and *Resen.* This description could describe the Assyrian Empire until after the expansion and campaigns of both Assurnasirpal II (833-859 BCE) and Shalmaneser III (858-824 BCE), because *Kalhu* was a city state that gained fame when Assurnasipal II made it his capital. A new magnificent city was built over an older and unimportant one, confirming Gen 10. 12. Later, another Neo-Assyrian king, Sennacherib (705-681 BCE) moved his capital again to Nineveh, which is also mentioned in this chapter of the Genesis.

- By the same approach, Nineveh was the most important city of Assyria after *Asshur*; *Rehobot-ir* means literally "city-squares" which was the name of a suburb of Nineveh, a description of Nineveh itself or an interpretation of the

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[32] The chapters 1-3 of the book of Micah seem to come from the 8th century BCE, with portions from before 721 BCE when the Neo-Assyrians destroyed Israel and its capital. Chapters 4-7 seem to stem from Babylonian Exile during the 6th century BCE or possibly even later.

name of the city of *Asshur*; *Calah* is identified with the modern Nimrud, 24 miles south of Nineveh and it was made the capital of Assyria in the 9th century BCE; *Resen* is probably equivalent to Akkadian *reš-eni* –"fountainhead"- situated on the right bank of the Tigris 8 miles south of Nineveh (Wenham 1992: 224).

-        The mention of Assyria or *Asshur* in Genesis is also relevant. *Asshur* was the god of the Assyrian people. With the extension and power of Assyrian Empire, *Asshur* became the god of the emergent state and empire. During the course of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, many rulers had attempted to identify *Asshur* with many topics, thus *Asshur* ended up being a personification of the entire Assyrian country, people and power of Assyria as a political entity.

The P section (Gen. 10. 1-32) has been identified as a literary work which served as a continuation of Genesis 5. 32. Using several eponyms, the biblical author tries to show the spread of humanity after the deluge. In this case, the son of Noah (Sem Cam and Japheth) are the unique branches of all the countries with their own language, family and nation.

However, the table of nations does not reveal humanity according to either race or language. Rather, these are nations that were politically and historically distinct from one another. The cosmopolitan outlook suggests an author well informed about world affairs and possibly connected with a royal court, representing the historical reality of the Ancient Near East between 8th and 6th centuries BCE.

What could be the objective of this table of nations? Perhaps it was also a Neo-Assyrian cultural influence. It seems that the new order that Neo-Assyrians imposed in the world during 8th and 7th centuries BCE originated a universal geography under the New-Assyrian rule. In this case, the geography was an organizing principle used broadly in the imperial art. The emphasis on distant places in the texts of this period accompanying the map suggests that their purpose was to describe and locate distant regions but, as in the Israelite case, these areas were located in relation to familiar places such as Babylon, Assyria and the Euphrates.

For example, during the period of the Neo-Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, the famous "Black Obelisk" was sculpted which describes the booty and tributes of the

New-Assyrian vassals, included Israel, to his kingdom. However, the imagery of this monument seems to follow a conscious study for the geographical arrangement of the narrative which summaries the extent of Neo-Assyrian power. The whole monument is thus a statement of the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian commercial network under Shalmaneser III and of the maintenance of economic prosperity through access to a wide range of foreign raw materials and goods.

With respect to this matter, there is a visual polarity between east and west which are correlated with the chosen metaphor of Shalmaneser III about the power of his empire from "the Lower Sea of the land of Nairi" (Lake Urmia in northwestern Iran) to the "Great Sea of the Setting Sun" (the Mediterranean); and from Gilzanu to Israel, which were consciously chosen because, on one hand, they were the regions farthest to the east that Shalmaneser III had advanced, and on the other hand, because they were the extremities of his commercial trade network (Marcus 1987: 88). Ancient Israelites similarly divided humankind into three groups: nomadic peoples (Shem), urban dwellers (Ham) and seafarers (Japheth).

On the other hand, the *Priestly* tradition or P (Gen. 10. 1, 2-7, 20, 22-23, 31-32) links fragments of genealogies and points them back to the sons of Noah. However, P has a broader range of vision which extends northward to the Black Sea, eastward to the Iranian plateau, southward to Nubia and westward to the Mediterranean coast of Spain. It is an expression of geographical knowledge and it is hard to imagine that the author of P did not have an actual map which had been a source of inspiration to this literary scheme. Thus, the authors could have known other cartographic works such as the map of Anaximander, which is very similar to the table of nations, or any world map of the Neo-Assyrian or New-Babylonian period.

In the version of P the table of nations begings with the descendants of Japheth, the group of peoples with which Israel had least contact. Perhaps for this reason, they are handled first and dealt with most briefly. Afterwards the descendants of Ham –the Hamites- are mentioned among whom were the Babylonians, Egyptians and Canaanites, who were the most influential neighbours of Israel. Finally, the descendants of Shem were included as the forefathers of Israel itself.

However, the omission of the Persians in this table, who appeared on the scene in the 6th century BCE, allows us to date it around 7th century BCE, when the Neo-

Assyrian empire controlled the region. Consequently this section of P belongs to one of the first stages of this source which, if we remember our analysis of the Documentary Hypothesis in the first chapter, *was redacted before* the Exile in Babylon *but still under the Neo-Assyrian influences.*

That could be corroborated if we study some of the names of the table belonging to the family of Japheth and Ham which confirm, by Wenham (1992: 216-222), the dating of the New-Assyrian period:

- *Gomer* is identified with the Assyrian *Gimirray* or the people of Cimmerians who were a powerful Indo European people who came from southern Russia and posed a considerable challenge to Assyria between 8th-7th centuries BCE.

- *Magog* could be the equivalent of the Assyrian *Gugu* representing the king of Lydia in Anatolia in the same period.

- *Madai* or *Medes* is another Indo European people who were first mentioned in Assyrian texts in 836 BCE during the reign of Shalmaneser III.

- *Yavan* refers in the first instance to the Ionian Greeks who lived in the cost of Anatolia and they were known by the Assyrians as *Iawanu* in the 8th century BCE.

- *Tubal* and *Meshek* are mentioned in the cuneiform tablets as *Muški* and *Tabal*. The first is mentioned as kingdom in 1100 BCE when it fought against the Assyrian king Tiglat-pileser I on the upper Tigris, whereas *Tabal* was another kingdom of the region north of Cilicia. In the 8th century BCE both kingdoms fought together against Assyria but in 709 BCE they became allies in order to fight off the Cimmerian invasion.

- *Ashkenaz* is to be equated with *Aškuza*, the classical Scythians, mentioned in Assyrian texts. They came from southern Russia, driving the Cimmerians ahead of them, and may have eventually settled in Media in the 7th century BCE.

- *Togarmah* is associated with *Tegarama*, an Assyrian name of 1st millennium BCE which was the name of a city and its surrounding district north of Carchemish on the trade route between Assyria and Kanish.

- *Elisha* is probably identified with *Alašiya* of Acadian, Hittite and Neo-Assyrian inscriptions and usually supposed to be either the island of Cyprus or at least part of it.

- *Tarshish* was usually identified with *Tartessos* in western Spain or Carthage, and it also was considered by the Neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon as part of his empire.

- *Dodanim* might be identified with the *Yadanana* of the Neo-Assyrian inscription of Sargon II, in the 8th century BCE, who mentioned with this name apparently Greek speaking inhabitants of Cyprus.

- *Sheba* is also mentioned in the Neo-Assyrian inscription of 1st millennium as the kingdom, with the same name, placed in southwest Arabia which capital was Marib.

To sum up, both traditions J (or JE) and P were elaborated under the geographical concept and information of the New-Assyrian empire between 8th-7th centuries BCE.

1.9 The Myth of the Tower of Babel.

This narrative (Gen. 11. 1-9) has been considered as one of the most complex of Genesis 1-11 in terms of composition. Some scholars have identified up to four different motifs –the building of a city, the confusion of languages, the dispersion of peoples and a tower-building story- that all came together at a later stage of literary development such as the 6th or 5th centuries BCE. Thus, these four motifs were known in the Israelite folklore and they should have been associated with each other by various combinations from oral and written traditions.

However, there is a literary "core" belonging to J (or JE) source that could be a tradition written around the 8th century BCE. This tradition started with the verse 1 with its statement about one language of the whole earth is contrasted with the verse 9 in which there are several languages. The human activity of building a city in verses 2-4 is paralleled by the divine response in verses 5-8, often with similar literacy style and language.

This means that any analysis of this myth must begin with this literary unity for which the source J (or JE) should be responsible: a brief story which spoke about a people, with a common language (same language and same words), who wanted to build a city with bricks and become famous by name; but the Hebrew God does not believe in this building and scattered this people, after confusing their language.

What is astonishing is the close relationship between this narrative and a Neo-Assyrian inscription which has all these characteristics, and also describes a specific period in the history of the northern kingdom of Israel: the political situation after the destruction of this kingdom in the year 722 BCE:

- There is an Neo-Assyrian inscription belonging to Sargon II from *Dûr-Sharrûkin*, which speaks about the construction of a new Assyrian city, with many elements that we already saw in the biblical text: the city itself, the use of bricks for building, the importance of the royal name of Sargon for posterity, the relevance of the numeral of his name for the circuit of its walls and, especially, the mention: "people of the four regions of the world, of foreign tongue and divergent speech (…) I carried off at Asshur, my lord's, command, by the might of my sceptre. I unified them (made them of one mouth) and settled them (at the city)…" (Luckenbill 1968: 66)

- Based on this information, the original source used by the Israelite author was Sargon's inscription for historical causes: in the year 722 BCE the kingdom of Israel was destroyed by Sargon II. Two year later, this Assyrian king wanted to build a new city as capital of his empire: *Dûr-Sharrûkin*. With this construction he wanted to unify all the conquered peoples –as Israel, which is the Assyrian *Samarina* or *Bit-Humria*- under his command by the might of *Asshur*, and made them "one mouth" (as the biblical concept of a people with "same language and same words").

- It must be noted, also, that many Israelite prisoners and workers were brought there for working in this imperial dream of Sargon II. Probably, many of these Israelites saw this enterprise as a sin of pride of the New-Assyrian empire and, when Sargon II died and his city was abandoned in 705 BCE, they interpreted these facts as the punishment of God to an evil imperial system, and

thus they created this biblical story using the city of Sargon II as its principal theme (as the biblical text concludes "...and they stopped building the city...").

However, when the surviving kingdom of Judah was destroyed by another Mesopotamian empire, Babylon, and the people from Judah was exiled in this city, other authors –who knew the story about *Dûr-Sharrûkin*- changed some elements of the narrative and added others, specifically those mentions about the tower and the city of Babylon. In this case, these exiled authors used some Mesopotamian mythological traditions that they knew during the Exile in Babylon, specifically from Sumeria and Babylon.

For this reason, this story reveals an astonishingly intimate knowledge of Mesopotamian building techniques, displays some remarkable verbal correspondences with literary sources, and features some typically Mesopotamian motifs:

- The Sumerian epic *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* which speaks about the confusion of tongues.

- The Babylonian *Enuma Elish* which describes the construction of a sacred precinct called *Esagila* with bricks.

- The Babylonian inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar, who restored the tower or *ziqqurat* of Babylon, of which the Bible speaks as etymological explanation in the Hebrew text (Babel/Balal= "confusion").

Notwithstanding, we believe that the most important detail of this biblical story is the impact of the imperial Neo-Assyrian ideology in the development of the Israelite monotheism. By Levine (2005: 412) the roots of the monotheism in the human experience are the ancient notion of a unified cosmos under the rule of a powerful, supreme and creator god. In the Neo-Assyrian case, the conception of a global horizon became a feature of the new order imposed for this empire to its world. Under this point of view, the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian empire allowed many people to increase the horizon of identification of different people from the Ancient Near East under the shadow of an unique power.

Indeed, if we consider the royal inscriptions and annals belonging to Neo Assyrian period between 8th-7th centuries BCE, it is possible to discover in the speeches

of Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II and Sennacherib the idea of expansive conquests and the project of a world dominated by the king of Assyria on earth and the god *Asshur* in heaven. In this case, we are talking about a period where the principal ideology for the New-Assyrian sovereigns was to expand their territory and to thread where no one had been before.

Furthermore, the Assyrian claim to world supremacy by the exaltation of *Asshur* is contemporary to both destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel and the siege of the southern kingdom of Judah by the Neo-Assyrian empire. It seems that Neo-Assyrian ideology and its praxis in Palestine motivated an Israelite/Judaist response, which by Levine: "…was to go beyond the situation of the moment and have a lasting effect on Israelite religion. It is better to speak of response than of influence; in truth, response may be clearest form of influence" (Levine 2005: 413).

In our opinion, the concepts that we rescue from the Myth of the Tower of Babel have similarities with the speech of some prophetic book which has been situated chronologically in the same New-Assyrian period. Such is the case of one section of the book of Isaiah –the former identified by scholars (Kuhl 1961: 168) as "First Isaiah" or "Proto-Isaiah" (I-XXXIX)- whose author lived in a complicate times marked by the rise of Assyria as a great power.

Furthermore, both authors of the biblical myth and "First Isaiah" should have been familiar with the particular style and idiom of Neo-Assyrian documents of the period, which were common in the Neo-Assyrian ideology or propaganda, of that period, such as the inscription of Sargon II. Specifically, one of these ideas was the notion of one world order by only one empire which was very useful in the development of Israelite monotheism. If we reconsider the origin of the Israelite religion, in a regional phase, it was originally associated with the emergence of two different societies or monarchies in the north and in the south of Palestine.

This origin also included several confrontations against many neighbours – Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites and Madianites- beside other encounters with more developed cultures such as Aramaeans and Phoenician states. However, all these peoples, including the Israelites themselves, shared an overarching West Semitic pantheon composed, on one hand, of national divinities, as the Israelite Yahweh and the

Moabite *Kemosh*, and on the other hand of a complete group of divine entities with more or less grade of relationship, such as *El*, *Baal*, *Ashtoret*, *Ashera* and *Dagon*.

From this point of view, the former Israelites were not a monotheist people at the beginning, but henotheistic such as is expressed in many passages of the Hebrew Bible (Ex 15.11; 18.11; 20.3-5). The situation changed with the appearance of the Neo-Assyrian empire and its western campaigns, the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel and the siege of the southern kingdom of Judah by Sennacherib. In this scenery the *Yahwistic* henotheism was fast becoming untenable in the confrontation with the imperial ideology of *Asshur*, producing a crisis of faith besides more practical dangers. Then, by Levine (2005:422):

> We read that Yahweh, the national God of Israel, a small and powerless people, is using Assyria, the global empire, as a punitive tool against his own people. In effect, the Israelite response has risen to the dimensions of the triumphal claims of the Assyrians. Yahweh controls the Assyrian Empire, and it he who has granted the kings of Assyria their many victories and conquests (…). None of the early narratives, neither the *Yahwist* nor the *Elohist* of Torah literature, looks at history this way, and none of the other VIII century prophets went as far Isaiah in articulating this global perspective. (…) Isaiah does not mention the god *Asshur*, or any other Assyrian god for that matter. Isaiah (10. 5-15) refers (…) to the unnamed king of Assyria and to Assyria, the land/or its people, and the empire. Conceivable, the triad –*Assur* the city, *Assur* the land or *Assur* the god- might allow us to detect in Isaiah's exclamation "Ah, Assyria", a veiled allusion to the deity with that name. However, Isaiah would not openly acknowledge the existence, much less the power of the head of the Assyrian pantheon! He does not project a battle of gods between Yahweh and *Asshur* (…). Yahweh is not *Asshur*'s adversary or counterpart; he is the only true God.

Notwithstanding, there are some similarities with Yahweh when the Israelites became a monotheistic entity after the Exile in Babylon. For example, *Asshur* was a god without other cult centres, except when they were established by the Assyrian themselves; he was not a *deus persona* because his identity was hidden; he lacks the family connections as other gods from Mesopotamia or Egypt; he was rarely associated

with a female consort; he lacked divine epithets as other deities from Mesopotamian pantheon; generally he was not related to powers and other phenomena of nature; he received divine titles as *beli* "my lord" or *ilum/ili* "the god/my god" which meant *Asshur* (Lamberg 1983: 83)

An interesting theory could be that the ancient Israelites adopted gradually some of these characteristics belonging to Assyrian divinity to its own god, specially owed to Assyrian culture influences between 8th-7th centuries BCE. Along this time, and until the Exile in Babylon, the same intellectual class who elaborated the monotheistic aspect of Yahweh in the southern kingdom of Judah and in the exiled community in Babylon adopted these Assyrian divine characteristics for developing better the monotheistic aspect of the Israelite god.

To sum up, the myth of the tower of Babel is a complex and interesting example about the influence of the Neo-Assyrian empire but in a more negative point of view. It was redacted after the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel, for someone who knows about the imperial ideology of Assyria and its terrible repercussions. However, it is also an example of the first stages in the development of the Israelite monotheism from 8th century BCE until the days of Exile in Babylon in the 6th century BCE, when this concept had already been elaborated.

Conclusion

In our research, we consider that the early myths described in Genesis 1-11 could be a relevant source for the study of influences of Neo-Assyrian culture inside the ancient Israelite mind and its impact on the elaboration of the first Israelite narrative. This objective will only be obtained if we read the biblical myths with sophistication, not simplistically, because this enables us to read the Hebrew Bible from a new historical perspective. The Hebrew myths thus come to life in a new way.

In the past, according to the principles of the Wellhausen school the first expression of the Israelite literature began at 10th century BCE in the period of the David-Solomonic dynasty, specifically the oldest source know as *Yahwist* or J. After the division of the kingdom another source was born in the northern kingdom, the *Elohist*, which was mixed with J (JE) after the year 722 BCE when the northern kingdom was destroyed by Assyria. After time gap, another source, the *Deuteronomist* or D, was created in the southern kingdom of Judah which made the first revision of all the books that existed belonging to the Hebrew Bible. Finally, after the Exile in Babylon, a last edition, represented by the *Priestly* source or P reviewed all the literary structure and produced the Hebrew Bible such as it is known nowadays.

Notwithstanding, modern archaeological and literary studies have given a new vision. First, there is not enough evidence neither about a powerful united monarchy such as the David-Solomonic dynasty nor about any school of scribes which could elaborate any kind of literature as the narratives of the Hebrew Bible. In fact, there are archaeological evidences about two different Hebrew kingdoms in the north and the south of Palestine during 9th century BCE: Israel and Judah. Israel was more advanced in many aspects, especially in the development of a state and writing administration. For this reason, from this century until the 7th century BCE, it could be more possible that the first Israelite narratives were born in this period.

We are not sure if these first narratives, associated with the northern source E, were as extensive as the narratives associated with the southern source J. That is because, after the destruction of the northern kingdom, both sources were mixed in such

a grade that nowadays it is practically impossible to distinguish where either of them began and finished. However, we could consider that the northern kingdom of Israel was able to elaborate the first stories of the Hebrew Bible chronologically before that the southern kingdom of Judah, especially for the influence and contact with other cultures more advanced.

This was also the case in the Neo-Assyrian empire. Many of the oldest narratives of the Hebrew Bible such as the myths of Genesis 1-11 reflect an Assyrian root with respect to themes, symbols, ideas and structures. The myths of the Garden of Eden, the Deluge, the Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel corroborate it. Thus, the people who wrote these biblical myths did not start from nothing. In this case, the international trade, the political dependence or the syncretism with the Neo-Assyrian culture allow the development of the first expression of Israelite literature.

It does not matter that the same stories were later modified, transformed or elaborated by other scribes whose work is known nowadays as the result of the sources JE, D and P. Indeed, a modern reading of many of the books of the Hebrew Bible demonstrate that they ignore, for no apparent reason, the relevance and power of the northern kingdom of Israel in the Neo-Assyrian time. The unique descriptions are in 1 and 2 Kings, where the Israelite rulers are villains who introduced foreign gods, murdered holy priests and prophets and violated Israel's sacred traditions with arrogant impunity until they were destroyed by the Assyrians.

That is because, inside the northern kingdom of Israel itself, some groups of prophets, priests and intellectuals were enemies of the ruler classes. They were the same persons of the early prophetic books who denounced the corruption and impiety of the rulers and aristocracy of the northern kingdom of Israel, specifically the lavish lifestyle and the injustices, idolatry and domestic tension that the international trade and the dependence on the Neo-Assyrian empire had brought over the people of Israel. When the northern kingdom of Israel was finally destroyed by the Assyrians themselves, some of these prophets who survived the destruction joined the flow of refugees to find shelter in the cities and towns of the neighbour and related southern kingdom of Judah.

They also elaborated and rewrote and mixed the old literacy traditions that was born in the north (as the source JE) and created a new theological point of view (source D) which culminated with the conception of Judaic monotheism of 6th century BCE

(source P). Indeed, until now, the Hebrew Bible has been believed to present a point of view which is sharply slanted in favour of the historical and political claim of the Davidic dynasty, of its temple at Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah. Thus, they created a new history that forgot many important events of the Israelite past, such as the development of the first expression of Israelite literature during the age of the powerful northern kingdom of Israel of the *Omrides*, altering the historical truth.

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