

Noth begins his history with the question as to the identity of Israel. Since the term has its first definable meaning as the name of the Hebrew Twelve Tribe League in Palestine, this is the point where the history of Israel must begin. Hence after sections on the land and the historical situation c. 1200 B.C., the author proceeds to the discussion of the confederacy, introducing it with a chapter on the origin of the tribes (i.e., all came into being on the soil of Palestine as the union of various geographically placed clans; the traditions of the Mosaic amphictyony and the conquest of Joshua are unhistorical).

The patriarchs represent one of the traditions that survived in the Twelve Tribe League. Central to it was the theme of the promise of the land and the aetiological traditions concerning the individual 'fathers' as founders of cultic shrines used by later Israelites. 'The tradition of the patriarchs was conceived and developed' (p. 120; italics mine) in the Tribal League from the perspective of the Divine guidance which led to the occupation of the land. The patriarchs were actual historical personages because a prominent element in the tradition is that concerned with the worship of the 'God of the fathers', a type of worship of ancestral gods which can be illustrated further by similar phenomena in the Hellenistic-Roman period. (This follows Alt's *Der Gott der Väter* [1929]; and nothing is said about the apt comparisons to be drawn from early second millennium sources.)<sup>1</sup> The descendants first established this worship in Palestine after they had settled there and had seen the promises of the land fulfilled. Since the main Pentateuchal traditions were developed by the central Palestinian tribes, the figures of Jacob and Joseph are central. Joseph was associated with the sanctuaries of Shechem and Bethel, and he, 'to begin with, [was] the sole representative of the patriarchs', and because of his association with the occupation of the land he was acknowledged by all Israel. Jacob, however, was known as the one who received the promises, and he 'logically became the Ancestor of the whole of Israel and the eponyms of the twelve tribes became his sons'. This central Palestinian tradition 'was further developed by the southern tribes' to whom belonged Abraham and Isaac (Mamre and Beersheba) who 'were given geneological precedence over Jacob'.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, ch. 4 B; J. Lewy, 'Les Textes paléo-Assyriens et l'Ancien Testament', in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, cx [1934] 29-65, especially 50 ff.; cf. also L. Philip Hyatt, *Vetus Testamentum*, v. [1955] 131-132; T. Jacobsen, in *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* [Chicago, 1946; or Penguin edition, *Before Philosophy*], 203-204 (on 'The Personal God').

As to the identity of the patriarchs, Gn 14 is the only narrative which associates Abraham with anything definite in ancient history. This chapter is so isolated, however, that it is a question whether it actually belongs to the authentic foundations of the tradition. Besides the narrative has not yielded to historical elucidation. While 'it may be feasible to see their history within the framework of the migratory movement of the nineteenth-eighteenth centuries, . . . it is more likely that the historical figures of the patriarchs, however tangible, already belonged to the "Aramaic migration", at the turn of the thirteen-twelfth centuries'. 'It may be assumed that numerous "patriarchs" were well known among the Israelite tribes. The fact that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were particularly remembered was due to the peculiar evolution of the Pentateuch tradition.'

To one trained in another scholarly tradition it is very difficult to avoid uttering the query as to whether much of this is not entirely too subjective. Is it really history at all? Does tradition-history as a method of tracing tradition-forms really permit such historical conclusions to be drawn from it, or do we have here a method misused? Do the unproved assumptions of the primacy of the fragmentary and the attachment of sacred traditions always to places rather than to people commend themselves as sufficiently well-based to form the almost exclusive cornerstones of historical reconstruction? Would not the historian be on firmer ground if he simply said, 'We do not know'?

Bright's work comes at the patriarchal problem in a very different manner. A Prologue presents a concise survey of Near Eastern history before 2000 B.C. and Part One is entitled 'Antecedents and Beginnings: The Age of the Patriarchs'. The first chapter in this section gives a précis of Near Eastern history in the first half of the second millennium B.C. because the author believes it to be the scene of Israel's pre-history as a people, the age to which the patriarchal traditions refer. The second chapter on the patriarchs is introduced by a section on method. Here the author points to the problem of the sources, the past attempts to solve it, and to the many forms used from older sources by the common parent, whether oral or written is unknown, of both the J and E compilations of the epic. But 'the precise circumstances under which the various traditions originated and developed lie beyond our knowledge, and probably always will. Attempts to reconstruct a complete tradition-history [referring especially to the work of Noth] are too speculative, and too little based upon objective evidence, to command confidence' (p. 66). Of one thing we may be sure, the actual historical situation was far more complex than