

The Pre-Priestly Abraham Narratives from Monarchic to Persian Times

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Résumé. La recherche récente sur le Pentateuque souligne que l'essentiel de l'histoire d'Abraham en Gn 12-25 est d'origine soit sacerdotale, soit post-sacerdotale. Néanmoins, quelques traditions pré-sacerdotales peuvent être identifiées, notamment en Gn 12,10-20 ; 13* ; 16* ; 18-19*, des passages qui peuvent difficilement être lus comme formant une narration unifiée. Sur la base d'observations littéraires et historiques, l'article défend la thèse selon laquelle Abraham était à l'origine une figure du Sud judéen qui appartenait à divers groupes ethniques. Les traditions les plus anciennes qui nous soient parvenues, en particulier le récit d'Abraham et Lot, qui est associé à la promesse d'un fils et à sa naissance, étaient probablement transmises dans le sanctuaire de Mamré durant la période monarchique tardive. Plus tard, à l'époque exilique, où les sanctuaires judéens hors de Jérusalem reprennent de l'importance, les anciens récits d'Abraham ont été complétés par la tradition de la matriarche en danger en Gn 12,10-20 et celle de la naissance d'Ismaël en Gn 16*. Ces deux passages, qui témoignent de liens importants, accentuent la dimension pluriethnique de la figure d'Abraham. Ce n'est qu'à la période perse que les récits pré-sacerdotaux sur Abraham ont été utilisés par les élites de Jérusalem en vue de justifier leurs prétentions culturelles et politiques sur la région du Sud.

* This article is based on two papers presented by Oded Lipschits and Thomas Römer at a symposium on *The Politics of the Ancestors* (held January 15th to 17th 2016 at the University of Oldenburg, Germany). The papers will be published in the proceedings of the symposium. Observations at the symposium were that Lipschits's historical-archaeological approach and Römer's exegetical investigation resulted in similar conclusions about the origins of the Abraham tradition. These observations triggered the idea of merging the two texts into a combined piece. This was accomplished with the assistance of Hervé Gonzalez, who added further ideas and comments of his own.

Introduction

The origins of the Abraham traditions have been much debated in biblical research. Since the classical Documentary Hypothesis has been called into question, new models have been proposed, which considerably limit the extent of pre-priestly Abraham traditions and narratives. The first part of this article proposes a brief presentation of recent scholarly discussion, pointing out that pre-priestly traditions can only be identified in Genesis 12:10–20; 13*; 16*; 18–19*. These passages, however, can hardly be read as a cohesive narrative. The second part argues, based on literary and historical observations, that Abraham was originally a multi-ethnic figure from the South, whose early traditions were probably transmitted at the cult site of Mamre. The third part supports the view that the Abraham-Lot narrative, which is connected to the promise to Abraham of a son and to Isaac's birth, represents the earliest Abraham traditions, which were developed in the South during the late monarchic period. The fourth part of the article deals with the exilic period, when the local sanctuaries outside Jerusalem gained importance, and the early Abraham narratives were expanded with the tradition of the “endangered ancestress” in Genesis 12:10–20, as well as the birth of Ishmael in Genesis 16*; these two passages, which display important connections, further emphasize the inclusive character of the figure of Abraham. At the end of the article, we argue that the pre-priestly narratives were eventually used by the Jerusalem elites during the Persian period to justify their religious and political claims over the South, which was cut off from Judah and became what is known from the Early Hellenistic documentation as the province of Idumea.

I. Pre-priestly traditions in the Abraham narrative

Some scholars still continue to explain the formation of the Abraham narrative within the paradigm of the Documentary or New Documentary Hypothesis, like, e.g., Joel Baden, who assumes