**Preface**

This book examines the history of the genre of origin stories that lie at the foundation of several sources of the Torah and form the basis of the book of Genesis in general. In this book, I have used the term ‘origin stories’ to indicate a literary work based upon a genealogical foundation and plot sequence stretching from the beginning of humanity (or the first humans) to the stories of the group’s patriarchs and its geographical settlement, focusing primarily on questions of group identity and origin. This type of writing is quite well-known in later literature, for example, European or Arabic literature, to the extent that it would seem that this literary genre has existed in all cultures from time immemorial. However, in the words of the Israeli poet Nathan Alterman, “An old sight also has its moment of birth” (“Moon”). Indeed, signs of the existence of this type of literature cannot be found among the multitude of discoveries from the ancient Near East before the second quarter of the first millennium BCE, and its full expression appears only in the eastern Mediterranean literature from this period on. This book, therefore, endeavors to examine the formation of this genre based on its expression in biblical literature and a series of sources from Greek genealogical and mythographic literature from the Archaic period and the beginning of the Classical Period, as well as traditions from the Phoenician and Luwian cultures of the first millennium BCE.

This book originated in the doctoral dissertation that I wrote at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem under the supervision of Professor Alexander Rofé from the Bible Department and Professor Deborah Gera from the Department of Classical Studies, who guided me throughout all the stages of my academic studies, from undergraduate courses in the departments of Bible and Classical Studies and onwards. I am grateful to them for their complete confidence in me throughout all the stages of writing the dissertation, their constructive comments, and their meticulous attention to detail. From the time that I completed the dissertation until the preparation of the Hebrew version of this book, I was privileged to receive many astute suggestions and comments on the book’s contents. I will mention with gratitude only a few of the scholars whose comments helped me to reexamine, change, correct, and improve the book’s contents and present them anew in this current format: Professors Yair Zakovitch, Michael Segal, and Baruch Schwartz from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the late Professor Zipora Talshir from the Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Professor Irad Malkin from Tel Aviv University, Professor John Van Seters from the University of North Carolina, Professors Carolina López-Ruiz, Jeffrey Stackert, and Simeon Chavel from the University of Chicago, where I did post-doctoral research in 2012-2013, and Professors Shaye Cohen and Peter Machinist from Harvard University, where I served as a Harry Starr Fellow at the Center for Jewish Studies in 2014-2015. During the preparation of the Hebrew edition of the book, I received excellent advice from Professor Shmuel Ahituv, Dr. R**onela Merdler**, and Geulah Cohen.

The book continued to develop and undergo changes in its new, English version. I made several corrections, a few additions, and updated references to recent scholarship. I naturally could not discuss extensively all the developments in scholarship in the last few years but will certainly attempt to do so in the coming years. I am very grateful to Dr. Hannah Davidson who translated the Hebrew book to English with great dedication during the challenging period of the global pandemic, and to my student, Anat Alkalay, who assisted me in all aspects of preparing this book in its current form and offered sage advice. I would also like to thank my students, Jonathan Schabbi, Tzlil Miron, and Matan Oren, who prepared the bibliography and indexes in the Hebrew version, and XXX who prepared the indexes in the English version. I am grateful to the staff of the Cambridge University Press for their work in producing the book and especially to Beatrice Rehl for her assistance and steadfast support in this project from its earliest stages, as well as to the anonymous readers who read the manuscript on behalf of the publishers and made very constructive comments. It is my duty and pleasure to thank the research foundations that supported the production and publication of the book: the Israel Science Foundation (ISF grant no. 49/19) and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

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