**Peoples, Nations, and Wars:**

The Growth of the Genre of Origin Myth in the Mediterranean

Many myths about wars and heroes, especially those with superhuman powers, were put into writing at the very beginning of literary creation in the ancient Near East, but myths dedicated to the stories of peoples, nations, or ethnic groups are known only from the first millennium BCE. This phenomenon is consistent with a new genre of writing in the eastern Mediterranean basin in the first millennium BCE, the genre of origin myths — whether of a people, an ethnic group, or a city — that are presented in genealogical sequence, beginning with the first generations of humanity and continuing with stories of the eponymous heroes, the formation of the ethnic group, and the foundation of cities. These works take an ethnographic perspective, while their content is expressed through a genealogical framework. The Greeks called such compositions “genealogies”([γενεαλογία](http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/inst/browser.jsp)ι), and the early Israelite writers probably called this genre a “record of generations” (ספר תולדֹת, see Gen 5:1). In scholarship about the ancient Near East, however, the discussion of genealogical writing has focused on the basic lineages and king-lists, not on the mythological material and mythography that are central to the genealogical genre in the eastern Mediterranean. In the discussion that follows, I will treat both concepts, origin myths/mythography and genealogy, as characteristic of a single, unique genre that began to be created in the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean basin in the 1st millennium BCE.

Despite the abundance of literary material that has been discovered in the ancient Near East, Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Hittite literature do not have origin myths composed of stories relating the history of ancestors, the origins of peoples, and the foundation of cities and kingdoms in genealogical order. By contrast, this genre is quite conspicuous in the biblical literature, especially the Pentateuch, and in the Greek genealogical literature that began to be written down toward the end of the Archaic Period and the beginning of the Classical Period (7th-5th c. BCE). Our knowledge about this genre in the Greek world has increased tremendously in recent decades thanks to discoveries of papyri; the publication of updated editions of the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, which is the most important genealogical composition from the Greek world; and new editions of the mythographers who wrote genealogical compositions in prose. These studies have made comparative research into the development of this genre in biblical literature essential. There is reason to believe that in the 1st millennium BCE compositions belonging to this genre existed not only in the ancient Greek and Israelite worlds but also elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean. There is some evidence for this in the epigraphic finds that have been discovered in the region in recent decades, as well as in the work of Philon of Byblos. I will briefly present the main sources that represent this genre, after which I will review the literary patterns that characterize it, which are shared by the extant 1st millennium sources that have reached us from the eastern Mediterranean.

**1. Origin Myths and Mythography: Sources**

1.1. Genealogical Writing in the Greek World

The Greek world had great affection for genealogical tradition, as is evident from Plato’s *Greater Hippias*. When Socrates asks what the Greeks most love to hear, the sophist replies, “the genealogies of heroes and men, and the foundations of cities in ancient times (285b–e, [Fowler 1926:352–353]).” Limited genealogical lists of individual heroes are found as far back as Homer, but they do not constitute autonomous works. Independent genealogical compositions apparently began to be written in the Greek world only from the 6th c. BCE onward. The most prominent of the ancient genealogical texts is the *Catalogue of Women* (Γυναικῶν Κατάλογος), which was attributed in ancient times to Hesiod. This epic poem reviews the history of the eponymous heroes and ancestors of the Greeks, structured around genealogies. It was named the *Catalogue of Women* because it focuses on the famous women of Greek mythology who, having slept with the gods, gave birth to the heroes of the Greeks. It is also called *Ehoiai* (Ἠοῖαι) because of the refrain ἢ οἵη (“or such as …”) that opens each unit of the composition, introducing the story of another woman and the children whom the heroine bore. In the first centuries of the Common Era the *Catalogue of Women* was still one of the most popular works in the Greek world, but it is no longer extant. Nonetheless, a great number of fragments of the *Catalogue of Women* remain in the form of quotations or paraphrases cited by other writers. There are also a significant number of papyri fragments containing substantial excerpts from the composition. All these make possible a relatively comprehensive look at the *Catalogue*’s original contents and structure. The basis of the *Catalogue of Women* is the genealogical outline, but frequently the author interweaves various stories that are sometimes tangential to the genealogical sequence. Even based on the fragments that have come down to us, it is evident that most of the Greek mythological stories that were known in the Classical period were already included in the genealogical framework of the *Catalogue of Women*, at least in their basic form.

Alongside the *Catalogue of Women* there were additional genealogical-mythographic compositions that were written in epic meter, such as *Μεγάλαι Ἠοῖαι* (also attributed to Hesiod), as well as compositions more limited in scope, like *Europia* and the *Korinthiaca*, which were attributed to Eumelos. From an additional genealogical composition, the *Phoronis*, which focused on the Argive genealogy and began with Phoroneus, the first Argive man, there remain no more than six fragments. Yet in light of the fact that the word πρῶτος (“first”) appears in half of the fragments, we learn that this author, too, was interested in traditions about the beginning of humanity and the first inventions. An additional genealogical epic that focused on the genealogy of the Argives was the Danais, which told the story of the tribe of Danaos and their return from Egypt to Argos. All these epics, by contrast to the Homeric and similar epics, do not recount a single main story but focus instead on the genealogical sequence of the ancient clans.

From the end of the 6th c. BCE onward we begin to find prose genealogical works written by authors whom it is customary to call logographers or mythographers, that is, tellers of tales. Hekataios of Miletos was apparently the earliest of them, but shortly after him there arises a series of mythographers like Akousilaos of Argos, Pherekydes of Athens, and Hellanikos of Lesbos. Most of their compositions follow a genealogical pattern, set forth based on the origin of the heroes and so descending from characters like Phoroneus, the first man from Argos, or Deukalion, the hero of the Greek Flood story. Although these compositions, too, have not survived, they are partially known to us through the many citations of them in the works of later writers.

1.2. Origin Stories and Genealogical Writing in Genesis

The narrative parts of the Pentateuch constitute a story of the origin of the Israelites, based on a genealogical structure that is quite reminiscent of the Greek mythographic compositions. The genealogical framework is especially prominent in Genesis, and even though this framework continues into Exodus and the other Pentateuchal books, I will focus here on Genesis in order to illustrate the structure of the genre. Biblical scholarship of the last 150 years has shown that the material in Genesis is compounded of various traditions from different times and places; even so, it is possible to identify at least two continuous narrative threads, created independently, both organized genealogically.

One narrative thread (P) came from priestly circles, and its genealogical character is especially noticeable in the first part of the narrative. The words “these are the generations” (אלה תולדות), parallel to the Greek term “genealogy,” return throughout its length and appear at the opening of each unit. The conclusion of this genealogical sequence securely identifies the circle from which the entire narrative came, for the priestly writer sought (among other things) to outline a long, comprehensive chain of descent from Adam all the way to the first priests and Levites, the descendants of Moses and Aaron. This long genealogical sequence was not created by a single author, since it evidently incorporates several literary traditions that took some time before attaining their final form. However, the whole constitutes an orderly genealogical sequence, in chronological form, from the beginnings of humanity to the rise of the priestly families in Israel. Like the Greek genealogical compositions, the Priestly writer, too, includes brief narratives and additional material within the genealogical framework, expanding on the story only at the places on which he wants to focus.

A second narrative thread in Genesis occurs in the non-P materials about the beginning of humanity and the patriarchs. This thread is admittedly more complex than the Priestly thread, but here too it is possible to identify a sequence of units that came out of the hands of a Yahwistic school of writers who sought to arrange the variety of traditions that had come down to them, giving them a uniform character and organized sequence. Despite what has been asserted in recent decades, these materials do not constitute a random collection of various traditions attached to a Priestly skeleton. In the Yahwistic thread, the genealogical sequence is inseparable from the plot, and it is therefore impossible to disengage the genealogical details from the plot and the stories with which they are intertwined. Nevertheless, recurrent stylistic patterns in the genealogical information can be identified, which indicates relative uniformity. One can see, for example, similar genealogical patterning both in the Primeval History (Genesis 1-11), e.g. in the Yahwistic Table of Nations, and in the narrative of the Patriarchs (Genesis 12-50), e.g. in the stories of the begetting of Ammon and Moab, Nahor and his descendants, and the sons of Keturah. The Yahwistic material in Genesis can therefore be identified as a continuous narrative, establishing the history of the people from the beginnings of humanity up to the patriarchs on a genealogical basis.

The principal component in biblical genealogical writing, as in the Greek world, is a focus on the group or ethnic identity, and not antiquarian interest. Genealogical writing does not stem from an interest in assembling a set of antiquities, or a desire to preserve early clan traditions just out of curiosity or a collector’s instinct, but from the impulse to teach the history of the peoples or of the cities, to indicate the relationships of clans, and to establish the identity of the ethnic group to which the writer belongs. As such, the genealogical works collect not just the genealogy of the eponymous ancestors of the city or the ethnic group, but also the origin stories and foundation stories of the people. Naturally, there are clear differences between biblical and Greek genealogical literature regarding the unique content and style of each culture. Nonetheless, it is worth noting the fact that this genre focuses in both cultures on the ethnic angle. It seems the main goal of the genealogical compositions was to give expression to questions of identity in the present through preservation of the traditions of the past. Often the eponymous ancestors of various ethnic groups outside the Greek and Israelite world are mentioned in order to indicate the nature of the relationship between them and those who stand outside the group.

1.3. Philon of Byblos: Phoenician Origin Myths

Several data points indicate that the genre of genealogical origin myths is not found only in Greek and biblical literature but also in additional places in the eastern Mediterranean in the 1st millennium BCE. However, these have not survived due to the practice, widespread in the Levant, of writing on perishable materials. It is difficult to accept the claim that this genre of writing existed only in Greek and Israelite cultures but was absent from the Phoenician cities that were the geographical and cultural link between the Levant and the Greek world. True, there is almost no extant Phoenician literature, yet the evidence that does remain — from the writings of Philon of Byblos, born at the end of the 1st c. CE —reflects a similar genre of origin traditions. This composition is admittedly late, and itself is known only from citations in the writings of Eusebius, but a comparison with the discoveries in the 20th century and in recent decades at Ugarit and from the Hurrian-Hittite world suggests that those fragments do indeed preserve traditions from the ancient literature of the Levant. For our purposes, it is worth noting that the *Phoenician History* of Philon (or its early sources) was also apparently composed as a genealogical sequence, close in many respects to the traditions of Genesis. Philon’s genealogical sequence includes a cosmogony (the creation of the world), a technogony (the beginnings of culture and the first inventors), and brief stories of migration and settlement. As in the Greek and biblical compositions reviewed above, here too there is a focus on the foundation of the nation and its cities. Careful comparative investigation of Philon’s composition is called for in order to isolate the early traditions that reflect ancient genealogical sequences and to distinguish them from the Hellenistic and Roman materials in which they are embedded. In light of the parallels to Greek and biblical genealogical literature that we have discussed above, the impression is strengthened that this genre, missing from the literature of Mesopotamia and the other great kingdoms of the ancient Near East, included unique literary patterns and motifs that can be found in many of the compositions that began to be created in the eastern Mediterranean in the 1st millennium BCE.

**2. The Flood and the Trojan War as a Line of Demarcation in the Origin Myth**

A central motif in the genealogical traditions of both biblical and Greek myths of origins is the idea that the protagonist of the Flood story had three children who were the ancestors of nations. According to the biblical text, Noah fathered Shem, Ham (or Canaan according to another tradition), and Japheth, from whom were born the forefathers of all the nations. In Genesis 10 are woven together two narrative threads that describe the histories of the three children of the Flood hero — Shem, Ham, and Japheth — and their own descendants as the ancestors of all the peoples of the world. In the priestly source, the list of the sons of Noah is apparently preserved in its entirety and in its original order: It begins with Japheth, ancestor of the peoples of the north, continues with Ham, ancestor of the peoples of the south, and concludes with Shem, ancestor of the peoples that dwell in the center of the world (from the author’s perspective), from whom, the story continues, the ancestors of the people of Israel would spring. The Yahwistic list in Genesis 10 is more complex, having undergone a more complicated process of consolidation, but it too is attached to the descendants of Noah, the biblical Flood hero. Hekataios similarly states that Deukalion (the Greek Flood hero) had three sons ― Pronoos, Orestheus, and Marathonios ― who are identified as the ancestors of Greek tribes. Orestheus was the forefather of the Aetolians who dwell in northwestern Greece, and Pronoos, who begat Hellen, was the forefather of the main Greek tribes. According to the *Catalogue of Women* and many other Greek genealogical works, Deukalion is not the grandfather but rather the father of Hellen, the ancestor of the Greeks, who in turn also had three sons―Doros, Xuthos, and Aiolos. These three brothers were the forefathers of the Dorians, the Achaeans and Ionians (through Xuthos’ sons Achaios and Ion), and the Aeolians respectively. All these texts use the Flood hero and his descendants to shape a Pan-Hellenic/Israelite genealogical picture.

The “table of nations” pattern, which presents the evolution of peoples and ethnic groups in genealogical sequence, also has its parallel here. The biblical texts describe in sequence the genealogies of all the nations known to their authors. Although the Greek genealogical tradition is more Hellenocentric, focusing in more tightly on the Greek world, here too eponymous forefathers who represent nations further removed from the Greek world are included, most prominently in the Argive genealogies. Thus, for example, the genealogical thread which stems from Argos contains Libya representing North Africa, and Libya’s offspring include Aigyptos (Egypt), Danaos (representing the Danaans and the Greek world), and Phoenix (Phoenicia), while the following generation includes Arabos (the Arabians), and so forth. Some of these eponymous heroes serve no other function than to indicate the origin of the ancestors of nations familiar to the Greeks within the Mediterranean.

Even if we accept the assumption that in the Greek world the Flood story was attached to the character of Deukalion only secondarily, apparently the reason that so many Greek genealogies begin with Deukalion is the fact that the Flood story was already known in the Greek world when the authors of these genealogies were active (see chap. 3 above), and they identified Deukalion as the hero of these genealogies, from whom the Greek groups sprang. This concept develops in different ways in the Greek genealogical tradition, becoming widespread in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, as emerges for example from the origin story of the Greeks that is told in Plato’s *Timaeus*, which starts with the Flood. The parallel with the biblical traditions is evidence that the sources in both cultures were dependent on a notion that was widespread in the eastern Mediterranean. According to this concept, the Flood was the central component of the genealogical story of the origin of people, and the ancestors of the ethnic group to which the author belonged were the descendants of the protagonist of the Flood story. These accounts differ from the Mesopotamian version of the Flood story, in which the hero is not the ancestor of a new dynasty but rather leaves the world and goes to live with the gods (according to *Atrahasis*), and nothing further is heard of his offspring.

Another indication that the integration of the hero of the Flood story into the Greek genealogical traditions is secondary is the use of the Flood story as a line of demarcation between the ancient mythological period and the era of historical reality. In the ancient Near East, the Flood story already played this role at a very early stage. A short introduction was added to some of the recensions of the *Sumerian King List* that includes the names of the first kings, who reigned in the days before the Flood. These kings reigned for thousands of years, while the kings who reigned after the Flood reigned for mere centuries at most, and the further the list continues, the more realistic the lengths of the reigns become. The Flood is also the starting point in the sequence of the first kings in the *King List of Lagash* and in the *Dynastic Chronicle*.

The biblical stories adopt this idea of the Flood as a boundary line between the mythological era and the more historical era of the ancestors of the nation, and here too we find lifespans diminishing. According to P, for example, the first generations before the Flood lived for hundreds of years, while after the Flood there was a significant diminution of the lifespan, followed by an additional diminution in the era of the Patriarchs. The Yahwist’s version of this idea finds expression in God’s decree, just after the Flood, that human beings would not live longer than 120 years.

In classical literature, the Flood is the demarcation between the era of the heroes and the present era of humanity, but in this respect the Flood story duplicates the function of the Trojan War in Greek myth. In fact, the Flood story, which arrived from the East, is competing with the more indigenous story in Greek culture, the story of the Trojan War, as is clear for example from the *Kypria*. This composition, apparently written in the 6th c. BCE and constituting part of the Epic Cycle, adds extensive details about the events and circumstances of the Trojan War. In it we see clearly that the Trojan War takes the place that is filled by the Flood in ancient Near Eastern literature. According to this version of the story, when people began to multiply on earth Zeus sought to wipe out humanity and instigated the Trojan War:

There was a time when the countless races <of men> roaming <constantly> over the land

were weighing down the <deep->breasted earth’s expanse.

Zeus took pity when he saw it, and in his complex mind

he resolved to relieve the all-nurturing earth of mankind’s weight

by fanning the great conflict of the Trojan War,

to void the burden through death (κενώσειεν θανάτωι βάρος).

So the warriors at Troy kept being killed, and Zeus’ plan was being fulfilled.

(English tr. follows West 2003 [LCL 497]: 83)

These words in the *Kypria* clearly echo *Atrahasis*, the Babylonian Flood story. As is well known, in *Atrahasis* the Flood is a result of the expansion of the human population. The noise that rises up from earth disturbs Enlil’s sleep, and the gods decide to destroy humanity by means of drought and famine. When these prove insufficient, the gods bring on the Flood. In the *Kypria* too humanity multiplies, and Zeus tries to relieve the earth of this burden. The influence of the ancient Near Eastern Flood story is clear, but instead of a flood we are told that Zeus instigated war. In fact, the introduction of the scholion that preserved this fragment of the *Kypria* explicitly mentions a flood. According to the scholion, Zeus intended at first to destroy humanity by means of the battle of Thebes, but when he did not manage to destroy them completely he decided “to kill all of them by means of lightning or flood” (κεραυνοῖς ἢ κατακλυσμοῖς πάντας διαφθεῖραι). Eventually, following the advice of Momos (“cavil, blame”), he brought on the Trojan War, which “gave relief to the earth” (οὕτω συμβῆναι κουφισθῆναι τὴν γῆν).

To conclude, it is clear that this idea of the Flood as a demarcation between historical eras is ancient, being found already in Mesopotamian literature. However, when the Mesopotamian story of the Flood permeates into the literature of the eastern Mediterranean, it adds a new feature, for in Israelite and Greek literature (unlike that of Mesopotamia) the hero of the Flood story is the ancestor of peoples, and the authors of the genealogies integrated him into the lineages that lead to their ethnic groups. In this way, the genealogical concept of these cultures also uses the Flood to divide between the mythological era and that of the eponymous ancestors of the group, who represent a more historic reality. In the Greek world, though, we find the story of the Flood and the story of Troy competing to fulfill this mythological function.

**3. First Inventors**

One of the characteristic features of the biblical and Greek genealogical origin myths is the “first inventor” pattern―a brief note specifying the originator of a specific craft. The Yahwistic strand employs such notes in reference to Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-cain (Gen. 4:20–25). Noah discovers wine and Nimrod is the first hunting warrior, and their feats are introduced by the verb ויחל (“he began, he was the first”, cf. Gen 9:20-27; 10:8-12). The same root is also used in relation to the generation of Enosh, when “men began (הוחל) to invoke YHWH by name” (Gen 4:26). This genealogical sequence also includes Cain, the first cultivator, and Abel, the first herdsman (4:2)―forming a parallel tradition to Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-cain (4:20–22)―and Enoch, the builder of the first city (4:26). This genealogical line depicts the beginning of humanity as the history of civilization.

The Greek genealogical traditions portray first inventors in a very similar fashion and likewise depict the first human beings as culture heroes. While this literary pattern is also found in many Greek genres and writings, the earliest mentions of human (rather than divine) “first inventors” appear in the genealogical works. Thus, for example, the fragmentary remains of the *Phoronis* (dated to the 6th c. BCE) dealing with the Argive genealogical traditions reveal that its author’s interest lay in first inventors, portraying the Phrygian inhabitants of Mount Ida as the discoverers of iron, and Kallithoe― probably to be identified with Io, the priestess of Hera―as the first to decorate the pillar of the goddess. The Argos traditions depict Phoroneus, the first man, as the discoverer of fire. Hekataios relates that Danaos, Io’s descendant in the fourth generation, was responsible for introducing the alphabet to Greece, and a later source―the *Library* of Pseudo-Apollodoros―states that he discovered sailing, using boats to return from Egypt to Argos.

The similarities between the traditions of the first inventors in the Greek world and the biblical traditions are especially close in two areas: The first is the particular way in which they are framed; in both cases the wording of the discovery takes the form of a brief announcement. The Pentateuchal text uses the formula “the ancestor (אבי) of [invention],” as in “Jubal, he was the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the pipe (אבי כל תפש כנור ועוגב)” (Gen 4:21), or “[PN] was the first to take up (ויחל) [the specific profession],” as in “Noah was the first to till the soil; he planted a vineyard (ויחל נח איש האדמה ויטע כרם)” (Gen 9:20). Greek literature uses the formula “'πρῶτος [‘first’] + [the specific discovery]” or the verb εὑρίσκω (‘discover’). In Greek literature as well as in the Pentateuch, the short formulation focuses on the discoverer and on the human aspect of the discovery. The second similarity is the genealogical context. In the Greek literature the formulation “the first inventor” is quite widespread, but the ancient sources that deal with human discoveries suggest that its beginning was in the genealogical works, in compositions such as the *Phoronis*, the *Europia*, and the *Catalogue of Women*. In the Aetolian tradition preserved by Hekataios of Miletos, we even find a similar kind of genealogical chain of culture heroes that we find in the description of the first generations in the Yahwistic thread in Genesis. Hekataios attributes the discovery of wine to the descendants of Deukalion, the hero of the Flood story, just as wine was discovered by Noah, the biblical hero of the Flood story in the Pentateuchal text. The ultimate result in both cultures is a description of the beginnings of the world as a story of cultural development whose heroes are human, not divine.

A well-developed and elaborate sequence of first inventors also occurs in a description of the beginning of history in the Phoenician traditions embodied in the works of Philon of Byblos. This account includes a sequential series of brothers, each of them a culture hero, and their discoveries. Of the first generation, for example, it is told that they discovered eating fruit from trees, and their children lifted their hands to the sky and began serving the god of heaven. Their descendants in turn discovered how to light a fire, and in subsequent generations Samemroumos discovered how to build shelters of reeds, rushes, and papyrus; his brother Ousoos, the hunter, invented clothing using the hides of the animals he hunted, and was the first who dared to go into the water.

Comparison with ancient Near Eastern literature from the 3rd and 2nd millennia BCE shows that it is possible to describe the days of the beginnings of humanity in many ways, but not one of the ancient Near Eastern sources narrating the beginning of the world describes this period as a genealogical sequence of discoverers and cultural development. In light of the absence of any such pattern from Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Hittite literature, and the appearance of this motif in biblical and Greek genealogical literature, as well as in the Phoenician traditions preserved in Philon of Byblos, there is good reason to believe that this pattern was one of the literary elements that characterized the traditions of origin and genealogical writing that sprang up in the eastern Mediterranean during the 1st millennium BCE.

**4. The “Two Brothers/Two Nations” Pattern**

Stories about pairs of brothers and the affectionate or antagonistic relationships between them occur frequently in world folklore, as indeed they do in the written literature of the ancient Near East. But in the origin stories of the eastern Mediterranean — that is, in the Biblical and the Greek genealogical literature, as well as in the works of Philon of Byblos — stories of this kind are unique in having a fixed literary pattern that gives an etiological explanation for the political relationship between nations, kingdoms, peoples, or neighboring cities. In the Levant these are generally two rival kingdoms or two clans, tribes, or the like, while in the Greek world they are generally two cities. Usually the two brothers have eponymous names, from which it is clear that the two really represent groups, and the reader or hearer learns from the story how the rivalry between the two groups came into being. Sometimes the two brothers are twins and the rivalry begins in their mother’s womb.

The biblical stories of Jacob and Esau, signifying Israel and Edom, and Perez and Zerah, the forefathers of the tribe of Judah, belong to this pattern. The Greek examples include the traditions regarding Panopeus and Krisos, representing the cities of Panopeus and Krisa in the district of Phocis, and Akrisios and Proitos, representing the cities of Argos and Tiryns in the Argolis. In all these cases, the twins are portrayed as already struggling in their mother’s womb or at the time of their birth. Like the rivalries of Jacob and Esau or Perez and Zerah in Genesis, the *Catalogue of Women* describes the rivalry between Krisos and Panopeus in the womb of their mother. The papyrus fragment of the *Catalogue of Women* in which this scene is described has not been completely preserved, but we do have most of the main part of this tradition in the writings of Lykophron. The reconstructed text below describes the struggle between the two brothers at birth:

She bore [Krisos and high-spirited Panopeus]

in one night [

even before they saw [the bright light of the sun

the two of them fought while they were [still] in their mother’s [hollow belly]

(Eng. tr. follows Most 2018,135)

A similar story of struggle within the mother’s womb is found in Apollodoros’ story of the birth of Akrisios and Proitos.

Many similar stories constructed according to this pattern portray the brothers as having contradictory characteristics, sometimes representing a particular craft or profession. A similar use of the pattern is also found in Philon of Byblos’s account of Samemroumos (also called Hypsouranios, i.e. ‘High-in-Heaven’), representing a quarter in the city of Sidon called *šmm rmm*, and his brother Ousoos, representing Ušu―the coastal district of Tyre. Philo adduces here an early tradition concerning the eponymous ancestors of places in Phoenicia, intended to explain the relations between them. The famous Roman example of this pattern is the story of Romulus and Remus, which contains many details that fit the general pattern, along with some that are unique. Like the other brother stories, this story too is part of a foundation story, a genre that will be discussed in the following section.

**5. Foundation Stories (*ktisis*)**

A major component in the genealogical myths of origin is the foundation story, and particularly the founding-father pattern. This literary pattern recounts the settlement of a foreign territory by an early ancestor and contains four primary features: a) the founding father emerges from an ancient center; b) he reaches a new location and lives as a stranger amongst the local populace; c) he acquires a piece of land by establishing ritual places, purchasing an estate or burial plot, or providing military assistance to and marrying one of the local inhabitants; d) he then becomes the ancestor of a new nation, named after him or his sons. The main focus in stories of this kind is not the heroic deeds or adventures of the hero, but the origin of the people and the ethnic identity of the nation that came forth from the loins of this ancestor. These stories were, therefore, created by those who viewed themselves as descendants of that ancient ancestor. They respond to the question, “Whence we do come?” or “How did the city (or the ethnic group) to which we belong arise?” The answer is that they are the descendants of an ancestor who came to this place from somewhere else. Among the examples of this pattern are the biblical traditions regarding Abraham and Jacob, the P account of Esau, and the Greek traditions concerning Xuthos—the son of Hellen and the father of Ion―who journeyed to the Peloponnese from the north, Danaos, who travelled to Argos from Egypt, and Kadmos, who came from Phoenicia and founded the city of Thebes. Another well-known example from classical literature is the story of Aeneas fleeing Troy, which serves as the foundation story of Rome.

Although numerous migrants and nomads became part of the great ancient Near Eastern empires throughout history, some even ruling them for long periods, none of the ancient Near Eastern cultures have preserved this story pattern. On the other hand, several factors indicate that the foundation-story genre became central and foundational in other small kingdoms and city-states around the Mediterranean, in addition to the ancient Israelite and Greek cultures. The biblical literature records accounts of migration and resettling for the Aramaeans, the Philistines, the Edomites, the Ammonites, and the Moabites. Similar accounts of other Mediterranean peoples have been preserved in classical literature—such as the legends of the establishment of Carthage by Phoenician settlers. In recent years, bilingual Phoenician-Luwian inscriptions have been discovered (now augmented by a trilingual Phoenician-Luwian-Akkadian inscription from Cilicia), all of which suggest the existence of a similar migration tradition in the kingdom of Que, northwest of the Syrian coast. This group of people appear to have regarded themselves as the descendants of the founding father *Mpš* (Mopsos in Greek) who, according to both the classical sources and the epigraphical evidence, migrated from western Asia Minor and the land of Ahhiyawa (Hiyawa), whence the name Que.

If the material in Herodotus (1.1; 7.89.2) and other Greek sources is based on Phoenician traditions, then even more ancient kingdoms in the area, such as the Phoenician cities, also appear to have adopted analogous migration stories, even if they were not among those nations that arose at the beginning of the first millennium BCE. This can serve as further evidence that the foundation literary pattern spread throughout the Mediterranean during the first millennium BCE. In a previous study I suggested that this literary pattern is not found in the literature of the Mesopotamians, Egyptians or Hittites because it emerged only after the establishment of the new, small-scale kingdoms and city states in the Mediterranean basin at the beginning millennium BCE. Together with the rise of new political identities in this period, the Phoenician and Greek colonization enterprises of the first half of the first millennium BCE increased awareness of the newly-emerging states and focused attention on ethnic identity (Darshan 2014).

**6. The Birth of the Genre**

The themes, pattern and motifs discussed above enable us to establish the features of this unique genre of origin myths as it appears in the ancient Greek, Israelite, and several other eastern Mediterranean sources. Its fundamental element is the genealogical sequence, and all the examples commence with primordial human beings. Although the Greek tradition knows no single, central first man, it does adduce a first woman (not discussed here, see…), and the earliest human beings―such as Pelasgos or Phoroneus―apparently represent the proto-Greek populace. In the same manner, the early figures in the biblical traditions represent the early inhabitants of the land―e.g., Cain representing the Kenites and Seth the group of *Šutu*. All corpora also contain traditions concerning the earliest inventors or craftsmen, such as Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-cain who parallel, for instance, the Greek Phoroneus, discoverer of fire, and the Arkadian Pelasgos, said to be the inventor of huts and leather tunics. The central figure in both sets of genealogical works in this period is the hero of the Flood story, who is the ancestor of the forefathers of nations. Although the Flood does not lie at the heart of the Greek traditions as it does in ancient Near Eastern literature, Deukalion (the Greek Flood hero) is found at the beginning of many of the Greek genealogies, being the ancestor (according to the majority of the sources) of Hellen, the father of the Greeks, who begot the forefathers of the principal Greek groups―Doros, Xuthos, and Aiolos. The scope of the biblical tradition is much broader in the period prior (and subsequent) to Noah, but the focus eventually narrows to the patriarchs. In both literatures the genealogies thus extend from the earliest human beings―who frequently represent the pre-Greeks/pre-Israelites—and the Flood hero, to the ancestors of the nations, the eponymous forefathers and founders of the Greek/Israelite cities. The stories of the conflicts between rival brothers, like the forefather-settlement accounts, constitute central building blocks in this genre, whose main interest is the evolution of ethnic groups, peoples, nations, and cities.

Although none of the numerous sources discovered in Mesopotamia contain any parallels to the genealogical genre and its focus upon the establishment of ancestral houses and ethnic groups, perhaps the first seeds of this type of writing appear as early as the lists of Mesopotamian kings. Of course, these lists focus on the kings, the royal succession, and the lengths of their reigns. The lists therefore necessarily relate dynastic sequences, and they certainly pay no significant attention to ancestral houses or ethnic groups. However, since some of the king lists, such as the *Sumerian King List*, the *Rulers of Lagash*, and the *Dynastic Chronicle* commence with the earliest kings and go down to contemporary rulers, they can constitute a model of sorts for a lengthy and complex genealogical chain of eponymous forefathers that begins in earliest times, as well as for the use of the Flood to demarcate the mythological and historical eras.

The Greek and biblical genealogical texts are not merely a direct continuation of these lists, however, for the forefathers do not simply replace the kings and these texts are far more elaborate and convoluted. They branch out horizontally, trace generations through brothers, sisters, and sons of different wives, and the genealogies embedded in them sometimes serve merely as a way to connect numerous sequential plots. These stories constitute the body of the text, so that the principal focus of these sources also differs from that of the king lists. The absence of any complex genealogical myths of origins in the literature of the surrounding ancient empires and the parallels between the Greek and Israelite texts suggest that, up until the first millennium BCE, not only the pattern of the foundation stories but also the whole literary genre of origins was not yet fully formed. This genre apparently emerged only after the rise of the small states in the eastern Mediterranean following the collapse of the great Hittite, Mycenaean, and Egyptian kingdoms. The literary remains attest that these smaller states were aware of their “youth” and viewed themselves as migrant cultures even though they consisted, in full or in part, of local population groups.

These small states―the kingdoms of Judah and Israel and the Greek city-states, and presumably other such kingdoms―were interested in issues related to ethnic and national identity, issues that had been largely neglected by the region’s large, ancient empires. The traditions regarding the Israelites as the descendants of forefathers who were born from Noah’s son Shem and the Greeks as the offspring of Hellen son of Deukalion thus appear to have been designed to elucidate and define the identity of their respective groups. While this new type of writing used―and was incorporated into―chronologies and historiographical patterns prevalent in the ancient world, such as the Flood at the beginning of human history, it was intended for an entirely different purpose. We may thus surmise that the socio-political changes undergone by the “young” nations, and the rise of new kingdoms and new political organizations around the Mediterranean, constituted the primary factors contributing to the creation of this genealogical genre. This development may also have been influenced by the increase of literacy from the second quarter of the first millennium BCE onwards among the eastern Mediterranean cultures, all of which adopted the Phoenician script. The growth of literacy in the Mediterranean during the second quarter of the first millennium BCE onwards may have encouraged a greater interest in writing and reading among wider layers of the elite classes, not just among skilled scribes in the service of the king and temples. In this way the genealogical traditions concerning the eponymous heroes, important noble families, and tribal and city relations clearly took the place of the king lists in Greek and biblical accounts of the beginnings of peoples, the related wars and ethnic groups.