

<sup>17</sup> Avec Westermann, p. 606, qui qualifie avec raison ce passage de tradition particulière, sans pouvoir se prononcer sur la date (ancienne ou récente) de la tradition (contre Alt).

<sup>18</sup> F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), p. 269; p. 4, l'auteur traduit "the Fear (possible Kinsman) of Isaac".

<sup>19</sup> E. Puech, "Présence phénicienne dans les îles à la fin du II<sup>e</sup> millénaire. A propos de deux coupes inscrites", *RB* 90 (1983), pp. 365-95, on lirait aussi bien *ks*; P. Bordreuil, "L'inscription en cunéiformes alphabétiques de Hala Sultan Tekké", *Newsletter for Ugaritic Studies* 29 (1983), p. 3, lit *p<sup>cl</sup> aky/bn yphd*, "A fait Aky, fils de Yphd".

<sup>20</sup> Malgré Lemaire, *RB*, pp. 323ss, "*Paḥad*, Dieu des *Bené Jacob*". Toute cette étude s'efforce de montrer que *Paḥad* est le dieu ancestral des *Bené Jacob* qui sera définitivement banni lors de l'alliance de Sichem avec les *Bené Israël*. Mais cette interprétation repose sur une série d'hypothèses invérifiables. Le fait que Jacob vienne du pays araméen et du "désert transjordanien" ne prouve aucunement que le nom de la divinité des *Bené Jacob* *doive nécessairement avoir des affinités avec l'arabe*. *phd* est connu au sens de "cuisse" en ouest sémitique et en arabe, mais seulement en arabe (et en palmyrénien par emprunt) au sens de "lignée". On ne peut pas dire que "la révélation [mes italiques] du nom divin *Paḥad*, signifiant à la fois 'cuisse' et 'lignée', serait tout à fait à sa place ici", à propos de Gen. xxxii 25-33, p. 327, puisque le nom du dieu de son père est (ou devait être) déjà connu. Il ne peut à la fois être à l'origine de la lignée issue de Jacob (*Bené Jacob*) et le dieu de son père, invoqué par Jacob!

<sup>21</sup> La présence des Hurrites est bien attestée en Syrie du sud et Palestine dès le début du XV<sup>e</sup>s., appelées dès Thoutmès III "le pays de Huru", de Vaux, *Histoire ancienne ...*, pp. 86-91.

<sup>22</sup> N. H. Snaith, "The Daughters of Zelophehad", *VT* 16 (1966), pp. 124-7. La tribu de Manassé occupait d'abord la partie est du Jourdain avec Galaad. Voir aussi A. Demsky, "The Genealogies of Manasseh and the location of the Territory of Milcah, Daughter of Zelophehad", *Eretz-Israel* 16 (1982), pp. 70\*-75\* (hébreu).

## NOTES ON GENESIS XXXV

### I. *The Homecoming*

C. H. Gordon has noted that one of the features of East Mediterranean epic literature is the *nostos* or homecoming.<sup>1</sup> This motif appears in Homer, where the main theme of the *Odyssey* is the wanderings and homecoming of Odysseus; in the *Gilgamesh Epic* describing the wanderings and homecoming of the title character; and in a number of Egyptian tales — Sinuhe, Shipwrecked Sailor, Wenamon — where the main character leaves Egypt only to return happily.<sup>2</sup> The same motif has also been suggested for the Hexateuch, where the main story line is the Israelites' descent into Egypt and successful return to Canaan.<sup>3</sup>

One detail which occurs in these stories is the washing and changing of clothes either before returning home or upon returning

home. The best example is the Gilgamesh Epic XI: 239-55, where the hero readies to leave Utnapishtim. Before the departure the latter instructs the boatman Urshanabi:

Take him (Gilgamesh), Urshanabi, and bring him to the place of washing;  
 Let him wash his long hair (clean) as snow in water.  
 Let him throw off his pelts and let the sea carry (them) away, that his fair body may be seen.  
 Let the band around his head be replaced with a new one.  
 Let him be clad with a garment, as clothing for his nakedness.  
 Until he gets to his city,  
 Until he finishes his journey,  
 May (his) garment not show (any sign of) age, but may it (still) be quite new.

And then the text continues informing us that the instructions were carried out:

Urshanabi took him and brought him to the place of washing.  
 He washed his long hair (clean) as snow in [water].  
 He threw off his pelts, that the sea might carry (them) away,  
 (And that) his fair body appeared.  
 He rep[placed the band around] his head with a new one.  
 He clothed him with a garment, as clothing for his nakedness.  
 Until he [would come to his city],  
 Until he would finish his journey,  
 [(His) garment should not show (any sign of) age but] should (still) be quite new.<sup>4</sup>

Gordon (*Common Background*, p. 83) has noted a biblical parallel in Deut. xxix 4 (see also viii 4) *wāʾōlēk ʾetkem ʾarbāʿīm šānāh bam-midbār lōʾ-bālū šalmôtēkem mēʿalēkem* “I led you forty years in the wilderness, your clothing did not wear out.” In other words, just as Gilgamesh is to return home in new clothing, the Israelites will enter Canaan with clothes looking like new. There may be a slight variation here — Gilgamesh must change clothes, the Israelites need not (but see Exod. xii 36 where the Israelites receive clothes from the Egyptians just as Gilgamesh receives them from Utnapishtim) — but that we are dealing with the same motif cannot be denied.<sup>5</sup>

Other East Mediterranean homecoming epics also include the detail of fresh clothing and washing. When Sinuhe returns to Egypt, he informs us of the following events (lines B 285-93):

We went through the great portals, and I was put in the house of a prince. In it were luxuries: a bathroom and mirrors. In it were riches from the treasury; clothes of royal linen, myrrh, and the choice perfume of the king and of his favorite courtiers were in every room. Every servant was at his task. Years were removed from my body. I was shaved; my hair was combed. Thus was my squalor returned to the foreign land, my dress to the Sand-farers. I was clothed in fine linen; I was anointed with fine oil.<sup>6</sup>

Again we have a slight variation — this time Sinuhe is already home when he washes and changes clothes — but the inclusion of these events in the story notifies us that the *nostos* is not complete without them. The other Egyptian homecoming tales do not include this detail, Shipwrecked Sailor perhaps because it is relatively short, and Wenamon presumably because we lack the end of the report.

Given the washing and changing of clothes in Mesopotamian, Hebrew, and Egyptian literatures, it is not surprising to find it present in the greatest of the *nostos* epics, the *Odyssey*. The reunion of Odysseus and Penelope, the climax of the poem, is recounted in Book XXIII where Homer has ingeniously used the motif to its utmost. Penelope comes to see Odysseus but is most hesitant in lines 85-95. Telemachos then scolds his mother in lines 96-103, to which Penelope responds in lines 104-110. At this point Odysseus interjects and tells his son “now that I am dirty and wear foul clothing upon me, she dislikes me for that, and says I am not her husband” (lines 115-16). Further on, in lines 152-5, we are told the following:

Now the housekeeper Eurynome bathed great-hearted  
Odysseus in his own house, and anointed him with olive oil,  
and threw a beautiful mantle and a tunic about him.<sup>7</sup>

Only now can the *nostos* be complete, so that Penelope “burst into tears and ran straight to him, throwing her arms around the neck of Odysseus, and kissed his head” (lines 207-8).

In four corners of the ancient Near East — Mesopotamia, Israel, Egypt, and Greece — we encounter the homecoming motif and in each case we have the feature of washing and changing one’s clothes. With this background, we gain a new understanding of Jacob’s words to his household in Gen. xxxv 2: *w<sup>h</sup>ittah<sup>a</sup>rû w<sup>h</sup>ah<sup>a</sup>lipû simlôtêkem* “and wash yourselves and change your clothes”.<sup>8</sup> Gen. xxxv is clearly a homecoming, Jacob’s successful return to Canaan

(see especially verses 6, 9, and 27).<sup>9</sup> The entire Jacob cycle, moreover, parallels the *Odyssey*, *Sinuhe*, and *Gilgamesh* where the protagonist must leave home and then happily returns.<sup>10</sup>

## II. *Rebekah and Deborah*

The commentators have traditionally struggled with Gen. xxxv 8, “Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died, and was buried under the oak below Bethel; so it was named Allon-bacuth.” R. Davidson sums up the problem: “It is difficult to know what gave rise to this brief reference to the death and burial of *Rebecca’s nurse Deborah*” (p. 201). S. R. Driver thought the verse was perhaps displaced,<sup>11</sup> and this suggestion is tentatively accepted by E. A. Speiser.<sup>12</sup> But a closer look at the verse and especially its placement — coming immediately after xxxv 6-7 telling of Jacob’s return to Canaan — allows us to ascertain its importance.

The deception of Isaac was effectuated by two conspirators, Rebekah and Jacob. Several scholars have noted that the latter receives his just desert in xxix 25-26, illuminated by Laban’s words *lō<sup>2</sup>-yē<sup>c</sup>āseh kēn bimqōmēnū lātēt haṣṣ<sup>c</sup>irāh lipnē habb<sup>c</sup>kirāh* “it is not the custom in our place to put the younger before the firstborn”.<sup>13</sup> But what about Rebekah? She after all was the instigator in deceiving Isaac and thus we expect her deeds to be likewise recompensed.

Scripture seems to be silent on this issue; but it is this very silence which is the key. Jacob’s gaining the birthright and the blessing moves Esau to seek to kill him, and Jacob must flee to Harran. Never again in the narratives do we hear of Rebekah. The story continues to trace the life of Jacob, and we never again encounter his mother. We are left to conclude that she never saw her beloved son (see xxv 28) again.<sup>14</sup> This was to be Rebekah’s punishment, but it was one which she brought upon herself: *‘alay qil<sup>c</sup>lātākā b<sup>c</sup>ni<sup>c</sup>* “upon me is your curse, my son” she proclaims in xxvii 13.

When Jacob returns to Canaan we have a brief reference to Isaac’s death and burial in xxxv 28-29. Indeed Genesis tells us of all the patriarch’s deaths and burials (see also xxv 7-9 and xlix 33-1 14) and also of the deaths and burials of their favored wives (xxiii 1-20 and xxxv 19). The lone exception is Rebekah. We simply are not told of her death and burial.<sup>15</sup> We are led to conclude that she died and was buried while Jacob was in Harran.<sup>16</sup>

How does all this help explain the reference to Deborah’s death and burial in xxxv 8? This passage, seemingly out of place as it is,

serves to highlight the point just made. Our author will not openly moralize about Rebekah, for this is not how he judges characters (Cassuto, pp. 63-4). Rather he leaves clues in the narrative which allow us, the readers, to reach our own conclusion. Jacob returns to Canaan in xxxv 6 and we expect a reference to his being reunited with Rebekah. But what do we get? We read only of Deborah's passing in xxxv 8. Our author cleverly included the name Rebekah to evoke in our minds the recollection of her character lest we have forgotten about her, but the person Rebekah is absent.<sup>17</sup> As usual, U. Cassuto put it best: "Undoubtedly a lesson that is taught by implication is capable of exerting a greater influence than one explicitly stated" (p. 63).

Gen. xxxv 8, therefore, far from being out of place, is expertly situated in the Jacob cycle. It is a key verse to the entire narrative and thus also explains the presence of the unnamed nurse (presumably Deborah) in xxiv 59. Eleven chapters earlier, our author or editor implanted a seed in our minds with the use of but two words, *w<sup>e</sup>et mēniqtāh*. This seemingly incidental and unimportant reference is introduced at the time of Rebekah's and Isaac's marriage, but this nurse, anonymous in xxiv 59 (!), will have a prominent role in the overall story.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, xxiv 59 is another example of what N. M. Sarna recently termed the anticipatory use of information, a significant and brilliant literary feature in the Genesis narratives.<sup>19</sup>

Buffalo

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<sup>1</sup> *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York, 1965), pp. 102, 111, 125, 223; and *Homer and Bible* (Ventnor, N.J., 1967), pp. 22-3, 36-7.

<sup>2</sup> Of course we do not possess the end of Wenamon but, as J. A. Wilson in *ANET*, p. 29, noted, "Since the tale is told in the first person, it is fair to assume that Wen-Amon returned to Egypt to tell his story, in some measure of safety or success." Cf. H. Goedicke, *The Report of Wenamun* (Baltimore, 1975), pp. 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon, *Common Background*, p. 83; and *Homer and Bible*, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Translation of A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago, 1949), p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> We have no mention of the Israelites washing themselves, though the circumcision ritual in Josh. v 2-9, with some stretch of the imagination, may have been intended as a similar idea (gaining a new skin?).

<sup>6</sup> Translation of M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature I* (Berkeley, 1973), pp. 232-3.

<sup>7</sup> Translation of R. Lattimore, *The Odyssey of Homer* (New York, 1967), pp. 338-40.

<sup>8</sup> Some commentators (e.g., R. Davidson, *Genesis 12-50* [Cambridge, 1979], p. 200; G. von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose. Genesis* [5th edn. Göttingen, 1958], pp.

293-4, E. tr. *Genesis* [London and Philadelphia, 1961], p. 331; and already Rashi, commentary on Gen. xxxv 2) understand these words in a cultic sense, but in light of the parallels from Near Eastern literature cited above, we should better recognize the homecoming motif in them.

<sup>9</sup> See M. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19-35:22)", *JJS* 26 (1975), p. 23: "This chapter concludes the Jacob Cycle ... [Jacob returns to Bethel, the tensions with Esau have been resolved, Jacob receives the blessing of the patriarchs, Rachel dies, the lineage is assured through the favored wife] ... and the narrative Cycle is complete".

<sup>10</sup> Are Odysseus' 20 years away from Ithaka (*Odyssey* XXIII: 102) and Jacob's 20 years away from Canaan (Gen. xxxi 41) merely coincidental?

<sup>11</sup> *The Book of Genesis* (London, 1906), p. 309.

<sup>12</sup> *Genesis* (Garden City, N.Y. 1964), p. 270.

<sup>13</sup> U. Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis* (Jerusalem, 1961), p. 64; and Davidson, p. 155.

<sup>14</sup> Noted by D. Kidner, *Genesis* (London and Downers Grove, Ill., 1967), p. 157. Cassuto, p. 64, merely states that Rebekah's punishment was having to send "her dearly loved son away", but it is actually much greater.

<sup>15</sup> Already noted by the rabbis who offered several explanations for the omission; see L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1937-56), I, p. 414; V, p. 318, n. 302; and the commentaries of Rashi and Ramban on Gen. xxxv 8. Rebekah's burial is mentioned in xlix 31 but only as one of the group interred in Machpelah. Nothing consequential should be derived from this passage since it is not an actual death notice and because we also have reference to Leah's burial there. On the other hand, are we here supposed to see an allusion to Jacob's and Rebekah's reunion, coming only in the dismal and dreary nether-world, and mentioned only two verses before Jacob's own death?

<sup>16</sup> Stated explicitly in Jub. xxxv 27, Josephus, *Antiquities* I.22.1, and in the few Midrashic sources cited by Ginzberg, V, p. 318, n. 302.

<sup>17</sup> This connection between Deborah and Rebekah was already implied in the midrash of R. Samuel bar Naḥman in *Genesis Rabbah* 81:5; see also Ramban's commentary on xxxv 8. We can thus reject the suggestion of M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch* (Stuttgart, 1948), p. 93, n. 254, E. tr. *A History of Pentateuchal Tradition* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972), p. 86, n. 254, that Rebekah may be an error for Rachel: "But how could Rebekah have come into *this* context? Can one solve the difficulty by assuming that a simple mistake [i.e., Rebekah for Rachel] occurred?" Also, a number of scholars (B. Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* [Berlin, 1934], p. 663; J. Skinner, *Genesis* [Edinburgh and New York, 1910], p. 425; W. H. Green, *The Unity of the Book of Genesis* [New York, 1895], p. 406; and even the rabbis [see Ginzberg, I, pp. 369, 413; and Rashi, commentary on xxxv 8]) are plagued as to how Deborah even was part of Jacob's company. But I fail to see the difficulty. The text does not state that she came with Jacob from Harran to Bethel, simply that she died soon after Jacob's arrival in Bethel.

<sup>18</sup> This obviates the difficulty sensed by Skinner, p. 425: "The notice of Deborah is in many ways perplexing. The nurse who accompanied Rebekah (24<sup>59</sup>) is nameless, and there is nothing to lead us to expect that she was to be an important figure in Hebrew legend."

<sup>19</sup> "The Anticipatory Use of Information as a Literary Feature of the Genesis Narratives", in R. E. Friedman (ed.), *The Creation of Sacred Literature* (Berkeley, 1981), pp. 76-82. Sarna, p. 82, notes that the anticipatory information is usually from a different source from the later main story, and thus he calls into question the entire JEP segmentation of Genesis. The same can be noted here, since xxiv 59 is usually assigned to J and xxxv 8 to E; see further Green, p. 406.