

Received: 6 July 2023 Accepted: 29 August 2023

DOI: 10.33182/aijls.v3i1.2844

# Patronage, Sectarianism, and Cultural Hegemony: Historical Speculations on the Socio-Cultural Background of the Hebrew Bible

**Emanuel Pfoh<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** *Patronage relationships have been ethnographically found at many locations in the Middle East during the second half of the twentieth century but also detected in ancient Near Eastern sources in more recent times, in every case mostly in connection with political situations. Patronage, however, also operates at the level of mentalities and its expression is equally discovered in worldviews of different cultures. This condition may therefore be observed as well in textualized mental expressions like the Hebrew Bible. In cases exposing sectarianism in the biblical stories, we may assert that patron-client bonds are taken by ancient scribes as the key mode for illustrating domination, subordination and in general an ontological order, transcending socio-politics and impacting also on what we would analytically deem a socio-religious imagination and its ulterior conceptual derivations. This paper seeks to relate clues and examples of patronage and sectarianism in the Hebrew Bible while focussing on their socio-cultural background. These expressions, in the history of the production of the biblical texts, would end up manifesting a particular cultural hegemony of a biblical ontology articulated by patronage dynamics in the southern Levant since the Persian period, but especially in connection with the Hasmonean rise to power, centred in Jerusalem.*

**Keywords:** *Hebrew Bible; patron-client relationships; sectarianism; cultural hegemony*

---

<sup>1</sup> Emanuel Pfoh, IICS-UCA-CONICET, Argentina & Centre of Excellence “Ancient Near Eastern Empires,” University of Helsinki, Finland. E-mail: emanuel.pfoh@helsinki.fi



## Introduction: As an Anthropologist Would

The themes and issues treated in this contribution are, properly speaking, historical in nature. However, the analytical emphasis is placed on approaching these themes and issues with an anthropological or even ethnographic epistemological perspective, i.e., questioning social or cultural perspectives given as obvious or natural, but also relating historical processes with their own cultural and symbolic contexts.<sup>2</sup>

When reading the Hebrew Bible from a socio-anthropological perspective, and precisely without losing sight of the historical processes involved in the production of its texts, two themes may be identified. In a first place, the understanding of reality through an essential and exclusionary opposition between the “People of God”—or also the “Children of Israel”—who are expected to obey YHWH’s commands, and the pagan peoples, who worship deities other than YHWH; and, in a second place, the presence of basic units of patronage bonds between a major party and a minor one configuring the socio-political background. Both these aspects present in biblical literature—namely, sectarianism and patronage—were initially studied in different yet interrelated ways by Niels Peter Lemche and Thomas L. Thompson, the founding members of the so-called “Copenhagen school” in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament studies, in contributions from the 1990s and early 2000s.

---

<sup>2</sup> See already B. Lang, “Introduction: Anthropology as a New Model for Biblical Studies,” in *Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament*, ed. B. Lang (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 1–20; and now Emanuel Pfoh, “Introduction: Social and Cultural Anthropology and the Hebrew Bible in Perspective,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Anthropology and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. E. Pfoh (T&T Clark Handbooks; London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 1–16. Anthropologists have been dealing with historical questions from quite a long time now; cf., among the vast amount of specialized literature, B.K. Axel (ed.), *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); and D. Kalb and H. Tak (eds.), *Critical Junctions: Anthropology and History beyond the Cultural Turn* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005).



It was Lemche who first advanced in recent times the hypothesis that most if not all of the literature of the Hebrew Bible was composed or “edited” under special social circumstances, tracing the origins of these circumstances to the Mesopotamian Exile and the Return to the Promised Land between the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. And both events appear to be more relevant in their “mythical” significance, in an anthropological sense, than properly historical, as narrated in the Hebrew Bible, even if we can assume and demonstrate to a certain extent a return of some Yahwistic worshippers.<sup>3</sup> Lemche, however, focuses his attention especially on the social and religious conditions in Southwestern Asia during the Hellenistic period. In effect, particular conditions during this period would have fostered a religiously sectarian understanding of past, present and future reality for biblical tradents.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, it is also Lemche’s merit to have developed an historical analysis based on the concept of patronage when discussing the Syro-Palestinian or rather Levantine social, political and cultural background of Israelite society as depicted in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf., e.g., L.L. Grabbe, “The Reality of the Return: The Biblical Picture Versus Historical Reconstruction,” in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context*, ed. J. Stökl and C. Waerzeggers (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 292–307.

<sup>4</sup> See on all this, N.P. Lemche, “‘Because They Have Cast Away the Law of the Lord of Hosts’—or: ‘We and the Rest of the World’: The Authors Who ‘Wrote’ the Old Testament,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 17/2 (2003): 268–290; for a close relationship with Qumran literature, idem, “The Understanding of Community in the Old Testament and in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Qumran between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. F.H. Cryer and T.L. Thompson (JSOTSup 290 / CIS 6: Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 181–193; more recently, idem, “A Sectarial Group Called Israel: Historiography and Cultural Memory,” in *History, Politics and the Bible from the Iron Age to the Media Age: Studies in Honour of Keith W. Whitlam*, ed. J.G. Crossley and J. West (LHBOTS 651; London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 72–96; idem, “Too Good to Be True? The Creation of the People of Israel,” *Die Welt des Orients* 50/2 (2020): 254–274. See also T.L. Thompson, *The Bible in History: How Writers Create a Past* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), 190–199 and 237–244.

<sup>5</sup> See N.P. Lemche, “Kings and Clients: On Loyalty between the Ruler and the Ruled in Ancient ‘Israel’,” in *Ethics and Politics in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. D.A. Knight (Semeia 66; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 119–132; idem, “Justice in Western Asia in Antiquity, or: Why No Laws Were Needed!,” *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 70/4 (1995): 1695–1716; idem, “From Patronage Society to Patronage Society,” in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States*, ed. V. Fritz and P.R. Davies (JSOTSup 228; Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 106–120. Also in this connection, see R. Westbrook, “Patronage in the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48/3 (2005): 210–233; and E. Pfoh, “Introduction: Patronage as Analytical Concept and Socio-Political Practice,” in *Patronage in Ancient Palestine and in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. E. Pfoh (SWBA - SS 12; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2022), 1–37.

In the following pages, I shall attempt to relate the two intervening factors, patronage and sectarianism, in order to envision a possible social and cultural background for understanding the political and religious world of the biblical writers and the final shape of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, a third factor related to questions of cultural hegemony appears as relevant in this connection: it should be noted that the referred word “writer” when applied to ancient scribes might be somewhat misleading. With this term, it is essentially intended to mean a person creating an interpretation of a particular tradition, as it is being written down—the interpretation re-creates meaning, and in this specific manner, the ancient writer evokes a reality socially meaningful for the intended audience. In quite a few ways, we can understand ancient writers as proper intellectuals (cf. below).<sup>7</sup>

Lastly, my main purpose in this essay is not to offer final answers to these questions nor to present a discussion of the complex internal textual processes of the composition of the biblical text and its narratives, which has already been addressed many times by historical-critical scholars. Instead, I wish to foster socio-scientific perspectives—speculative as they may be, and rather alternative to the common historical-critical analyses in Old Testament scholarship—on the socio-cultural background of the Hebrew Bible and early Judaism(s), relying on biblical depictions as a primary source of

---

<sup>6</sup> I revisit and supplement in this paper some discussions originally presented in E. Pfoh, *The Emergence of Israel in Ancient Palestine: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (CIS; London: Equinox, 2009), 143–160; and idem, “Ancient Historiography, Biblical Stories and Hellenism,” in *The Bible and Hellenism: Greek Influence on Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, ed. T.L. Thompson and P. Wajdenbaum (CIS; Durham: Acumen, 2014), 19–35.

<sup>7</sup> See further the different approaches to the issue in, e.g., P.R. Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of Hebrew Scriptures* (LAI; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), esp. 74–88; W.M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); J. Van Seters, *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the “Editor” in Biblical Criticism* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006); K. van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); E. Ben Zvi, *Social Memory among the Literati of Yehud* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), where “literati” has a clear meaning of ancient intellectuals, producers and distributors of a certain remembered (or created) meaning of the present in relation to a certain past; and lastly K. Schmid and J. Schröter, *The Making of the Bible: From the First Fragments to Sacred Scripture* (transl. P. Lewis; Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021).



intellectual rather than factual historical information.<sup>8</sup> The following discussion then focuses on patronage and sectarianism as factors of importance in the shaping of Second Temple Judaism and its textual productions.

## Conceptual Departures

### *Patronage in Contemporary Social Anthropology*

The socio-political nature of patronage in traditional societies has been thoroughly studied during the past sixty years, especially through the methodology produced by accumulative ethnographic fieldwork in the Mediterranean basin and also in the Middle East region between the 1950s and the 1980s—what has generally been termed “the anthropology of Mediterranean societies” or simply “Mediterranean anthropology.”<sup>9</sup> The basic structure of patron-client relationships entails, in short, a dyadic and notably asymmetrical bond between an individual with power, authority and/or prestige and resources of any kind (the patron) and another individual without power or resources (the client), who consents to being in the relationship and therefore obtains something in exchange. There is always a direct reciprocity between the parts, but the ever-asymmetrical condition of the bond implies that the patron sets the

---

<sup>8</sup> I follow Philip Davies’ understanding of different Judaism between the Persian and Roman periods; cf. P.R. Davies, *On the Origins of Judaism* (BibleWorld; London: Equinox, 2011), 7–53. See also T.L. Thompson, “Etnicitet og Bibel: Flere ‘jødedomme’ og Det nye Israel,” in *Etnicitet i Bibelen*, ed. N.P. Lemche and H. Tronier (FBE 9; Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Forlag, 1998), 23–42.

<sup>9</sup> See, among the main studies on the topic, E. Gellner and J. Waterbury (eds.), *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (London: Duckworth, 1977); J. Leca and Y. Schemel, “Clientélisme et patrimonialisme dans le monde arabe,” *International Political Science Review* 4 (1983): 455–494; S.N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); A. Maçzak, *Ungleiche Freundschaft: Klientelbeziehungen von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (DHIW: Klio in Polen 7; Osnabrück: Fibre Verlag, 2005); V. Lécivain, (ed.), *Clientèle guerrière, clientèle foncière et clientèle électorale: Histoire et anthropologie* (Collection Sociétés; Dijon: Éditions Universitaires de Dijon, 2007); L. Ruiz de Elvira, C.H. Schwartz, and I. Weipert-Fenner (eds.), *Clientelism and Patronage in the Middle East and North Africa: Networks of Dependency* (Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Democratization and Government; London: Routledge, 2018).

norms through which a particular exchange of protection for loyalty and assistance, or also material resources for debt, will be materialized. The direct, personalized, and reciprocal nature of patronage makes it exclusivist by definition: there can be only *one* patron; a client cannot have two simultaneous patrons (at least for a substantial period of time). The patron's clientele constitutes one group of loyalty-bound individuals, forming a vertical pyramidal hierarchy (big or important clients can at the same time perform as mid-rank patrons of other lesser clients) of protection from the top down and obedience and loyalty from the bottom up.

### ***Sectarianism in Contemporary Societies***

Considering modern and contemporary examples of sectarianism from the Islamic Middle East, we may be able to grasp some interpretive patterns for interpreting ancient forms of sectarianism comparatively.<sup>10</sup> We must, however, always bear in mind that ancient sectarianism differs from modern cases, even if we can attest similar patterns of social behaviour and the presence of an *integrated* understanding of reality: historical and cultural processes and changes appear in the presentation of the modern phenomenon and this fact must be taken into account when applying analogies in a transhistorical analysis. By “integrated” I refer to a conceptualisation of reality that does not draw any fundamental difference or delimitation between concrete analytical spheres such as politics, economics and religion, or private and public life, or the divine and the earthly worlds. Every aspect of human life is accordingly understood

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf., for instance, B. Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).



under a leading (integrated) pattern of behaviour.<sup>11</sup> For instance, among conservative Islamic communities this pattern is dictated by the *shari'ah* norms; among conservative, or better, ultra-orthodox Jewish communities the pattern is based on living exclusively according to the *torah* teachings and *halachic* precepts. As such, “us and them” becomes the main performative factor of a sectarian worldview, even for situations presenting factionalisms within a same religious tradition,<sup>12</sup> and it therefore exposes the key mode of social articulation. Needless to say, such a sectarian worldview coincides in many aspects with the direct and personalized relationship found in patronage bonds, not least in the contemporary Middle East (although the latter are ethnographically proven to be much more flexible than the socio-religious sectarian bonds).

Back to the comparison between ancient and modern sects, David Chalcraft reminds the following for us:

[S]ociology is built on the assumption that sectarian phenomena in the present should be very different from sectarian phenomena in the past precisely because of the fact that the phenomena will be occurring in different types of society with a range of social, political and cultural institutions and arrangements. Hence comparing a sect in modernity with a sect in the past is not to conflate one with the other but actually

---

<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, this is illustrated—and besides the common Orientalist tropes in this lengthy treatment—in G.E. Post’s Victorian description of the many characteristics of the “nations and sects” in Syria-Palestine, for instance: “(1) *Religion is universal*.- The whole population is enrolled by the Government according to religious divisions. The first question asked of a man in court is ‘What is your religion?’ To say that a man has no religion is equivalent in public opinion and law to cursing his religion, and declaring it to be of no account, as it is held to be impossible for anyone to be without religion. (2) *Religion enters into all the Relationships of Life* [...] Religion regulates the social relationships and affinities.” And quite relevant for the present contribution: “[...] Sectarian schools are the rule, non-sectarian schools have not proven a success,” which is telling of the common factionalism in social (i.e., collective) identities’ expressions in the Ottoman Levant (“Essays on the Sects and Nationalities of Syria and Palestine,” *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* 23/2 [1891]: 99–147, here pp. 145–146; the emphases are original).

<sup>12</sup> See M. Bax, “‘Us’ Catholics and ‘Them’ Catholics in Dutch Brabant: The Dialectics of a Religious Factional Process,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 56/4 (1983): 167–178.

to discover what is similar and different between them and to account for those differences by reference to social variations.<sup>13</sup>

Accordingly, every phenomenon of contemporary sectarianism must first be properly historicized; their socio-historical causes must be brought to the fore so we may grasp its particularities, since from a historical point of view there is no transcendental or essential form of sectarianism. If we take, for instance, the ethno-historical cases of sectarianism in Lebanon during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries into account, we must attend to the historical context of a political and economically decadent Ottoman empire and the question of the modernisation of the Middle East by the interaction between European actors and local elites, not only regarding technology and infrastructure but also through the confrontation of ideas, worldviews and even ontologies, notably in relation to the spread of external factors like (Western) nationalism and secularism, the local reactions to both of them and their eventual reformulations by local populations.<sup>14</sup>

What we may learn from studying modern and contemporary examples of sectarianism is how socio-historical conditions generate or influence worldviews, and how such worldviews impact on the wider society—which gives us a lot to think about regarding the key polarisation in the Hebrew Bible between those who follow YHWH's

---

<sup>13</sup> D.J. Chalcraft, "Is a Historical Comparative Sociology of (Ancient Jewish) Sects Possible?," in *Sects and Sectarianism in Jewish History*, ed. S. Stern (IJS Studies in Judaica 12; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2011), 235–286, here p. 245.

<sup>14</sup> For a general historical framework, see I. Pappé, *The Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2005). More in particular, see R.E. Crow, "Religious Sectarianism in the Lebanese Political System," *Journal of Politics* 24 (1962): 489–520; S. Khalaf, "Changing Forms of Political Patronage in Lebanon," in *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies*, ed. E. Gellner and J. Waterbury (London: Duckworth, 1977), 185–205; U. Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); M. Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi'ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); D. Zeidan, "Networks of Dependency and Governmentality in Southern Lebanon: Development and Reconstructions as Tools for Hezbollah's Clientelist Strategies," in *Clientelism and Patronage in the Middle East and North Africa: Networks of Dependency*, ed. L. Ruiz de Elvira, C.H. Schwartz, and I. Weipert-Fenner (Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Democratization and Government; London: Routledge, 2018), 192–210.





will and those who disregard it or reject it, but also about the “true Israel” and deviations from this theo-ideological notion (see below).

### ***Cultural Hegemony***

The concept of “cultural hegemony” builds on the work of the Italian Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) who referred to it, especially in his *Prison Notebooks*, as basically the dominance of a series of ideological concepts and expectations proper of the ruling class over the rest of society, producing a worldview aligned to, subservient of or dependent on, precisely, the ruling class’s ideology.<sup>15</sup> In this process, those who Gramsci categorized under the concept of “organic intellectuals” are fundamental since they produce and disseminate the aforementioned ideological concepts and expectations which then make hegemony possible over the different lower classes in society. Gramsci, with the concept of “cultural hegemony,” was naturally thinking especially about modern and industrialized societies. However, there is in effect a potential and heuristic use of “cultural hegemony” as an interpretive and explanatory tool of particular historical situations of ancient societies, especially in cases where scribalism possesses a technical importance as a social and intellectual practice producing and transmitting both collective traditions and particular theological (ideological) messages, which may eventually become hegemonic in certain circumstances.<sup>16</sup> Without delving into discussions of this concept within Marxist social, economic and

---

<sup>15</sup> A. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (ed. J.A. Buttigieg; New York: Columbia University Press, 1992 [orig. Italian 1929–35]).

<sup>16</sup> Cf., for instance, E. Zucchetti and A.M. Cimino (eds.), *Antonio Gramsci and the Ancient World* (Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies; London: Routledge, 2021), essentially dealing with Greek, Etruscan and Roman antiquity, but including several insights to further thinking about other situations in East Mediterranean antiquity; and most recently S.M. Thompson, *Displays of Cultural Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony in the Late Bronze and Iron Age Levant: The Public Presence of Foreign Powers and Local Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2023), dealing as the title indicates with the period ca. 1550-550 BCE.

historical analyses, we may attempt a first exploration and see how it contributes to the relationship of patronage and sectarianism in Second Temple Judaism, always taking into account the limitations intrinsic to the concept's historicity and its related interpretations and the historical particularities of southern Levantine societies and religious communities.

### **Patronage in the Hebrew Bible**

Under the correct analytical predisposition, patronage relations in the Hebrew Bible can indeed be found everywhere, from Genesis to the wisdom literature (and even beyond that).<sup>17</sup> One needs only attend to the textual evidence as an anthropologist (or better, an ethnographer in the field) would. The key question is to acknowledge that the ideal social order in the biblical world—namely, the mythic and narrative worlds structuring biblical stories—is not the outcome of a popular agreement but, quite the contrary, a command “from above” impacting on the people.<sup>18</sup> If one can summarise this key point: YHWH establishes what is right and wrong, good and bad, accepted and forbidden in the world. Therefore, justice in the Hebrew Bible is not a collective social and horizontal pact, but rather what is good in YHWH's eyes (cf., e.g., Deut 6:18; 1 Sam 3:18). It is—ultimately—an arbitrary decision made by a powerful (divine) patron. This is in effect YHWH's patronage over humanity—and in particular over certain chosen humans, namely personal servants (clients) of the divinity.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> For a general background, see V.H. Matthews and D.C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel: 1250–587 BCE* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993); and further J. Georges, *Ministering in Patronage Cultures: Biblical Models and Missional Interpretations* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019); and the literature in footnote 5 above.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. K. Vermeulen, “Telling Tales: Biblical Myth and Narrative,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Anthropology and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. E. Pfoh (T&T Clark Handbooks; London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 351–371.

<sup>19</sup> Thompson, *The Bible in History*, 305–317



In the context of the previous assertion, the Covenant Code (Exod 20:22–23:19), which used to be considered as expressing a kind of normative law, should be actually understood as a constitutive part of religious or wisdom literature, not a section in a juridical archive of a kingdom in antiquity.<sup>20</sup> Unless extra-biblical evidence is presented (which so far has never been found), one cannot say that it constituted the cornerstone of some possible Israelite legal system of the Iron Age in Palestine (ca. 1150–550 BCE).<sup>21</sup> From a strictly textual point of view, we could assume that the Covenant Code is at least exilic in form and origin and that it created the bases for the self-understanding of early forms of Judaism.<sup>22</sup> But here we can go further and think comparatively of the many examples coming from previous periods of the ancient Near East, like treaties and loyalty oaths. These textual artefacts expressing the bonding of two parties (a few times symmetrically, but most of the times asymmetrically) may in effect be regarded as manifestations of a particular comprehension of political reality in terms of patronage. We ought to remember the aforementioned integrated understanding of society: concrete separations or delimitations of reality, such as “religion,” “politics,” “economics,” etc., were conceptually non-existent in ancient Near Eastern societies.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it is not improbable that the Covenant Code was conceived of, in form and content, with a patronage perception of the socio-political reality in mind. This perception of patronage, involving both divine and human realms, dwells implicitly in the formulae of the

---

<sup>20</sup> Cf., e.g., B. Jackson, *Wisdom-Laws: A Study of the Mishpatim of Exodus 12:1–22:16* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> See Lemche, “Justice in Western Asia in Antiquity,” 1695–1708.

<sup>22</sup> See the discussion in J. Van Seters, *A Law Book for the Diaspora: Revision in the Study of the Covenant Code* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); also E.T. Mullen, Jr., *Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries: The Deuteronomistic Historian and the Creation of Israelite National Identity* (SBLSS; Atlanta, GA, Scholars Press, 1993). To speak of an “Israelite national identity” during these periods of multiple Judaisms seems to be at the least misleading but also conceptually anachronistic.

<sup>23</sup> See the lengthy synthetic approach in M. Liverani, “La concezione dell’universo,” in *L’alba della civiltà: Società, economia e pensiero nel Vicino Oriente antico*, ed. S. Moscati (Torino: UTET, 1976), vol. III, 437–521; which, in spite of being now dated, is hardly surpassed in its theoretical orientation.

code. Taking the whole of the Hebrew Bible, the interaction between YHWH and different humans clearly responds to a logic consistent with patronage as found in different ethnographic contexts.

In this sense, it may be possible to affirm that patronage and covenant constitute in fact two interrelated modes of expressing an ancient form of alliance—or better, we can state that covenant relationships are a kind of patronage relationship. It is the socio-political practice that creates the ontological order, which is projected as the correct and just manner in which the world is to be set.<sup>24</sup> Thus, apart from such an order, patronage establishes political legitimacy in society: no external laws to the personal relationship of patronage were needed, only the authority of a mighty lord and his word.<sup>25</sup> In spite of the particularities of the biblical covenant, which involve a pact between a deity and a people—something quite unique in comparison to other treaty formulas in the ancient Near East—the operative logic of this relationship is fitting with a patronage model: YHWH commands as a patron to his clients, the people of Israel, usually by means of divinely appointed individuals, which act as brokers between patron and

---

<sup>24</sup> The idea of the practice of justice and righteousness, especially with the god or the king as warrant of these factors, ought to be related to ideal instances of patronage in the ancient Near East, including the Hebrew Bible. Cf. the original study by H.H. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte des alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1968), who however did not have patronage on his interpretive and analytical horizon.

<sup>25</sup> See T.L. Thompson, “A Testimony of the Good King: Reading the Mesha Stele,” in *Ahab Agonistes: The Rise and Fall of the Omri Dynasty*, ed. L.L. Grabbe (LHBOTS 421 / ESHM 6; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 236–297, esp. 257–259; idem, “Mesha and Questions of Historicity,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 21/2 (2007): 241–260, esp. 246–250. An effort to interpret biblical law from the point of view of anthropology can be found in J.W. Marshall, *Israel and the Book of Covenant: An Anthropological Approach to Biblical Law* (SBLDS 140; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 29–59. Marshall argues that “as a cultural product, law is not an objective regulator of culture; instead law will represent the interests of particular groups and time periods” (p. 33). The Covenant Code would then be an intellectual expression of a socio-political model of patronage behind the creators of the biblical text in a particular time period.



clients.<sup>26</sup> What we may therefore justly call a “theology of patronage” is consistent with a socio-cultural background proper of patronage kingdoms or societies: higher powers ruling over them and dyadic relationships of protection, loyalty and unequal reciprocity taking place in Palestine since the Bronze Age and existing well into the mid-first millennium BCE and later periods.<sup>27</sup>

### Projections of a Sectarian Society and the Socio-Historical Background of the Hebrew Bible

The idea of the existence of sectarian characteristics in the early manifestations of Judaism can already be found in Max Weber’s *Das antike Judentum* (published as a book in 1923), where the key distinction of sectarianism is the voluntary membership to a sect by means of qualification.<sup>28</sup> However, and without discarding a Weberian approach to the issue, my interest resides with a more historical and anthropological approach to the question of sectarian perspectives in

---

<sup>26</sup> Cf. G. Garbini, *Myth and History in the Bible* (JSOTSup 362; Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), p. 65: “For all Near Eastern peoples a ‘covenant’ between a god and his people simply made no sense: the covenant concerned only the king and his dynastic god and the king was legitimate just because of this direct relationship with the god.” Further on treaties, see the useful overviews in D.J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (new edition; AnBib 21a; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978); M. Weinfeld, “The Common Heritage of Covenantal Traditions in the Ancient World,” in *I trattati nel mondo antico: Forma, ideologia, funzione*, ed. L. Canfora, C. Zaccagnini, and M. Liverani (Roma: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 1990), 175–191; C. Koch, *Vertrag, Treueid und Bund: Studien zur Rezeption des altorientalischen Vertragsrechts im Deuteronomium und zur Ausbildung der Bundestheologie im Alten Testament* (BZAW 383; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2008); D. Charpin, «*Tu es de mon sang*»: *Les alliances dans le Proche-Orient ancien* (Docet omnia 4; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, Collège de France, 2019). Cf. E. Otto, “Die Ursprünge des Bundestheologie im Alten Testament und im Alten Orient,” *Zeitschrift für die altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 4 (1998): 1–84, for a linkage between covenant theology and the Assyrian vassal treaties.

<sup>27</sup> See Pfoh, “Patronage as Analytical Concept,” 12–17. The concept of a “theology of patronage” appears originally in T.L. Thompson, “He is Yahweh; He Does What is Right in His Own Eyes: The Old Testament as a Theological Discipline, II,” in *Tro og Historie: Festskrift til Niels Hyldahl*, ed. L. Fatum and M. Müller (FBE 7; Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Forlag, 1996), 246–263, esp. 257–261. See also the theological perspectives on patronage in Georges, *Ministering in Patronage Cultures*, 39–110.

<sup>28</sup> M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie. Bd. III: Das antike Judentum* (ed. M. Weber; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1923 [1917–19]); see further, D.J. Chalcraft (ed.), *Sectarianism in Early Judaism: Sociological Advances* (BibleWorld; London: Equinox, 2007), esp. 26–111; J. Jokiranta, *Social Identity and Sectarianism in the Qumran Movement* (STDJ 105; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2013), 25–28.

Judaism from a general and broader outlook and the hypothesis that the creation of the Hebrew Bible occurred during the second half of the first millennium BCE.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, any typology and any conceptual model are only tools for arranging our textual (and archaeological) data and being able to analyse and understand them.<sup>30</sup>

If we follow the biblical narrative, the remnant who returned from the exile in Babylon, as narrated in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, constitutes a pious community (the *b'nê haggolâ*), the chosen ones, the “true Israel” who are to take over the land of Palestine to fulfill YHWH’s promise to Abraham. In the Hebrew Bible, the implicit sectarian distinction creates in fact a double sectarianism, towards the outer world and within Judaism: in a general manner, there is those who know and study the law, and live according to it, and those who do not (cf. Psalm 1); in a more particular manner, and within the first pious group, there is those who worship YHWH in the correct place of worship, i.e., the Jerusalem temple—and Nehemiah here acts like the “chief sectarian”<sup>31</sup>—and those who worship in the wrong places, i.e., the Mt. Gerizim temple.<sup>32</sup>

Now, what could the appropriate socio-historical context for the development of this sectarian view in biblical literature be?

Without making an extensive survey of current approaches to the question, it may suffice to briefly mention as a start a position that is becoming widely accepted in Old Testament scholarship. Over two decades ago, Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman proposed the

---

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Chalcraft (ed.), *Sectarianism in Early Judaism*; Stern (ed.), *Sects and Sectarianism in Jewish History*; and especially Jokiranta, *Social Identity and Sectarianism*.

<sup>30</sup> Precisely, as Jokiranta (*Social Identity and Sectarianism*, 33) notes: “Sociology of sectarianism is not a given, a package that either fits or does not fit the material at hand. It is a tool that highlights certain features over others and provides empirical and theoretical elements for hypotheses.”

<sup>31</sup> I owe the *bon mot* to Martti Nissinen (pers. comm., October 2023).

<sup>32</sup> On the relationship between the Samaria temple, Samaritanism, and the Hebrew Bible, see I. Hjelm, *Jerusalem’s Rise to Sovereignty: Zion and Gerizim in Competition* (JSOTSup 404 / CIS 14; London: T&T Clark, 2004).



late Judean monarchic period as the time of the initial composition of the biblical texts. The main problem with this hypothesis is that the dating of the core of the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History to the seventh century BCE (during Hezekiah's and Josiah's reigns) does not actually depend on extra-biblical evidence but instead relies essentially on biblical data and historical probability alone,<sup>33</sup> reflecting the very same problems that one encounters in much older historiography which claimed very early contexts for the rise of the historiographical practice in Israel: for instance, Gerhard von Rad's dating of the beginning of biblical historiography to tenth-century Palestine, in the court of kings David and Solomon.<sup>34</sup>

It could on the other hand be possible to suggest that the Persian period (550–332 BCE) might provide us with a better earliest probable context for the appearance of some traits of biblical historiography, namely a biblical discourse about the past of Israel (which however cannot be necessarily equated with a proper dealing with the historical past of the region, in spite of a number of archaeological and epigraphic convergences in some cases).<sup>35</sup> It is rather during the

---

<sup>33</sup> See I. Finkelstein and N.A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 10–24, 246–250, 275–295. Finkelstein has since expanded and updated his hypotheses about the creation of biblical historiography, projecting the beginnings back to eighth-century Israel (Northern Kingdom), but without extensively modifying his original proposal: cf. I. Finkelstein, *Essays on Biblical Historiography: From Jeroboam II to John Hyrcanus* (FAT 148; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), esp. Parts VI and VII, and the Conclusions.

<sup>34</sup> See G. von Rad, "Der Anfang der Geschichtsschreibung im alten Israel," in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1961), 148–188. Cf. now the discussion in O. Sergi, "On Scribal Tradition in Israel and Judah and the Antiquity of the Historiographical Narratives in the Hebrew Bible," in *Eigensinn und Entstehung der Hebräischen Bibel: Erhard Blum zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. J.J. Krause, W. Oswald, and K. Weingart (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 275–299.

<sup>35</sup> See P.R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel': A Study in Biblical Origins* (JSOTSup 148; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); and see for background the useful synthesis in E.S. Gerstenberger, *Israel in der Perserzeit: 5. und 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (BE 8; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2005). See further Ł. Niesiołowski-Spanò, "Why Was Biblical History Written during the Persian Period? Persuasive Aspects of Biblical Historiography and Its Political Context, or Historiography as an Anti-Mnemonic Literary Genre," in *Collective Memory and Collective Identity: Case Studies in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History*, ed. J.U. Ro and D.V. Edelman (BZAW 534; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 353–376; and also K. Schmid, "How to Identify a Persian Period Text in the Pentateuch," in *On Dating Biblical Texts to the Persian Period: Discerning Criteria and Establishing Epochs*, ed. R.J. Bautch and M. Lackowski (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 101–118.

Hellenistic period (332–63 BCE) in the Levant (and extensively in Southwestern Asia) that we find socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions which could best explain the development of biblical historiography, such as the presence of scribal or theological schools and other intellectual and academic realms. In fact, the Hellenistic period also accounts for the spread of older Near Eastern and especially Greek intellectual (mythic, literary, religious) influences and borrowings that have been identified in many stories and tropes of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>36</sup> Thus, we could propose a scribal process that was perhaps ignited by a Persian exilic condition—or better, its ideology—then had its peak during the Hellenistic period, and whose resolution may well have lasted, in its final arrangements, until Roman times.<sup>37</sup> This does not mean, of course, that the biblical narrative was created out of nothing in the Hellenistic period. It is clear that many traditions and motifs in the biblical stories are originally older in their first literary attestations, dating in fact from the Persian or the Assyrian periods, and equally from much earlier times and related to different locations in the Near East.<sup>38</sup> What I contend instead is that both the

---

<sup>36</sup> See especially N.P. Lemche, “The Old Testament: A Hellenistic Book?” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 7/2 (1993): 163–193; T.M. Bolin, “When the End is the Beginning: The Persian Period and the Origins of the Biblical Tradition,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 10/1 (1996): 3–15; P. Wajdenbaum, *Argonauts of the Desert: Structural Analysis of the Hebrew Bible* (CIS; London: Equinox, 2011); and also the discussion in Pfoh, “Ancient Historiography.” Further now, see the studies by R. Gmirkin, *Plato and the Creation of the Hebrew Bible* (CIS; London: Routledge, 2017); idem, *Plato’s Timaeus and the Biblical Creation Accounts: Cosmic Monotheism and Terrestrial Polytheism in the Primordial History* (CIS; London: Routledge, 2022); and by R.K. Gnuse, *Hellenism and the Primary History: The Imprint of Greek Sources in Genesis–2 Kings* (CIS; London: Routledge, 2020). Within this historiographical context, one should integrate the recent argumentation of a very late (mid-second century BCE) constitution of normative and performative Judaism in Y. Adler, *The Origins of Judaism: An Archaeological-Historical Reappraisal* (ABRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022).

<sup>37</sup> See R.P. Carroll, “Exile! What Exile? Deportation and the Discourses of Diaspora,” in *Leading Captivity Captive: ‘The Exile’ as History and Ideology*, ed. L.L. Grabbe (JSOTSup 278 / ESHM 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 62–79.

<sup>38</sup> See, for instance, A. Schoors, *Die Königreiche Israel und Juda im 8. und 7. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (BE 5; Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1998), 108–181; H.M. Barstad, “Can Prophetic Texts Be Dated? Amos 1–2 as an Example,” in *Ahab Agonistes: The Rise and Fall of the Omri Dynasty*, ed. L.L. Grabbe (LHBOTS 421 / ESHM 6; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 21–40, esp. 36–37. See however the pertinent remarks in N.P. Lemche, *The Old Testament between Theology and*





intellectual motivation and the necessary material resources for beginning the writing of what later would become the Hebrew Bible find a more appropriate context during the Hellenistic period; yet, the mythic pattern contained in biblical traditions, memories and stories comes from centuries, even millennia of intellectual development in the Near East.

According to Lemche, the authors of the Hebrew Bible “belonged to the well-educated societal elite in possession of a definite socio-religious programme. The elite knew the Mesopotamian law and university tradition but it was also acquainted with religious and historical traditions from Syria and Palestine.”<sup>39</sup> Lemche also characterized—maybe somewhat mischievously—the Hebrew Bible authors as “Taliban,” and from a comparative point of view the analogy would indeed be not totally incorrect (cf., e.g., the worldview expressed in Ps 1:1-2; Isa 4:2-6; 5:8-24; 6:1-13), albeit the historical background for both religious sectarian groups is of course quite different. The relevant fact is that both the Hebrew Bible authors and the Taliban aspired to live strictly according to the order sanctioned by God (YHWH/Allah), and they were willing to fight and exert violence to make that happen. Sectarianism, as a matter of fact, usually involves some kind of violence, at times physical but mostly symbolic in its discursive construction and expression, and such violence seems to be condoned when perceived from within the sectarian worldview: the conquest of the Promised Land and its implicit genocide, as told in Josh 2–12, is a clear example of this, far from any consideration for “the other” or

---

*History: A Critical Survey* (LAI; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 212–234. Likewise, see especially the discussion in T.L. Thompson, *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), Chapters 5–10. On questions of transmission, see now R.D. Miller II, “Neither Divide nor Continuum: Orality and Literacy in the Hebrew Bible,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Anthropology and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. E. Pfoh (T&T Clark Handbooks; London: Bloomsbury 2023), 327–349.

<sup>39</sup> Lemche, “Because They Have Cast Away the Law of the Lord of Hosts,” 286–287.

their human rights (a most anachronistic expectation, however).<sup>40</sup> Finally, the religious programmes of both religious communities elevate the submission to God's word and command as a most important factor. For explicit biblical examples, let us think of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac in Gen 22:5-8 (or of Ishmael, as it is evoked in the Islamic tradition), or the different situations narrated in the story of Job.<sup>41</sup>

Let me rapidly sketch now a possible historical development for the constitution of this sectarian condition, following Thompson's reconstruction of the matter. The period from the ninth to the fifth centuries BCE in the southern Levant is one of local political fragmentation—something coherent with Palestine's topography—with autonomous patronage centres interacting diversely with, but mostly subordinated to, imperial powers (Assyria, Babylonia, Persia); this is a historical scenario where the cult of inclusive Yahwism, as Thompson has called it, may well have developed.<sup>42</sup> The following period, from the fifth to second centuries witnessed a process from inclusive Yahwism to exclusive Yahwism and a competition between cultic centres, notably those of Samaria and Jerusalem.<sup>43</sup> More recently, Diana Edelman has proposed a similar development,

---

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, M. Prior, "Ethnic Cleansing and the Bible: A Moral Critique," *Holy Land Studies* 1/1 (2002): 37–59; J.J. Collins, "The Zeal of Phineas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122/1 (2003): 3–21; R. Havrelock, *The Joshua Generation: Israeli Occupation and the Bible* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

<sup>41</sup> See further T.L. Thompson, "An Allegorical Discourse on the 'Fear of God': The Bible's Contemporary Theology," in *Plogbillar & svärd: En festskrift till Stig Norin*, ed. T. Davidovich (Uppsala: Molin & Sorgenfrei, 2012), 155–166.

<sup>42</sup> Thompson, "Etnicitet og Bibel," 23–25. Cf. also T.L. Thompson, "The Intellectual Matrix of Early Biblical Narrative: Inclusive Monotheism in Persian Period Palestine," in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms*, ed. D.V. Edelman (CBET 13; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 107–124. See further now B. Hensel, "Yahwistic Diversity and the Hebrew Bible: State of the Field, Desiderata, and Research Perspectives in a Necessary Debate on the Formative Period of Judaism(s)," in *Yahwistic Diversity and the Hebrew Bible: Tracing Perspectives of Group Identity from Judah, Samaria, and the Diaspora in Biblical Traditions*, ed. B. Hensel, D. Nocquet, and B. Adamczewski (FAT 2. Reihe 120: Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 1–46.

<sup>43</sup> Thompson, "Etnicitet og Bibel," 25–40; Hjelm, *Jerusalem's Rise to Sovereignty*; P.R. Davies, "Sect Formation in Early Judaism," in D.J. Chalcraff (ed.), *Sectarianism in Early Judaism: Sociological Advances* (BibleWorld; London: Equinox, 2007), 133–155.



although adopting the already mentioned possibility that biblical texts were produced during the Iron Age II (ca. 970–550 BCE):

Many scholars argue early forms of Judaism only began in the Hellenistic period [...]. However, the texts of Tanak espousing the beliefs and practices were created before then, signalling at least one group already was hoping to implement the new changes in its own social setting and likely did so within limited circles. If one feels a need to distinguish these earliest forms of Judaism from what emerges under the Hasmoneans, one could distinguish the transitional period between monarchic Yahwism and Hellenistic Judaism by referring to intertemple Yahwisms from 586 to ca. 450 BCE and Second Temple Yahwism, once the temple is rebuilt, until the Hasmonean dynasty arises [...].<sup>44</sup>

After a period of “intertemple Yahwisms,” Jerusalem eventually prevailed, and we must note accordingly that the final shape of the ideology of the Hebrew Bible, with Jerusalem as a “mythic chrono-spatial centre,” seems to reflect clearly a “centralization of religious and secular power in a single place (Jerusalem),”<sup>45</sup> which in this context is to be found (outside the biblical texts) in the rule of Palestine by the Hasmonean priest-kings in the second century BCE.<sup>46</sup> This would mean that, after the intellectual process of creation, including

---

<sup>44</sup> Diana V. Edelman, “Early Forms of Judaism as a Mixture of Strategies of Cultural Heterogeneity and the Re-embedding of Local Culture in Archaic Globalization,” in *Levantine Entanglements: Cultural Productions, Long-term Changes and Globalizations in the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. T. Stordalen and Ø.S. LaBianca (Sheffield: Equinox, 2021), 242–292, here pp. 242–243. See also R.G. Kratz, *Historical & Biblical Israel: The History, Tradition, and Archives of Israel and Judah* (transl. P.M. Kurtz; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 133–207; and in the context of the present discussion, J. Blenkinsopp, “The Development of Jewish Sectarianism from Nehemiah to the Hasidim,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.*, ed. O. Lipschits, G.N. Knoppers, and R. Albertz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 385–404.

<sup>45</sup> Hjelm, *Jerusalem’s Rise to Sovereignty*, 3 and 1, respectively. The following builds closely on the interpretation originally offered in Pfoh, “Ancient Historiography.”

<sup>46</sup> See already Robert A. Horsley, “The Expansion of Hasmonean Rule in Idumea and Galilee: Toward a Historical Sociology,” in *Second Temple Studies III: Studies in Politics, Class and Material Culture*, ed. P.R. Davies and J.M. Halligan (JSOTSup 340; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 134–165; further E. Regev, *The Hasmoneans: Ideology, Archaeology, Identity* (JASup 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

influence and borrowing from the wider intellectual world of the East Mediterranean and Southwest Asia, of the biblical narrative from Genesis to Kings and the wisdom literature in the Hellenistic centres of Southwestern Asia and Egypt (e.g., Babylonia, Seleucia, Alexandria), there must have been a theo-ideological arrangement of this collection of stories in Palestine to fit the political situation in Hasmonean Jerusalem. Such a necessary arrangement, in its textual messages, reflects in fact a sectarian worldview or ideology, even though it shares Hellenistic literary features. The narrative pattern is clearly discernible: a chosen lineage, which develops into a people; a migration to a foreign land; the return and conquest of the land; etc. This pattern appears not only if we compare the narrative of the Primary History or the Deuteronomistic History with, for instance, Herodotus' *Histories*, but also with other "national historiographies" (most anachronistic as the term "national" may be for premodern times) of the second half of the first millennium BCE: Berossus of Chaldea (ca. fourth century BCE) and his *Babyloniaca*, the Egyptian priest Manetho (ca. third century BCE) and his *Aegyptiaca*, the later Dionysius of Halicarnassus (ca. late first century BCE) and his *Antiquitates Romanae*, as well as Philo of Byblos (ca. first century CE) and his history of Phoenicia.

Lastly, we may differentiate the activity of biblical writers producing texts and traditions under imperial (Assyrian? Babylonian? Persian, Hellenistic) contexts from those writers editing and readdressing older traditions under the Hasmonean rule of Palestine: it should be clear that while in both instances these writers perform as intellectuals within their own communities, under the Hasmoneans these writers could in effect be understood as "organic intellectuals" in the Gramscian sense, enforcing a "nationalistic" ideological worldview over their own people and other peoples under Hasmonean



domination<sup>47</sup>—although one may better see this phenomenon in terms of an ancient imagined-community building under the idea of “Israel” in Hasmonean times rather than tracing what are properly modern nationalistic sentiments in ancient contexts.<sup>48</sup>

In sum, the intellectual environment of Greco-Roman Southwestern Asia may have been then an appropriate background where the Hebrew Bible creators found its socio-cultural place and in which a process of “Hellenistic enculturation” and of “education-enculturation” as formative of the Hebrew Bible took place—as David Carr has proposed.<sup>49</sup> And in this sense, not only Babylon in an initial phase but, as noticed before, also Seleucia and Alexandria in subsequent periods, ought to be deemed as appropriate centres where biblical intellectuals may have shaped the traditions, myths and stories coming from earlier times in the Near East into the narrative that we find today in the Hebrew Bible, between the (sixth-)fifth and second centuries BCE.<sup>50</sup> In Jerusalem, the Hasmoneans would have added a final sectarian understanding to this “national historiography,” standardising a series of rituals and religious norms that would have constituted the finalized performance of Judaism—or at least, a certain kind of Judaism now culturally hegemonic from this period onwards.<sup>51</sup> In this context, and as Eyal Regev has noted: “Their identity was based on commitment to the Torah and hatred towards the idolatrous

---

<sup>47</sup> See the discussion in A.M. Cimino, “The Author as Intellectual? Hints and Thoughts towards a Gramscian ‘Re-Reading’ of the Ancient Literatures,” in E. Zucchetti and A.M. Cimino (eds.), *Antonio Gramsci and the Ancient World* (Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies; London: Routledge, 2021), 329–340, which albeit being focused on Greek and Roman authors, it is heuristically useful for thinking the issue comparatively in Babylonian, Persian, Hellenistic (Ptolemaic and Seleucid), and Hasmonean Palestine.

<sup>48</sup> For the latter, cf. the interpretive perspective in D. Mendels, *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism: Jewish and Christian Ethnicity in Ancient Palestine* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

<sup>49</sup> David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. 253–285.

<sup>50</sup> See R. Gmirkin, *Berosos and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch* (LHBOTS 433; London: T&T Clark, 2006); N.P. Lemche, “Locating the Story of Biblical Israel,” in *New Perspectives on Old Testament Prophecy and History Essays in Honour of Hans M. Barstad*, ed. R.I. Thelle, T. Stordalen, and M.E.J. Richardson (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2019), 217–229.

<sup>51</sup> See Adler, *Origins of Judaism*.

Gentiles. A new ‘nationalistic’ sense of Jewish collective identity was created.”<sup>52</sup>

### A Closing Comment

Out of an intellectual condensation of southern Levantine socio-political practices, both patronage and sectarianism would have created a marked social and ideological identity polarity within many Eastern Mediterranean societies: people attached to a particular individual or deity, and people who do not fall into such bonding, that is, the sociological factionalist dichotomy of “us” and “them.” The coexistence of these factors, besides being interrelated, might have been especially developed in an age of redefinitions and creation of what we may now call ethnic identities (i.e., “Judaeans,” then “Jews,” etc.) during the second half of the first millennium BCE. In this context, the textual traditions produced mainly by Judaeans in centres of Southwestern Asia but also in the Levant, and also by Samaritans and then Jewish (Hasmonean) elites—namely, the tension between the different manifestations of biblical tradition through its competing tradents—during these centuries were all transmitted through expressions of sectarianism originating in the socio-politics of patronage, a practice existing for millennia in the region.<sup>53</sup> The cultural

---

<sup>52</sup> Regev, *The Hasmoneans*, 16. See also F. Porzia, *Le peuple au trois noms: Une histoire de l'ancien Israël à travers le prisme de ses ethnonymes* (OBO 298; Leuven: Peeters, 2022), 280–284.

<sup>53</sup> To these more “national” or ethnic orientations of biblical tradition (cf. J.K. Aitken, “Judaic National Identity,” in *Judah between East and West: The Transition from Persian to Greek Rule (ca. 400–200 BCE)*, ed. L.L. Grabbe and O. Lipschits [LSTS 75; London: Bloomsbury, 2011], 31–48), we have to add the posterior Qumran community, the Essenes, the Hasidim, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and lastly the early Christian groups; cf. L.L. Grabbe, “When Is a Sect a Sect—or Not? Groups and Movements in the Second Temple Period,” in D.J. Chalcraft (ed.), *Sectarianism in Early Judaism: Sociological Advances* (BibleWorld; London: Equinox, 2007), 114–132; and further for general background P. Sacchi, *The History of the Second Temple Period* (JSOTSup 285; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); and now L.L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period* (4 vols.; London: T&T Clark, 2004–23). Further on this last assertion, see Pfoh, “Patronage as Analytical Concept,” 12–17. See also E. van der Steen, “Empires and Farmers,” in *Judah between East and West: The Transition from Persian to Greek Rule (ca. 400–200 BCE)*, ed. L.L. Grabbe and O. Lipschits (LSTS 75; London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 210–224.



hegemony ultimately achieved by the Hasmonean control of biblical tradition contributed to transforming YHWH, originally a lofty god among others in the Iron Age, into a “national” god of Judaism, and perhaps more importantly, to a personal protector to whom one owes individual loyalty.<sup>54</sup> Thus, in a profane world of patrons and clients, the best—if not the only—way of portraying the absolutely powerful nature of God is to conceive of Him as the ultimate cosmic Patron, ruling over His earthly creatures and disposing over at divine will over His exclusive clients: the Children of Israel. This is one of the socio-anthropological pictures that may be obtained from reading the Hebrew Bible historically and, most importantly, its cultural worlds as an anthropologist would.

---

<sup>54</sup> See Edelman, “Early Forms of Judaism,” 274. See further R. Albertz and R. Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (Winona Lake, IN, Eisenbrauns, 2012).