

History of Judaism

The Patriarchs

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Assessment 1: Group Presentations

- Week: Your choice!
- Select a major topic explored in one of the sessions; each member will research and present on one of the following aspects concerning this topic: socio, cultural, political, religious, or economic
- Hand in hard copy of debate notes (assessed)
- 20% of total marks

Assessment 2: Research Essay

- Week: 12
- 2000 words
- 50% of total marks

Assessment 3: Final Exam

30% of total marks

3 essay questions

Questions?



Judaism: Historical Framework

- Biblical Judaism – c. 20th-4th century BCE
- Hellenistic Judaism – 4th century BCE-2nd century CE
- Rabbinic Judaism – 2nd-18th century CE
- Modern Judaism – c. 1750-present

The Hebrew Patriarchs

- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob – early 2nd millennium BCE
 - Origins: Mesopotamian town of Harran, Hurrian kingdom of Mitanni
 - Migration to Canaan
 - Exile in Egypt; return of Hebrew ancestors to Canaan

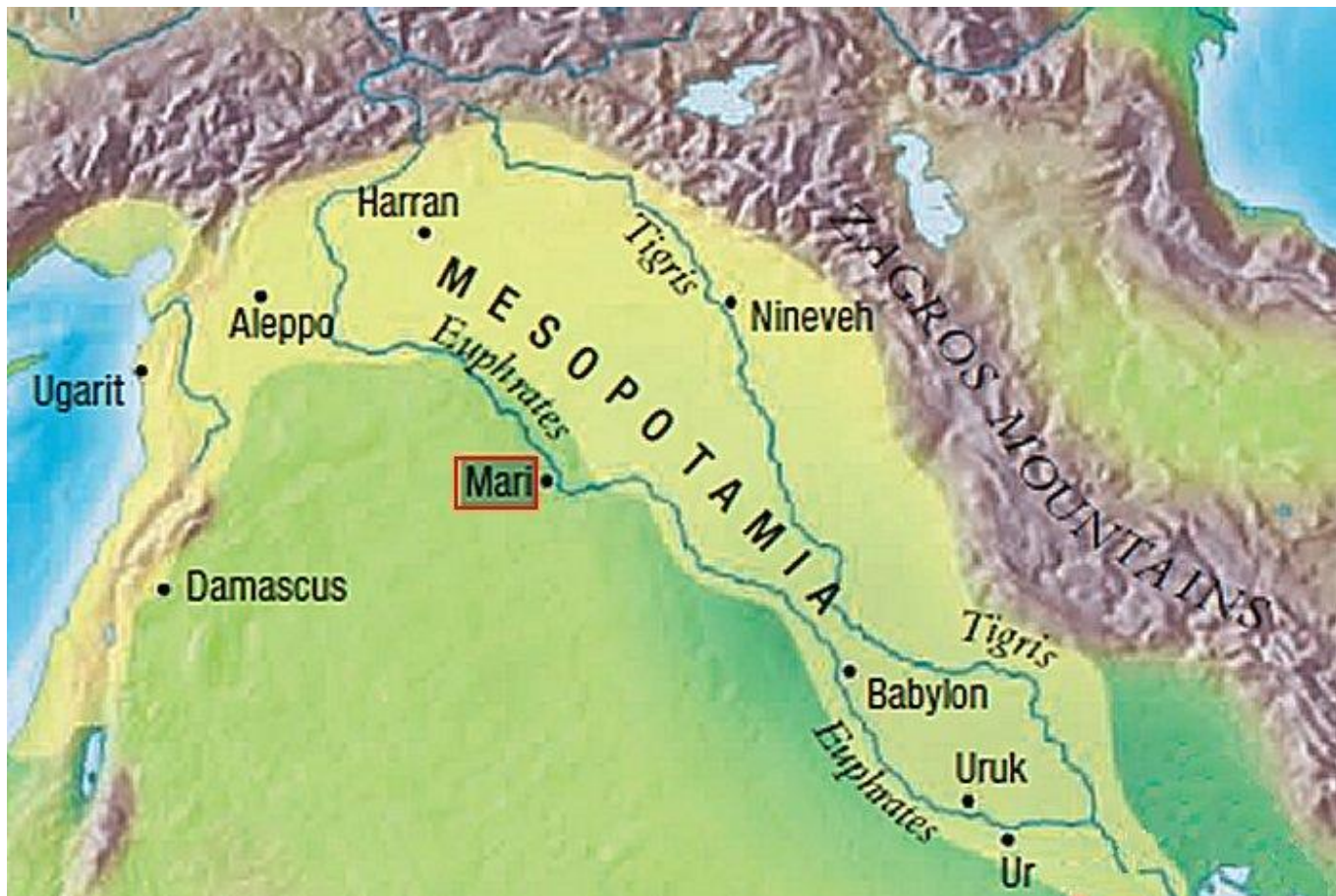
Ancient Babylon, Mittanni, Canaan, Egypt



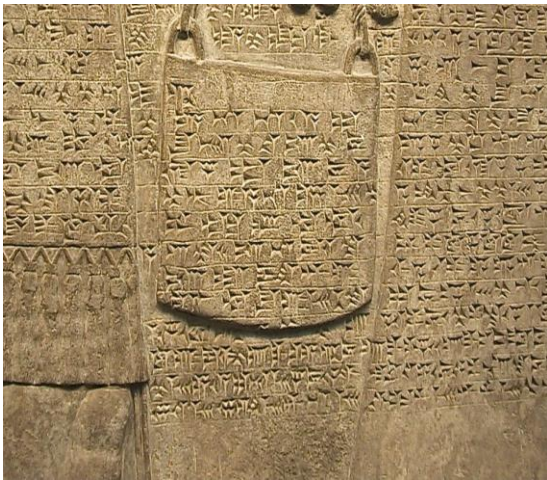
The Patriarchal Narrative: Mythical or Real?

- Pre-WWI theories: patriarchs mythical beings/personifications of tribes/folkloric/etiological figures derived from social, juridical, or cultic patterns
- Post-WWI: monuments and documents discovered dating from patriarchal period
 - E.g. Royal palace at Mari on the Euphrates – thousands of cuneiform tablets containing official archives, correspondence, and religious and juridical texts – confirm biblical narrative of Genesis in many areas in relation to contemporary 2nd millennium BCE events

Mari - Mesopotamia



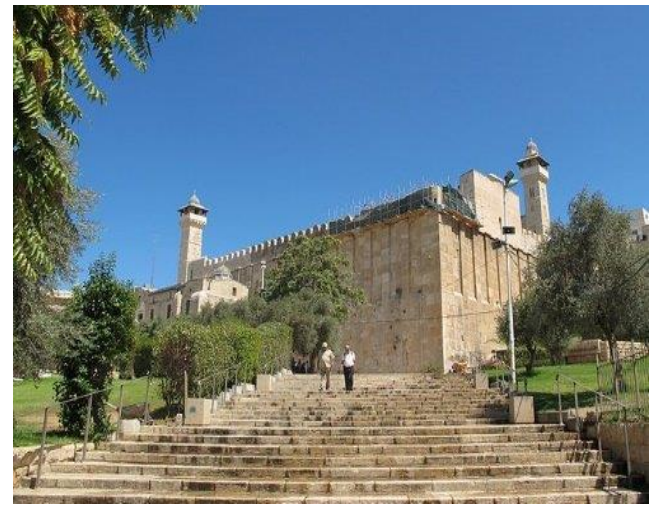
Mari - Mesopotamia



The Patriarchal Narrative: Mythical or Real?

- Abraham
 - From Ur; originally Abram (The Father [or God] is Exalter) – later Abraham (The Father of Many Nations); leaves with wife Sarai, nephew Lot and rest of household to Canaan at 75 years of age
 - Qualities: righteous; devoted wholeheartedly to God; a man of peace, compassion, hospitality; a warrior; and a liar
 - Two landmarks in Abraham story: Ur of the Chaldeans and the cave of Machpelah
 - Ur Kasdim – Sumerian city of Ur, today Tall al-Mugayyar, 200 miles southeast of Baghdad; Nanna (or Sin) the Sumero-Akkadian moon god worshiped in Ur
 - Machpelah located in Hebron – still a place of veneration for Jews and Muslims

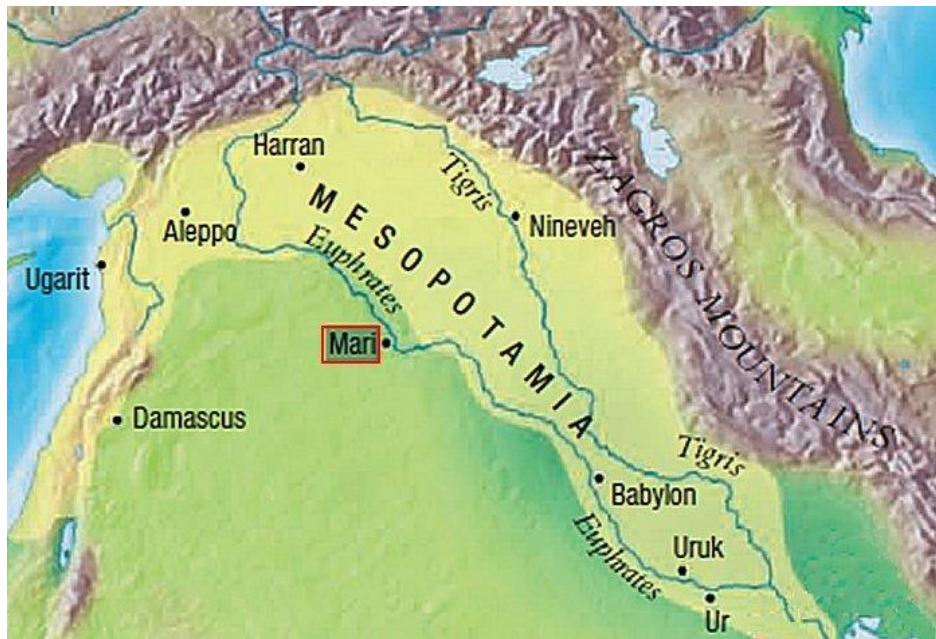
Ur and Machpelah



The Patriarchal Narrative: Mythical or Real?

- Between Ur and Machpelah
 - City of Harran – located between Tigris and Euphrates in Balikh Valley, modern Harran in Turkey; centre of the Sin cult and closely related to moon-god cult of Ur
 - Mari tablets – Hapiru (Hebrews) and Banu Yamina (Benjaminites) mentioned
 - From Haran journey continues to Euphrates River, possibly crossed at Carchemish during low-water period; Mari texts indicate presence of Benjaminites on right bank of river in Yamhad (Aleppo), Qatanum (Qatna), and Amurru – Nayrab near Aleppo was centre of Sin cult and south of Aleppo a village with the name of Benjamin still exists – all of these sites on the way to Canaan

Haran/Harran



The Patriarchal Narrative: Mythical or Real?

- Between Ur and Machpelah
 - Bashan (modern-day Hawran)
 - Plain of Shechem (modern-day Balatah)
 - Mid-13th to mid-11th century BCE Shechem: cult of Canaanite god Ba'al Berit (Lord of the Covenant)
 - Bethel (modern-day Baytin)
 - Cult of El, the highest Canaanite god – Abraham built altar here to YHWH (according to Yahwistic tradition)
 - Mamre
 - Abraham 'settled' here, but as pastoral nomad moved about (e.g. Negeb, Gerar, Beersheba)
 - Machpelah
 - Resting place of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob – consolidated belief in 'God of our fathers'; Abraham 'adopted' the Canaanite god El in a nominal sense only – still a family and tribal God; some scholars – patriarchs practiced monolatry instead of monotheism

Bashan, Shechem, Bethel, Mamre



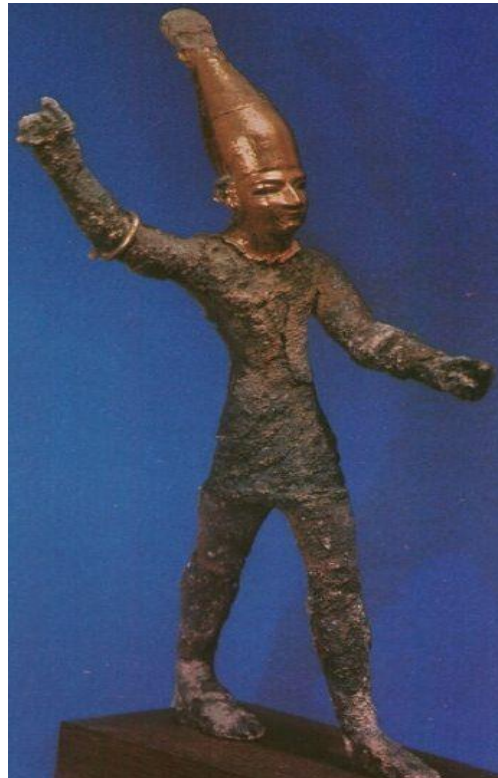
The Ancient Middle East

- Similarities with surrounding cultures
 - Tribal structure of Hebrews similar to West Semitic steppe dwellers
 - Family customs and law parallel Old Babylonian and Hurro-Semite law of early and 2nd millennium
 - Concept of messenger God in biblical prophecy similar to Amorite (West Semetic culture)
 - Mesopotamian religious and cultural conceptions are reflected in biblical cosmogony, primeval history, and law
 - Hebrew language and literary heritage influenced by Canaanite traditions
 - All cultures with which patriarchs interacted: cosmic gods creating the world and preserving it, had ethical system, and religious rites and myths

El or Yahweh/YHWH?

- Historical and anthropological studies dispute continuity of YHWH from Adam to Moses
 - Exodus 6:3 – God introduces himself as El Shaddai not YHWH; elsewhere in patriarchal narrative – El Elyon (God Most High); El Olam (God the Everlasting One), El Bethel (God Bethel), El Ro'i (God of Vision) – Canaanite epithets associated with El, head of Ugaritic pantheon
 - Expression 'God of my [your, his] father'
 - YHWH appears in the names of those closely associated with Moses: e.g. Yehoshua (Joshua)

Canaanite gods: El, Ba'al, fertility gods and goddesses



El or Yahweh/YHWH?

- Covenant between God and patriarchs
 - Patriarchs objects of God's blessings, protection, providential care
 - Patriarchs demonstrate loyalty, obedience, and observance of cult
 - Vows, prayers at altar, stone pillar, sacred tree, circumcision
 - Little religious contrast indicated with neighbours unlike later under YHWH
 - Patriarchal covenant modelled on royal grant to favourites and imposed few obligations; yet foundational to Mosaic covenant in terms of loyalty and obedience to one God

