

ISRAEL'S HOUSE: REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF *BYT YŠR'L* IN THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE LIGHT OF ITS ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN ENVIRONMENT

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In the OT the nation of Israel is referred to in a variety of ways. Recalling the traditions of their putative ancestor, the poets and prophets of Israel frequently employ "Jacob" as a collective eponymous designation for their nation.¹ Several interesting features characterize this usage. First, in two-thirds of these texts Jacob is paralleled with another designation for the nation, usually "Israel" itself.² Surprisingly, Jacob is overwhelmingly favored as the *a*-word in the pair.³ Furthermore there appears to be a pronounced tendency to combine

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¹This usage cannot be passed off as a later poetic device. It appears in the blessing of Jacob (Gen 49:7, 24), dated by F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman (*Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* [SBLDS 21; Missoula: Scholars, 1975] 70) as premonarchic; the oracles of Balaam (Num 23:7, 10, 21, 23; 24:5, 17, 19), dated by W. F. Albright ("The Oracles of Balaam," *JBL* 63 [1944] 233) in the twelfth century B.C. (cf. idem, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* [London: Athlone, 1968] 15-16); the song of Moses (Deut 32:9), dated by Albright, *ibid.*, p. 17, c. 1025 B.C. (so also O. Eissfeldt, *Das Lied Moses, Deuteronomium 32:1-43 und das Lehrgedicht Asaphs Psalm 78, samt einer Analyse der Umgebung des Mose Liedes* [Berlin: Akademie, 1958] 21; cf. U. Cassuto, "The Song of Moses," in *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, vol. I: *Bible* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1974] 41-46, who concludes that the song follows immediately upon the conquest of the land. Not all accept so early a date; see A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* [London: Oliphants, 1979] 380-382, who prefers an exilic or postexilic date on form-critical grounds; so also G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1968] 190); the blessing of Moses (Deut 33:4, 10, 28), dated by Albright, *Yahweh*, to the mid-eleventh century B.C. (so also Cross and Freedman, *Studies* 97); the last words of David (2 Sam 23:1), discussed by Albright (*Yahweh* 24-25) in the context of other tenth-century poems.

²These texts may be tabulated as follows: //yšr'l: Gen 49:7, 24; Num 23:7, 10, 21, 23a, 23b; 24:5, 17; Deut 33:10, 28; Isa 9:7; 10:20; 14:1; 27:6; 29:23; 40:27; 41:8, 14; 42:24; 43:1, 22, 28; 44:1, 5, 21, 23; 45:4; 46:3; 48:1, 12; 49:5, 6; Jer 2:4; 10:16; 30:10; 46:27; Ezek 20:5; 39:25; Hos 12:13; Mic 1:5; 2:12; 3:1, 8, 9; Nah 2:3; Pss 14:7; 22:24; 78:5, 21, 71; 81:5; 105:10, 23; 114:1; 135:4; 147:19; Lam 2:3; 1 Chr 16:17; //yšrwn: Isa 44:2; //yhwdh: Isa 65:9; Jer 5:20; Hos 10:11; 12:3; //prym: Hos 10:11; //ywsp + 'sw: Obad 18; //my: Isa 58:1; //brhm: Mic 7:20; Ps 106:6. In the last reference the parallel pair actually consists of *bny y'qbl/zr' brhm*.

³Exceptions are Deut 33:28; Isa 10:20; 41:8; 58:1; Ezek 20:5; Hos 12:3; Pss 81:5; 85:2; 105:6, 23; 114:1; Lam 2:3. This runs counter to the commonly held view that *a*-words are usually the more common words, whereas *b*-words are rarely used in prose. Cf. the note by J. J. Boling, "Synonymous Parallelism in the Psalms," *JSS* (1960) 223-224.

the name with another noun in genitive constructions.⁴ Of interest also is the frequent appositional association of Jacob with "my/his servant" (*'bdy/w*).⁵ Finally, Jacob appears to have been especially appropriate as a vocative term.⁶

Much more common, however, is the name Israel, which occurs 2,517 times, frequently in combination with other terms, thus producing compound forms of the name. Especially important are the expressions *bny ysr'l* (hereafter "*bny Israel*"), *byt ysr'l* and *zr' ysr'l*.⁷ Having previously investigated the significance of the first of these,⁸ the present study will focus on the usage and significance of *byt ysr'l*.⁹ The procedure followed will consist of two major parts: (1) an examination of the significance of *byt ysr'l* in the light of its OT context, and (2) an examination of the use of the *byt*-GN ("geographical name") form as a national designation in the cognate Semitic texts. In the conclusion we will seek to synthesize the findings to arrive at a clearer understanding of the use of *byt ysr'l* (hereafter "*byt Israel*") as a self-designation by the Hebrews.

I. THE DATA

1. *Frequency and distribution.* The expression *byt Israel* occurs 146 times in the OT, accounting for almost six percent of the references to Israel. As Table 1 indicates, the distribution of the form is extremely uneven.¹⁰ The eighty-three appearances in Ezekiel represent fifty-five percent of the total. Other significant concentrations are found in Jeremiah (20 ×) and Amos (8 ×, or one-fourth of all the references to Israel in this book). When compared with that of *bny*

⁴ (1) Designations for the people of Israel or segments thereof: (a) *bny y'qb*: Gen 49:2; 1 Kgs 18:31; 2 Kgs 17:34; Mal 3:6; Pss 77:16; 105:6; (b) *zr' y'qb*: Isa 45:19; Jer 33:26; Ps 22:24; cf. Isa 65:9, *whwšty my'qb zr'*; (c) *byt y'qb*: Exod 19:3; Isa 2:5, 6; 8:17; 10:20; 14:1; 29:22; 46:3; 48:1; 58:1; Jer 2:4; 5:20; Ezek 20:5 (*zr' byt y'qb*); Amos 3:13; 9:8; Obad 17, 18; Mic 2:7; 3:9; Ps 114:1; cf. the literal use in Gen 46:27; (d) *šbty y'qb*: Isa 49:6; (e) *šr'š'ryt y'qb*: Isa 10:21; Mic 5:6, 7; (f) *r'šy y'qb*: Mic 3:1; (g) *plytt byt y'qb*: Isa 10:20.

(2) Designations for the places of residence in Israel: (a) *'hly y'qb*: Jer 30:18; Mal 2:12; (b) *n'wt y'qb*: Lam 2:2; (c) *mšknwt y'qb*: Ps 87:2; (d) *nht y'qb*: Isa 58:14.

(3) Designations for the God of Israel: (a) *'l'lhym y'qb*: Isa 2:3; Mic 4:2; Pss 46:8, 12; 94:7; 114:7; 146:5 (all *//yhwh*); Pss 20:2; 84:9 (both *//yhwh šb't*); 81:2 (*'l'lhym*); also 2 Sam 23:1; Pss 75:10; 76:7; 81:5; (b) *qdwš y'qb*: Isa 29:23; (c) *'byr y'qb*: Isa 49:26; 60:16; Ps 132:2, 5; (d) *mlk y'qb*: Isa 41:21.

(4) Other associations: *hlq y'qb*: Jer 10:16; 51:19; *šm y'qb*: Isa 44:5; *kbwd y'qb*: Isa 17:4; *g'wn y'qb*: Amos 6:8 (in negative sense); 8:7; Ps 47:5 (both positive); *'wn y'qb*: Isa 27:9; *šbyt(wt) y'qb*: Ezek 39:25; Ps 85:2.

⁵Isa 44:1, 2; 45:4; 48:20; Jer 30:10; 46:27, 28; Ezek 28:25; 37:25. Cf. Isa 41:8; 44:21.

⁶Num 24:5; Isa 2:5 (*byt y'qb*); 40:27; 41:14 (*twl't y'qb*); 43:1, 22; 44:1 (*y'qb 'bdy*), 2, 21; 46:3 (*byt y'qb*); 48:1 (*byt y'qb*), 12; Jer 2:4 (*byt y'qb*); 46:27, 28 (*'bdy y'qb*); Mic 2:7 (*byt y'qb*); 3:1, 9.

⁷For a table illustrating the frequency and distributions of each of these expressions see our previous study, "Israel—'Sons of Israel': A Study in Hebrew Eponymic Usage," SR 13/3 (1984) 322–323.

⁸Cf. n. 7.

⁹The expression *zr' ysr'l* deserves its own study.

¹⁰Note the total absence of *byt Israel* from late historiography (Ezra-Chronicles).

Israel, the usage of *byt* Israel was governed by totally different considerations. Neither chronological proximity to the earlier tribal days nor a specific literary style determined its usage. If Jeremiah and Ezekiel—for whom the form appears to have been a distinctive literary device—are excepted, the distribution of the expression is quite evenly divided between historical narrative and prophetic writings.

As Table 1 illustrates, *byt* Jacob occurs twenty-one times. Only in Gen 46:27 is the expression used in a narrowly literal sense encompassing the immediate household of Jacob the patriarch. Everywhere else it occurs as a collective designation for the nation, usually serving simply as a stylistic variant to *byt* Israel. Apart from Exod 19:3 where *byt* Jacob is paralleled with *bny* Israel, these texts are restricted to the prophetic and poetic writings of the OT.

2. *Usage.* At first sight, the historians of Israel appear to have employed *byt* Israel simply as a stylistic variant of *bny* Israel. In each Pentateuchal context in which it occurs the latter form predominates.¹¹ In 1 Samuel 7, where the expression appears twice (vv 2, 3), it is alternated with Israel (vv 9–10), “all (*kl*) Israel” (v 5), “men of (*'nšy*) Israel” (v 11) and “sons of (*bny*) Israel” (vv 4, 6–8). On the other hand it may be argued that *bny* Israel stresses the plurality of individuals of whom the whole consists, whereas *byt* Israel places the emphasis on the nation as a unified body.¹² This would explain the ease with which the latter is paralleled with *kl h'dh*, “all the congregation,” in Num 20:29.¹³ Similarly, the adoption of this expression in Josh 21:45 may serve to highlight Yahweh's promise of the land of Canaan to the nation rather than to the individuals of whom it consisted. In each occurrence in Samuel–Kings a strong corporate stress is observable. According to 1 Sam 7:2 the absence of the ark from the central sanctuary caused corporate lamentation after Yahweh. This was transformed into corporate celebration when the ark was finally brought home to Jerusalem.¹⁴

After the institution of the monarchy, *byt* Israel tended to become increasingly political—even dynastic—in overtone. The tragedy at Mount Gilboa caused David to weep for “the people of Yahweh, even the house of Israel” (*'m yhw'h wby't ysr'l*, 2 Sam 1:12). The association of *byt* Israel with the *'m yhw'h* might suggest a collective religious sense here, but this connotation is absent from Mephibosheth's strictly secular comment in 16:3: “Today *byt* Israel will restore

¹¹Note the broader contexts of Exod 16:31; 40:38; Lev 10:6; 17:3, 8, 10; Num 20:29.

¹²Cf. A. R. Hulst's conclusion that in Deuteronomy *bny* Israel stresses “die empirische Pluralität,” whereas Israel by itself emphasizes the “Einheit” of the nation; “Der Name ‘Israel’ im Deuteronomium,” *OTS* 9 (1951) 82. This concurs with W. Zimmerli's comment (*Ezekiel* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 2. 564): “Here there is expressed the family solidarity, the all-embracing total entity of this Israel”; cf. idem, “Israel im Buche Ezechiel,” *VT* 10 (1960), esp. 79–90.

¹³On the use of *'dh* in “P” cf. J. Milgrom, “Priestly Terminology and the Political and Social Structure of Pre-Monarchic Israel,” *JQR* 69 (1978) 76.

¹⁴2 Sam 6:5, 15. Verse 19 indicates that the *byt* Israel consisted of “all the people, all the multitude of Israel, both men and women” (*lkl h'm lkl hmwn ysr'l lm'yš w'd 'šh*).

Table 1

Frequency, Distribution and Genre of *byt* Israel and *byt* Jacob in the OT

Book	<i>byt</i> Israel (146)		<i>byt</i> Jacob (21)	
	Narrative	Poetry	Narrative	Poetry
Genesis	—	—	1	—
Exodus	2	—	1	—
Leviticus	5	—	—	—
Numbers	1	—	—	—
Subtotals	8	—	2	—
Joshua	1	—	—	—
1 Samuel	2	—	—	—
2 Samuel	5	—	—	—
1 Kings	2	—	—	—
Subtotals	10	—	—	—
Isaiah	1	3	—	9
Jeremiah	15*	5	—	2
Ezekiel	82**	1	1***	—
Hosea	2	3	—	—
Amos	2	6	—	2
Obadiah	—	—	—	2
Micah	—	3	—	2
Zechariah	1	—	—	—
Subtotals	103	21	1	17
Psalms	—	3	—	1
Ruth	1	—	—	—
Subtotals	1	3	—	1
Grand Totals	122	24	3	18

*The full expression in 23:8 is *zr' byt ysr'l*.**The full expression in 44:22 is *zr' byt ysr'l*.***The full expression in 20:5 is *zr' byt ysr'l*.

the kingdom (*mmlkwt*) of my father to me." After the division of the kingdom the expression is applied exclusively to the northern kingdom, in juxtaposition to Judah. In 1 Kgs 12:21 Rehoboam assembles all *byt* Judah and the tribe of Benjamin against *byt* Israel. In 20:31 Ben-Hadad of Aram is reminded by his servants of the merciful reputation of the kings of *byt* Israel. A final text, 2 Sam 12:8, is noteworthy because of the effective play on the word *byt*. On the one hand Nathan reminds David that he has been given "the house of your master" (*byt 'dnyk*); on the other he has also received *byt* Israel and Judah.

The outstanding characteristic of the use of *byt* Israel in the prophets is its

vocative function.¹⁵ The critical circumstances immediately preceding the fall of the northern kingdom in the eighth century,¹⁶ and Judah toward the end of the seventh and the beginning of the sixth,¹⁷ contributed to the adoption of this hortatory device. The scope of the expression fluctuated in the prophets between the entire nation on the one hand¹⁸ and the northern kingdom alone on the other.¹⁹

Ezekiel's use of *byt* Israel deserves special comment. In a general sense the prophet is charged to minister to *byt* Israel,²⁰ to renounce her evil,²¹ and to declare her future prospects.²² Elsewhere the name is applied specifically to the northern kingdom even though it had long since disappeared,²³ the exiles of Judah in Babylon,²⁴ and the remnant in Jerusalem.²⁵ In several contexts *byt* Israel is paired with "my people" and contrasted with the nations (*gwym*).²⁶ According to this prophet *byt* Israel has elders,²⁷ possesses a register of its citizens,²⁸ and has a wall surrounding it.²⁹ Why Ezekiel, the prophet who is

¹⁵Cf. Isa 46:3; Jer 3:20; 5:15; 10:1; 18:6 (*bis*); Ezek 11:5; 18:25, 29, 30, 31; 20:31, 39, 44; 33:11, 20; 36:22; 44:6; Hos 5:1; Amos 5:1, 25; 6:14; note also Ps 135:19.

¹⁶See the references in Hosea and Amos in n. 15.

¹⁷Cf. the references in Jeremiah and Ezekiel in n. 15. Interestingly, after the fall of Jerusalem Ezekiel uses the phrase in a vocative sense only twice. The absence of *byt* Israel from Deuteronomy, which is cast as a sermonic address, may suggest a chronological distance between this work and the two prophets.

¹⁸This is frequently indicated by pairing *byt* Israel with *byt* Jacob (Isa 14:1–2; 46:3; Jer 2:4; Mic 3:9) or Jacob alone (Ezek 39:25; Mic 1:5; 3:1). Elsewhere this is indicated by the context; so Isa 5:7; 63:7; Jer 2:26; 9:25; 31:33; 33:17; Amos 9:9; cf. Pss 98:3; 115:12.

¹⁹Note the reference to the two houses of Israel in Isa 8:14. A specifically northern interpretation is indicated by the juxtaposing of *byt* Israel with *byt* Judah; so Jer 3:18; 5:11; 11:17; 31:27, 31 (cf. v 33, where *byt* Israel includes both houses); 33:14; Zech 8:13; cf. also Isa 5:7 (*//yš* Judah). Hos 6:10; 12:1 parallel *byt* Israel with Ephraim. Elsewhere the broader contexts of Jer 48:13; Hos 1:4, 6; Amos 5:1, 3, 4; 6:1, 14; 7:10 suggest the more restricted scope.

²⁰3:1, 4, 5, 17; 12:6, 27; 14:6; 17:2; 20:27, 30; 24:21; 33:7, 10; 36:22; 40:4; 44:6.

²¹3:7; 6:11; 8:6, 10; 9:9; 12:9, 24; 14:4, 5; 18:6, 15, 29; 20:13; 22:18; 39:23; 44:6, 12.

²²14:11; 20:40; 28:24, 25; 29:21; 36:10; 37:11; 39:12, 22, 25, 29; 43:10; 45:17.

²³4:3, 4, 5; 9:9; 37:16.

²⁴11:15.

²⁵12:10: *hnšy' hms' hzh byrwšlm wkl byt ysr'l 'šr hmh btwkm*.

²⁶13:9; 14:11; 28:25; 34:30; cf. 39:22.

²⁷8:11, 12.

²⁸13:9: *ktb byt ysr'l*.

²⁹13:5.

otherwise recognized for his emphasis on the responsibility of the individual for his own welfare, should have preferred this form to the simple name Israel³⁰ or *bny* Israel³¹ is not clear. It may be speculated that on the verge of the collapse of the nation as an independent political entity he deliberately adopted an expression with strong cohesive overtones. On the other hand, since he wrote from Babylon the form may suggest a Mesopotamian literary influence on his writings.³²

3. *Antithetical evidence.* *Byt* Israel is juxtaposed with antithetical expressions in only four contexts. Lev 17:8, 10 distinguishes the members of *byt* Israel from the *gr hgr btwkm*, "the sojourner who sojourns in their midst." However, the text is of little value for determining the unique emphasis of *byt* Israel because of the free interchange of the expression with *bny* Israel in the context. A similar alternation occurs in 22:18, in which Moses is charged to speak to Aaron, his sons and all *bny* Israel. The actual statement to be made, however, distinguishes between "the men from the house of Israel" (*yš mbyt yšr'l*) and "the sojourner in Israel" (*hgr byšr'l*). According to the succeeding verses both may offer sacrifices to Yahweh, a privilege denied the stranger (*bn nkr*) in v 25. Indeed the latter's produce is not to be received even if offered by an Israelite. Ezek 14:7 is similar to Lev 22:18 in insisting that the same laws concerning idolatry apply to both *byt* Israel and the sojourner (*gr*) in their midst.

Isa 14:1–2 is more helpful. The prophet speaks in v 1 of the sojourner (*hgr*) attaching himself³³ to *byt* Jacob, which in the context is paralleled with *byt*

³⁰The independent form Israel appears only in 13:4; 37:28; 44:10. Israel occurs in appositional relationship to "my people" seven times (14:9; 25:14; 36:8, 12; 38:14, 16; 39:7) and with the preposition *be-* ten times (12:23; 14:7; 18:3; 20:5; 39:7, 11; 44:28, 29; 45:8, 16). Otherwise a variety of construct combinations is used, depending upon the requirements of the context—e.g., *'dmt yšr'l*, 17x; *hry yšr'l*, 16x; *lhy yšr'l*, 7x; *šbty yšr'l*, 7x; etc. For additional expressions and full discussion see G. A. Danell, *Studies in the Name Israel in the Old Testament* (Uppsala: Appelbergs, 1946) 238–260; W. Zimmerli, "Israel im Buche Ezechiel," *VT* 10 (1960) 76–80. *Byt* Israel may well have been rejected in these instances because of a reluctance to extend the construct chain beyond two members.

³¹The form appears only in 2:3; 4:13; 6:5; 35:5; 37:16, 21; 43:7; 44:9, 15; 47:22; 48:11. Some of these have been questioned on text-critical grounds; cf. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2. 564.

³²J. Hermann speaks of a "bewusste übername babylonischer Redeweise"; *Ezechiel übersetzt und erklärt* (KAT; Leipzig; A. Diechertsche, 1924) 20.

³³The two words for "attaching" used here are both relatively rare. The word *sph* occurs only four times—each time, however, in a different stem. In 1 Sam 2:36 (Qal) it is used of appointing one to a professional (in this instance priestly) office. Hab 2:15 (Piel) uses it in the context of mixing drink, adding ingredients. In Job 30:7 (Pual) the verb is descriptive of young fools gathering to taunt Job. The closest parallel to Isa 14:1 is found in 1 Sam 26:19 (Hithpael). Here David complains of Saul's men having drawn him out of the land in order that he (David) should have no attachment with the inheritance of Yahweh. The second verb, *lwh*, appears more frequently, but Qoh 8:15 represents the only example of its usage in the Qal stem. Here it bears the sense "to commit oneself to"—e.g., the pursuit of pleasure. Only the Niphal stem occurs elsewhere. In each instance the connotation of "joining" in some type of relationship is obvious: (1) marital union, Gen 29:34; (2) political alliance, Ps 83:9; (3) joint religious service, Num 18:2, 4; (4) a people attaching itself to a deity, Jer 50:4–5 (*bny* Israel and *bny* Judah to Yahweh); Zech 2:15 (many nations becoming his people); but note especially Isa 56:3–6, which speaks of the foreigners (*bny nkr*) joining themselves to Yahweh to

Israel. According to v 2 the "peoples" (*mym*) who will bring the Israelites back to their own land will themselves become the servants and captives of the *byt* Israel. The text clearly distinguishes between *byt* Israel and outsiders who would identify with them on the one hand and those who will be subject to them on the other.

4. *Other examples of byt-GN in the OT.* Proper names with a prefixed *byt* are common in the OT.³⁴ Two types of names, however, should be distinguished: toponyms and eponyms. The most striking feature of the former is the absence of any place name of the form *byt-GN* in which GN also occurs as a personal name. Most reflect the veneration of a deity at the site³⁵ or some physical or biological feature associated with it.³⁶ Occasionally moral qualities will appear in the genitive position.³⁷ Each of these forms assumes a more literal meaning of *byt* than is reflected in *byt* Israel.

In contrast to this common usage, *byt* precedes other eponyms relatively rarely. In each occurrence the genitive is a personal name that also appears with great frequency in the patriarchal narratives.³⁸ Since these names are all closely associated with that of Israel/Jacob they provide little additional assistance in the interpretation of the significance of *byt* in *byt* Israel.³⁹

Having summarized the ways in which *byt* Israel is used in the OT we turn now to an interpretation of the data. What is the significance of the prefixed *byt* in this compound form of the name? In our earlier study we concluded that as a self-designation the form *byy* Israel reflected an Israelite perception of

minister to him, to love his name, and to be his servants, *contra* Lev 22:25 above; (5) proselytes who are said to attach themselves to another people rather than a deity, Isa 14:1; Esth 9:27. Cf. also Dan 11:34 on the possibility of a hypocritical alliance.

³⁴Cf. BDB 110–112.

³⁵The *byt-DN* ("divine name") in such cases is to be viewed as the residence of the deity—e.g., *byt* El, Josh 18:13; *byt* Dagan, 15:41; *byt* Anath, 19:38; *byt* Shemesh, 19:38; perhaps also *b'štrh* for *byt 'štrh*, "house of Astarte," 21:27; so W. Boree, *Die alten Ortsnamen Palästinas* (2nd repr. ed.; Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1968) 79. All the Palestinian names containing the element *byt* are listed on pp. 75–81.

³⁶Examples of the former: *byt gdr*, "house of the wall," 1 Chr 2:51; *byt hrm*, "house of the height," Josh 13:27; *byt lhm*, "house of bread," Judg 12:8; *byt h'mq*, "house of the valley," Josh 19:27; etc. For additional examples see Boree, *Ortsnamen*. Examples of the latter: *byt hgn*, "house of the garden," 2 Kgs 9:27; *byt hkrn*, "house of the vineyard," Jer 6:1; *byt lb'wt*, "house of the lioness," Josh 19:6; etc.

³⁷*Byt 'wn*, "house of iniquity," Josh 7:2.

³⁸*Byt* Esau, Obad 18 (*bis*); *byt* Isaac, Amos 7:16; *byt* Jacob, Gen 46:27 + 20x (cf. n. 4 above); and before the eponyms of the tribes of Israel. Cf. BDB 110.

³⁹Interestingly, when Obadiah uses the form *byt-GN* he uses the personal name of the eponym as the genitive and not that of the national name, Edom. This may suggest that the association Esau-Edom rests upon different foundations than that of Jacob-Israel. However, since *byt* Esau occurs only here the evidence is too limited to confirm or refute this hypothesis. In addition to the names cited, note also *byt* Eden, Amos 1:5. This name does not fit into either category, being paralleled exactly by the Akkadian form, *būt-Adini*, on which see below. For further discussion cf. A. Malamat, "Amos 1:5 in the Light of the Til Barsip Inscriptions," *BASOR* 129 (1953) 25–26, as well as our own "Israel"—'Sons of Israel' " 313, 316.

descent from a common ancestor. Is the same true of *byt* Israel? This question may be answered only by examining the broader use of the term *byt* in the OT and the *byt*-GN form in the cognate languages.

II. THE GENERAL USAGE OF *BYT*

With its more than two thousand appearances, *byt* seems to have been one of the most frequently-used Hebrew substantives.⁴⁰ Although its significance varied greatly from one context to another, in its basic meaning *byt* represented a building that served as a dwelling, a residence. Frequently, however, *byt* was used in a derived sense to designate a "household, family"—i.e., those who resided in the same dwelling. Not surprisingly a *byt* could consist of more than the parents and the immediate children. Noah's included the wives of his sons (Gen 7:1, 7); Jacob's included his grandchildren.⁴¹ Abraham's *byt* incorporated 318 trained men, and that long before he had any children of his own (14:14). Servants, whether born in the house or purchased from outside, were included (17:23, 27). Although the word *byt* is not employed in the context of Exod 20:10, since they are subject to the head of the house it is implied that even aliens and livestock were considered to belong.

In a patriarchal society such as Israel's the *byt* was dominated by the father (*'b*). The word *'b* itself connotes not only kinship but also authority.⁴² The father was the lord of the house,⁴³ even of his wife.⁴⁴ Children and servants alike honored him.⁴⁵ In return, in him they also found their security.⁴⁶ So important was the father in the household that the adoption of *byt 'b* as a designation for the family was a natural development.⁴⁷

⁴⁰For studies of the term see E. Jenni, "*bajit*: Haus," in *THAT*, 1. 308–313; H. A. Hoffner, "*bayith*," *TDOT*, 2. 107–116.

⁴¹Gen 46:27. The female members of a *byt* were subject to special customs. An unmarried daughter belonged to the *byt* of her father (Num 30:3 ff.). When she married she would join the *byt* of her husband (30:10). If a woman should lose her husband either through death or divorce while in a state of childlessness, she would return to the *byt* of her father (Lev 22:13; cf. Num 30:10 ff.).

⁴²For discussions of the term *'b* and the role of the father in the Israelite household see H. Ringgren, "*abh*," in *TDOT*, 1. 1–19; E. Jenni, "*ab*: Vater," in *THAT*, 1. 1–17; J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (London: Oxford University, 1926), 1. 60–64; R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965) 7–8.

⁴³*B'l hbyt*, Exod 22:7.

⁴⁴The term *b'l* is commonly used in the sense of "husband"; Gen 20:3; Exod 21:3, 22. See further J. Mulder, "*b'l*: *ba'al*," *TDOT*, 2. 182.

⁴⁵Exod 20:12; Mal 1:6.

⁴⁶Ps 27:10; Lam 5:3.

⁴⁷Gen 12:1; Exod 12:3. At the more advanced stage of tribal development the expression came to denote a subgroup of a clan (Num 3:24) and even a tribe (17:17). For a study of the use of the expression in postexilic times see J. P. Weinberg, "Das *Béit 'ābôt* im 6.–4. JH. V. U. Z.," *VT* 23 (1973) 400–414. Cf. also N. K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250–1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979) 248.

It should be emphasized, however, that although the *byt* could often include servants and other outsiders the foundation of this social unit was the blood relationship that existed among the primary members.⁴⁸ Marriage signified the departure of the male adult from his father and mother (Gen 2:24) and the establishment of his own *byt* (Num 30:10). The selection of an appropriate wife was a critical task, for her function was not only to attend to the physical well-being of the family (Prov 31:10 ff.) but especially to provide the 'b with children. To have children was to build the *byt*;⁴⁹ not to have them was the cause of great shame.⁵⁰ The importance of kinship by blood lies at the heart of the patriarchal narratives. Abraham was called to leave his kinsmen (*mwldt*) and his *byt* 'b in order that his own might grow in new creative directions (Gen 12:1-3). However, this growth was frustrated by Sarah's inability to conceive. Nevertheless all alternative schemes were rejected: Neither Eliezer, the designated heir (*bn mšq bytw*, 15:2), nor Ishmael the son of the Egyptian handmaiden (17:15 ff.) could substitute for the actual son of Abraham and Sarah. This concern for the blood ties continued in the search for a wife for Isaac,⁵¹ as well as the latter's final instructions to Jacob (28:1 ff.). It was these marriages that ultimately produced the *byt* Jacob—consisting of seventy members, fathers, children and grandchildren⁵²—that made its descent into Egypt.

According to the subsequent narratives, consciousness of membership in the household of Jacob was never forgotten in spite of the increasing size and complexity of the group. The hierarchical organization of the nation that emerged from Egypt was based upon an awareness of lineal descent from the ancestor, the dimensions of which are reflected in the genealogies.⁵³ These are by definition concerned with kinship ties; servants and slaves were not normally in-

⁴⁸Cf. Pedersen, *Israel* 51-54.

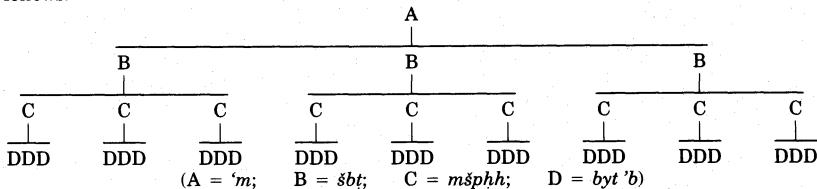
⁴⁹Note the idiom "to build a house for someone," *bnh byt l*-, 1 Sam 2:35; 2 Sam 7:27; 1 Kgs 11:38. Cf. also "to make a house for someone," *šh byt l*-, Exod 1:21; 1 Sam 25:28; 2 Sam 7:11; 1 Kgs 2:24.

⁵⁰The grief of one who has failed in this vital respect is given classic expression by Rachel in Gen 30:1.

⁵¹Abraham's servant is to get her from his *mwldt* (Gen 24:4), his *byt* 'b and his *mšphh* (24:38).

⁵²Gen 46:27. Note that in the context not a word is said about servants or other associates of the family; only blood relatives are counted.

⁵³This hierarchical structure is reflected in Josh 7:14-18 and may be represented diagrammatically as follows:



For fuller discussions of the interrelationships among these entities see de Vaux, *Ancient* 8, 12, 22; Gottwald, *Tribes* 245 ff.; Milgrom, "Priestly" 79-81; F. I. Andersen, "Israelite Kinship Terminology and Social Structure," *BT* 20/1 (1969) 29-39.

cluded. Consequently, although the term *byt* was applied to each new family unit, not only could the descendants of the various tribes be designated as *byt* Judah, *byt* Ephraim, *byt* Benjamin, etc., but the entire nation continued to be known as *byt* Israel/Jacob. It may therefore be concluded that overtones of kinship underlie the Hebrew use of *byt*-GN, particularly when employed as a self-designation, although perhaps to a slightly lesser degree than in the expression *bny* Israel.⁵⁴

III. BYT-GN IN THE COGNATE LANGUAGES

The root **byt*, "house," appears to have been common to all Semitic languages.⁵⁵ Fortunately, for the purposes of this discussion the form *byt*-GN has been attested in a variety of contexts, permitting a firm basis of comparison with the Hebrew usage.

1. *Bīt*-GN in Akkadian writings. The term *bītu(m)* occurs frequently in Akkadian texts. Its broad range of meanings parallels the Hebrew usage in many respects.⁵⁶ Especially important for our purposes are the numerous occurrences of the expression *bīt*-GN in which the proper name designates a geographic or tribal entity.⁵⁷ It remains to be determined whether the phrase implies a recognition of ethnic cohesion as was observed to be operative in the Hebrew counterpart.

Several rather severe limitations frustrate the search for a satisfactory answer to this question. First, most of these names appear only as just that: the names of regions or tribes listed along with many others, tribes that were conquered by the Assyrian and Babylonian kings. Consequently their value for us is little more than statistical; at best they may reveal some hierarchical

⁵⁴It is these overtones of kinship that underlie the application of *byt* 'b in a special sense to a royal dynasty. These are frequently identified by the name of the first occupant of the throne from a given line; e.g. *byt* Saul, 2 Sam 3:1 *et passim*; 9:1, 2, 3, 9; 16:5, 8; 19:17; *byt* David, 3:1, 6; 1 Kgs 12:19 (= 2 Chr 10:19), 20, 26; 13:2; 14:8; 2 Kgs 17:21; Isa 7:2, 13; 22:22; Jer 21:12; Zech 12:7, 8, 10, 12; 1 Chr 17:24; *byt* Jeroboam, 1 Kgs 13:34; 14:10, 13, 14; 15:29; 16:3; 21:22; 2 Kgs 9:9; 13:6; *byt* Baasha, 1 Kgs 16:3, 7; 21:22; *byt* Jehu, Hos 1:4. Notice, however, *byt* Ahab instead of *byt* Omri, 2 Kgs 8:18, 27 (3x); 9:7, 8, 9; 10:10, 11; 21:13; Mic 6:16.

⁵⁵Cf. Hoffner, *TDOT*, 2. 107–111; Jenni, *THAT*, 1. 308–309.

⁵⁶*CAD*, 2. 282–295, divides the various meanings of *bītu* into the following categories: (1) house, dwelling, shelter (of animals), temple, palace; (2) manor, estate, encampment of nomads; (3) room (of a house, palace or temple); (4) container, repository, housing; (5) place, plot, area, region; (6) household, family, royal house; (7) estate, aggregate of property of all kinds. Numerous references are provided. Cf. also *AHW* 132–134.

⁵⁷For listings see S. Parpola, *Neo-Assyrian Toponyms* (AOAT 6; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon & Becker Kevaläer, 1970) 75–92, where more than 110 entries are cited. Cf. also *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, 2. 33 ff. (hereafter cited as *RLA*).

structures.⁵⁸ Many appear only once.⁵⁹ Second, the Akkadian scribes were disappointingly inconsistent in their application of determinatives, alternating among *māt* ("land"), *āl* ("city") and *mār* ("son"), or omitting them entirely. Third, and perhaps most seriously, *bīt* in the sense of ruling dynasty and *bīt* meaning tribal unit are not carefully distinguished.⁶⁰ As a result it is often impossible to determine whether a given text is dealing with the ruling house of a tribe or with the tribe itself.⁶¹ On the other hand it is possible that in some cases the name in the genitive position of *bīt*-GN may have been recognized as both the ancestor of the tribe and the founder of the dynasty. Finally, unlike the Hebrews, who demonstrated their keen interest in ancestral traditions by committing them to writing, not a trace of similar literature has survived in Mesopotamia. The records of the ancestral heritages of the monarchs are not to be confused with national traditions.⁶²

⁵⁸See for example the records of the campaigns of Sennacherib in D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (OIP 2; Chicago: University Press, 1924) 52–54. In this particular campaign, the scribe records the following conquests: (1) 33 strong, walled cities and 250 hamlets within the borders (*li-mi-tu*) of *Bīt-Dak-ku-ri*, including, among others, *Bīt-Sa-an-na-bi*, *Bīt-Ra-ḫi-e*, *Bīt-Ku-dur-ri*; (2) 8 strong, walled cities and 120 hamlets of *Bīt-Sa-'al-li*; (3) 39 strong, walled cities and 350 hamlets of *Bīt-A-muk-ka-a-ni*, including *Bīt-Ta-ū-ra-a*, *Bīt-Ba-nu-īlu-ū-a*, *Bīt-Il-ta-ma-sa-ma-'*, *Bīt-Di-ni-īlu*; (4) 8 strong, walled cities and 100 hamlets within the borders of *Bīt-Ia-ki-ni*, including *Bīt-Za-bi-dia*. According to these lists Bit-Dakkuri, Bit-Sa'ili, Bit-Amukkani and Bit-Yakin, each with the land determinative, appear to be larger units, with subdivisions identified on the basis of urban centers, of which some are likewise designated as "houses."

⁵⁹Of the subgroups listed in the previous note only Bit-Zabidia is named elsewhere, and that only on one occasion.

⁶⁰See for example the references to the northern kingdom of Israel as *Bīt-Ḫu-um-ri-a* and variations; *ANET* 284–285; cf. 280–281. *Ḫu-um-ri* (Omri) was neither the eponymous ancestor nor the first monarch of Israel. His significance to the neo-Assyrians may be attributed either to the latter's perception of him as having founded the state capital in Samaria or to his occupation of the throne when neo-Assyrian political ambitions first began seriously to touch Israelite interests. This occurred first under Aššur-nāšir-apli, a contemporary of Omri. Cf. H. W. Saggs, "The Assyrians," in *Peoples of Old Testament Times* (ed. D. J. Wiseman; Oxford: Clarendon, 1973) 158. This designation of Israel as Bit-Omri contrasts sharply with the OT usage. In the latter the nation is never identified as "the house" of its monarch or ruling dynasty. Cf. n. 54 above. Furthermore, this particular dynasty is never identified as *byt* Omri but always as *byt* Ahab. T. Ishida, "The House of Ahab," *IEJ* 25 (1975) 135–151, attributes this alteration to the Deuteronomistic religious perspective of Israelite historiography. If D. J. Wiseman's reconstruction of a lacuna in one of Tiglath-Pileser's inscriptions is correct, the identification of Aram Damascus as *Bīt-Ḫa-za-īlu* may represent a similar case. "A Fragmentary Inscription of Tiglath-Pileser III from Nimrud," *Iraq* 18 (1956) 120 ff. Cf. H. Tadmor, "The Southern Border of Aram," *IEJ* 12 (1962) 114–122.

⁶¹In fact, even where the texts are clear the Assyrian interpretation appears to be erroneous. On the black obelisk Jehu is identified as *Ia-ū-a mār Ḫu-um-ri* (*ANET* 280), although it is known from 2 Kgs 10:1–17 that, far from being a member of the dynasty, he was responsible for its extermination and replacing it with his own. Note also the designation of the northern dynasty as *byt* Jehu in Hos 1:4. Expressions such as this Akkadian form may therefore signify no more than that Jehu was a successor of Omri or that he was from "Humri-land." So A. Ungnad, "Jaua, Mār Humri," *OLZ* 4 (1906) 224–226.

⁶²E.g. the Sumerian king list (*ANET* 265–266), the Assyrian king list (*ANET* 564–566), the Hammurapi genealogy (J. J. Finkelstein, "The Genealogy of the Hammurapi Dynasty," *JCS* 20 [1966] 95–117), compare this with their interest in the creation of man and his early history. Cf. W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-Ḫasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969) 15 ff.

In view of these limitations a great deal of caution must be observed in handling the data. It is impossible to prove definitively or to refute the common ethnic roots of any of the Mesopotamian tribes that come under the name *bīt-GN*. At best one may speak in terms of probabilities. But it is to be expected that, if the form *bīt-GN* does reflect a common ethnic heritage, hints of this consanguinity should occasionally be dropped.

The first hint derives from the common use of *bītu* for "household, family."⁶³ That the *bītu* as an economic unit could include servants and slaves as well as the members of the actual family is clear from the Babylonian laws. However, the core of the *bītu* consisted of the father (*abu*), his wife (*aššatu*), and the children of that marriage.⁶⁴ In the patriarchal Mesopotamian society the father was considered to be the lord of the house.⁶⁵ The use of the expression *bīt abim*, one of the central concerns of the law code of Hammurapi, is of special interest.⁶⁶ Full membership in the *bīt abim*, indicated by the rights of inheritance, was normally open to the children of the man (*awilum*) and his wife.⁶⁷ However, under special circumstances if a slave woman bore children fathered by the *awilum* these could also share in the privilege.⁶⁸ Adopted children too were to share in the inheritance,⁶⁹ but under certain conditions they could also return to their paternal homes (i.e., their own *bīt abim*).⁷⁰ On the other hand, even for seigniors the threat of being cut off from the *bīt abim* hung over those guilty of moral offenses against the family.⁷¹ The obvious importance of blood relationships in these texts confirms overtones of kinship in the Akkadian usage of *bītu* when followed by an appropriate genitive.⁷²

Although in its essential meaning *bīt abi* referred to the nuclear family, the expression could be applied to social units of ever-increasing size. According to ABL 1074:8-9, one *bīt abi* is presented as a larger entity containing a *qinnu*

⁶³CAD. For a discussion of family life in Mesopotamia see E. Ebeling, "Familie," *RLA*, 3. 9-15.

⁶⁴E.g. *TCL* 13, 193:10, PN ("personal name") PN₂ *aššat-šu* PN₃ PN₄ PN₅ PN₆ *māri-šu* PN₇ ù PN₈ *marāti-šu naḫḫar* 8 LÚ *a-me-lu-ut-tu* LU.UN me⁶⁴ *bīt-šu*, "PN (himself), his wife PN₂, his sons PN₃, PN₄, PN₅, PN₆, his daughters PN₇ and PN₈, together eight persons, his entire family."

⁶⁵Cf. "The Code of Hammurabi," *ANET*, 171, #129, and 173, #161, where he is called *be-el aš-ša-tim*, "owner of a wife." Hereafter the code will be referred to by CH and number of the article only.

⁶⁶Note CH #165-184.

⁶⁷CH #165, 166, 167.

⁶⁸CH #170, 171.

⁶⁹CH #191.

⁷⁰CH #186, 189, 190, 193.

⁷¹CH #158, *ina bīt abim innassaḫ*, for having engaged in sexual relations with his stepmother. The punishment for the same offense with his mother was for both to be burned (CH #157). The verb *nasāḫum* is used in CH #168, 169 of removing a son's title to a share in the father's estate.

⁷²For numerous other references to similar usage from other documents see *CAD*, 1. 73-74.

as a subunit: "This family belongs to the clan Belšunu."⁷³ The hierarchical tribal social structure is reflected even more explicitly in ABL 877:12–17: "Illatu, son of Marduk, son of Baueresh, family of the Buletira clan, his ancestral house is outside the gate of the Gula (temple)."⁷⁴ Noteworthy here is the substitution of the name of the person fulfilling the role of father, Buletira, in place of *abi*. It is this usage that also underlies the lists of Sennacherib's Chaldean conquests.⁷⁵

In an extended sense *bītu* was commonly used of paternal estate—not only of movable property,⁷⁶ but also of real estate. Thus a patrimony could consist of a garden, a field, or even a manor.⁷⁷ On the other hand, although one paternal estate could be divided into several "houses" the expression *bīt abi* continued to have reference to the ancestral castle, the family seat.⁷⁸ This semantic process developed still farther, to the point where *bītu* could be applied to a plot of land or geographic region independent of any inheritance connections.⁷⁹ Only in such cases have the kinship overtones receded completely.

We would be greatly assisted in confirming the kinship connotations of the expression *bīt*-GN if it could be demonstrated that when it is employed in a tribal or geographic sense the name appearing as the genitive represented a *bona fide* personal name. Unfortunately many of the names so used are unattested as names of individuals. It is possible that the personal-name determinative prefixed to many of these reflects memories of the founders of these houses—i.e., the eponymous ancestors.⁸⁰ On formal grounds there does not seem to be any reason for rejecting many of those accompanied by this determinative as personal names.⁸¹ Several have appeared in contexts in which they have been interpreted as individuals, suggesting that the personal-name determinatives were not entirely fictitious.⁸²

⁷³As translated by CAD, 1. 73. On *qinnum* see AHW, 922.

⁷⁴As translated by CAD, 1. 75.

⁷⁵Cf. above, n. 58. Cf. also the use of *bēl bīti* to refer to the chief of a tribe; CAD, 2. 295. These kinship connotations are especially important in the use of *bīt abi* to refer to a ruling dynasty; cf. CAD, 1. 74.

⁷⁶CH #183.

⁷⁷For references see CAD, 1. 74–75.

⁷⁸Ibid., 75. Cf. n. 56 above.

⁷⁹CAD, 2. 292–293. Cf. also Jer 31:27 where, however, kinship overtones may still be present.

⁸⁰Of the more than 110 toponyms with the prefixed *bīt* listed by Parpola, half occur with this determinative.

⁸¹Compare the forms of the names with the personal-name determinative listed by Parpola with those cited by K. L. Tallqvist, *Assyrian Personal Names* (Acta Societatis Scientiarum Fennicae 43/1; Helsingfors: 1914), and discussed by J. J. Stamm, *Die akkadische Namengebung* (MVAG 44; Leipzig: 1939).

⁸²E.g. Adini, *WO* 4 (1967) 34, vi:6–7. So interpreted by E. Ebeling, "Adini," *RLA*, 1. 36; J. A. Brink-

Of special interest in this regard are the major Chaldean tribes—the Bit-Amukani, Bit-Dakkuri and Bit-Yakin peoples. Several features, apart from the prefixed *bīt* and the personal-name determinative, suggest that here we have to do with tribes whose basis of unity was descent from a common ancestor. First, these names are never used of cities or associated with specific geographic locations.⁸³ Second, the members of the tribes are regularly identified as *mār*-PN, the genitive being the name of the supposed ancestor.⁸⁴ Since the names are not applied to cities, this usage should probably not be equated with the common Assyrian designation of a citizen of a city as “the son of the city.”⁸⁵ This suggests that these groups had not yet developed politically beyond tribal status.⁸⁶

It is obvious that the search for the origins of the peoples referred to by the Assyrians as *bīt*-GN cannot be completed without a great deal more information. However, it does appear that in some instances, especially with respect to the Chaldean tribes, the form might reflect a perception of tribal identity based on descent from a common ancestor. As in the case of Hebrew usage, this interpretation does not demand absolute ethnic purity. It is known that intermarriage was practiced at least among the leading families of the tribes.⁸⁷ It is also quite likely that outsiders were often incorporated into the tribe, either voluntarily or by coercion.

man, *A Political History of Post-Kassite Babylonia 1158–722 B.C.* (AnOr 43; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1968) 198 n. 1208 (hereafter cited as *PKB*). Cf. *ibid.* p. 224 n. 1567; *KAI* text 233:15. Note also Yakin, whose name appears in the same text as Adini and who is called “king of Sealand,” *šar māt Tam-di*. *PKB* 198 n. 1213 suggests that in this case the Assyrians have mistaken the name of the tribe, here accepted as its eponymous ancestor, for the name of its ruler. Cf. also A. R. Millard in a review of *PKB* in *Or* 39 (1970) 449. On these tribes and their names see further J. A. Brinkman, “Notes on Arameans and Chaldeans in Southern Babylonia in the Early Seventh Century B.C.,” *Or* 46 (1977) 305–309, in a review of M. Dietrich, *Die Aramäer Südbabyloniens in der Sargonidenzeit (700–648)* (AOAT 7; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1970). Dietrich, *Aramäer* 5, interprets the *bīt*-PN designations as primarily geographic rather than tribal entities.

⁸³Cf. the Arameans who are also found in southern Mesopotamia but whose “tribal” names appear elsewhere only as city names. *PKB* 271 suggests that their identification among the Aramean tribes may have been an Assyrian fabrication.

⁸⁴Cf. the use of gentilics for the Arameans; *PKB* 267 n. 1716; 273 n. 1762. This Chaldean usage applies even to the chieftains—e.g. *a-di-ni mār da-ku-ri*, *WO* 4 (1967) 34, vi:6.

⁸⁵Cf. our discussion, “‘Israel’—‘Sons of Israel,’” 309–310. Significantly, although several northern Aramean states were also identified by the *bīt*-GN form (e.g. Bit-Adini, Bit-Bahiani, Bit-Ḥalupe, Bit-Zamani) and although their citizens could be referred to as “sons of *bīt*-GN”, the personal-name determinative never appears before the genitive. Contrast this with the Chaldean Bit-Adini, which seldom appears without the determinative.

⁸⁶The occasional reference to the leaders of Bit-Yakin as “king of Sealand” and the collective designation of the chieftains as “kings of Chaldea” (*šarrāni [ša] māt Kaldi*), *Iraq* 25 (1963) 56 line 47, need not indicate otherwise. See *PKB* 264 n. 1704 for additional references to the use of *šarrum* for the rulers of these tribes. The process of sedentarization is described by H. Klengel, *Zwischen Zelt und Palast: Die Beziehungen von Nomaden und Sesshaften im alten Vorderasien* (Vienna: Schroll, 1972) 135–136.

⁸⁷Cf. *PKB* 265 n. 1707.

2. *Byt-GN in Northwest Semitic texts.* Outside Mesopotamia examples of tribal and national names using the form *byt-GN* are rare. The nearest the cuneiform texts of Ugarit come is the application of the expression *bīt abi* to a family seat or ancestral castle.⁸⁸ Unfortunately, however, as in so many instances from Mesopotamia, this text concerns the fortunes of a dynasty, not a tribe. From the alphabetic texts the Keret epic speaks of a *bt ḥbr*.⁸⁹ Habur, however, is not the name of a person but of a city, the home of Keret.⁹⁰

The data provided by Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions are no more satisfying. The expression *bt/byt 'b* occurs frequently with the sense "dynasty, royal house,"⁹¹ but *bt/byt-GN* forms are rare. However, two eighth-century B.C. references deserve comment. Exactly who is meant by *bt mpš* in the Karatepe inscription is not clear.⁹² It could be argued on the basis of *KAI* 26 A II:13–16 that *bt mpš* is treated as the equivalent of "the Danunites" (*dnwnym*).⁹³ Both are clearly associated with the plain of Adana and may be viewed as inhabitants thereof. On the basis of *KAI* 26 A I:13–16⁹⁴ and A III:8 ff.,⁹⁵ however, this interpretation is unlikely. Furthermore, if the tradition of Stephanos is to be

⁸⁸J. Nougayrol, ed., *Le palais royal d'Ugarit*, Vol. IV: *Textes accadiens des archives sud* (Mission de Ras Shamra 9; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1956) 138 text 18.06 + :13–15, *ù li-ḥal-li-qū-šu i[š-tu lib]bi bīt a-bi-šu ù i[š-tu libbi māṭ a-bi[š-u] ù i[š-tu kussi ša abbē-šu*, "May they (the gods) drive him from the house of his fathers, the land of his fathers, and the throne of his fathers."

⁸⁹1 Keret 82, 173; *ANET* 143–144.

⁹⁰Cf. *ḥbr rbt*, "Great Habur," and "Little Habur" in *UT* 128 IV:8–9, 19–20. This city is located by M. C. Astour on the Habur river; "A North Mesopotamian Locale of the Keret Epic," *UF* 5 (1973) 32. For consenting views see also H. L. Ginsberg, *ANET* 143 (contrary to his earlier interpretation in *The Legend of King Keret: A Canaanite Epic of the Bronze Age* [BASOR Supp. Studies 2–3 (1946)] 15); J. Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan* (VTSup 5; Leiden: Brill, 1957) 99 n. 5. The alternative is to interpret *ḥbr* as "storehouse, granary"; so H. Sauren and G. Kestemont, "Keret, roi de Hubur," *UF* 3 (1971) 196, "cellier"; G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Old Testament Studies 3; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956) 31. Cf. J. C. L. Gibson in his revised edition of the volume (1978), 84.

⁹¹*KAI* 24:5 (Kilamuwa, = J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, Vol. III: *Phoenician Inscriptions* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1982] text 13:5; hereafter cited as *PI*); 214:9 (Panammuwa I, = J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, Vol. II: *Aramaic Inscriptions* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1975] text 13:9; hereafter cited as *AD*); 215:2 *et passim* (Panammuwa II, = *AI* 14:2 *et passim*); 217:3 (Barrakab Fragment, = *AI* 16:3); 224:9–10, 24–25 (Sefire, = *AI* 9 iii:9–10, 24–25). Cf. the frequent use of *byt* without 'b in this sense in *KAI* 222 B:21 *et passim* (Sefire).

⁹²*KAI* 26 A I:16; II:15; III:11; C III:12. Cf. *PI* 15; *ANET* 653–654.

⁹³"I have built it (the city of Azitawadda) . . . with plenty to eat and well-being and in a good situation and in peace of mind to be a protection for the Plain of Adana (*'mq 'dn*) and the House of Mupsh (*bt mpš*), for in my days the country of the Plain of Adana had plenty to eat and well-being, and the Danunites (*dnwnym*) never had any night in my days"; *ANET* 654.

⁹⁴The text speaks of evil men who were not subservient to *bt mpš*. Azitawadda, however, was able to subdue them, thus bringing peace to the Danunites.

⁹⁵This passage speaks of the inhabitants of the city of Azitawadda prospering and serving Azitawadda and *bt mpš* in large numbers.

relied upon, Adana was founded not by Mupsh but by a person named Adanos.⁹⁶ Consequently *bt mps̄* should be viewed as the name of the dynasty, considered to have been founded by a man named Mupsh.⁹⁷

From the Aramaic texts we learn of *byt gš*,⁹⁸ a northern Aramean state with its capital Arpad.⁹⁹ According to Sefire II B:10 *byt gš* as well as *byt šll* are threatened with a curse should they break the treaty that Bir-Ga'yah king of KTK has made with them. From the context the identity of *byt gš* is not clear. If both entities are understood as toponyms,¹⁰⁰ these represent important parallels to *bit-GN* in Akkadian and *byt-GN* in Hebrew. However, it is possible to interpret the form much more narrowly—i.e., as a designation for the dynasty founded by *gš*.¹⁰¹ In the present context the expression seems to refer to those mentioned in Sefire II B:2–3: Arpad and its people, Mati'el, his sons, his nobles, his people ('*m*).¹⁰² If this interpretation is correct, *byt gš* serves as a collective expression for the inhabitants of the state ruled by Mati'el. It must still be determined, however, how the state came to be known as *byt gš*. Unfortunately,

⁹⁶As reported by Stephanos of Byzantium; cf. M. C. Astour, *Hellenosemitica: An Ethnic and Cultural Study in West Semitic Impact* (Leiden: Brill, 1965) 38–39. The etymological relationship between '*dn* and *dnw̄nym* is not clear, but the problem need not detain us here. For discussions see *ibid.*, p. 14: *PI* 56, who derive them from different roots; contra E. Laroche, "Études sur les hiéroglyphes Hittites," *Syria* 35 (1958) 263–275; *KAI*, II, 39, who treat the initial *aleph* of '*dn* as prosthetic and thus derive the two from the same root.

⁹⁷This name is probably to be connected with the Mopsus of Greek legend. Two years prior to the conclusion of the Trojan War this prince, the son of Rhakius of Clarus and Manto, daughter of Teiresias, is supposed to have embarked on a series of adventures, along with a band of followers, which led him as far as Pamphylia and Cilicia. In the former region he is purported to have founded the cities Aspendus and Phaselis; in the latter, Mopsuestia ("Mopsus' hearth") and Mallis. His influence appears to have extended to the plain of Adana. The Luwian form of the name, which exchanges *k* for *p*, may also be remembered in the name of the south Phrygian city of Moxoupolis, another of his foundations, as well as the tribal name Moxianoï, from western Phrygia. See further R. D. Barnett, "Phrygia and the Peoples of Anatolia in the Iron Age," in *CAH*, 3d ed., vol. II/2: *History of the Middle East and the Aegean Region c. 1380–1000 B.C.* (ed. I. E. S. Edwards *et al.*, Cambridge: University Press, 1975) 441–442; *PI* 43–45. For a different interpretation see Astour, *Hellenosemitica* 53–67, who sees *mps̄* primarily as a divine name.

⁹⁸In several Akkadian texts *gš* appears with a prosthetic *a-*, which E. Puech compares with the prosthetic *aleph* of Adana, cf. *dnw̄nym* (*KAI* 24 and 26); "Un ivoire de Bit-Gusi (Arpad) a Nimrud," *Syria* 55 (1978) 165 n. 8.

⁹⁹On the historical relationship between Arpad and Aram see A. R. Millard, "Adad-Nirari, Aram, and Arpad," *PEQ* 105 (1973) 161–164.

¹⁰⁰So A. Dupont-Somer, in "Les inscriptions arameennes de Sfire," *Memoirs presentees par divers savants a l'Academie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, 15 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1958) on Sf. I B:1–3, who identifies *šll* with *A-šal-li* of the Akkadian texts. Cf. D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (New York: Greenwood, 1968 [1927]), 1. par. #475 (hereafter cited as *ARAB*). Cf. also *KAI*, II, 253—but admitting the impossibility of identifying the place involved.

¹⁰¹So M. Noth, "Der historische Hintergrund der Inschriften von Sefire," *ZDPV* 77 (1961) 129, who regards *byt gš* and *byt šll* as parallel forms. Cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire* (BibOr 19; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967) 40, 60.

¹⁰²If the restoration of Dupont-Sommer is correct.

apart from this text¹⁰³ *byt gš* has appeared on only one fragmentary Aramaic text, which reads *l'ṭrsmk] byt gš*, "to [Attarsumki] of Bit-Guši."¹⁰⁴ Otherwise even the Sefire inscription appears to exchange *byt* for *br/bny*.¹⁰⁵ Again the expression has been associated with both the territory and/or the subjects of Mati'e¹⁰⁶ and the dynasty he represented.¹⁰⁷ The eighth-century B.C. inscription of Zakkur of Hamath names a certain *brgš* next to *br Hazael* in a list of kings allied against Zakkur.¹⁰⁸ It is apparent that here *gš* is understood as a dynastic title, suggesting that elsewhere too *byt gš* signifies either a dynasty or a state identified after its ruling house. Consequently the origins of the name are not to be found in an eponymous ancestor of the people of Arpad.

This interpretation is confirmed by the evidence of the neo-Assyrian royal annals. From the time of Ashurnasirpal (883–859 B.C.) comes the form ^m*Gu-u-si 'Ia-ḥa-na-a-a*, the name of a king bringing tribute.¹⁰⁹ The name distinguishes between the man Gusi and his country Yahan.¹¹⁰ The annals of Shalmaneser III (858–824 B.C.) frequently speak of Arame, a son of (A)gusi.¹¹¹ More than one hundred years later Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 B.C.) encounters *Mati'ilu mār* ^m*A-gu-u-si*.¹¹² In a list of villages the form *Bit-A-g[u-si]* appears,¹¹³ while another text uses *māt Bit-A-gu-si*.¹¹⁴ It appears that by this time the entire region ruled from Arpad was being identified by the name of the ruling dynasty in precisely the same way that Israel was being referred to as *Bit-Humria* and Aram Damascus as *Bit-Haza'ilu*.¹¹⁵ Consequently we are left with

¹⁰³See also the broken segments I A:16 and I B:11, which are to be restored on the basis of II B:10.

¹⁰⁴Puech, "Un ivoire" 162–169. Puech also provides a helpful summary of all references, including those in the Akkadian texts, to (A)gusi. Cf. also F. Vattioni, "A propos du nom propre syriaque Gusai," *Sem* 16 (1966) 39–41.

¹⁰⁵Cf. I B:3, 'm *bny gš*.

¹⁰⁶KAI, II, 247.

¹⁰⁷Fitzmyer, *Aramaic* 40.

¹⁰⁸KAI 202:5; ANET 655–656.

¹⁰⁹ARAB, 1. par. #477.

¹¹⁰Cf. J. D. Hawkins, "Jahan," *RLA* 5 (1977) 238–239.

¹¹¹ARAB, 1. par. #582, 600 (= ANET 278), 601, 614, 668. Arame appears in the Maras Museum stela as Adrame, father of Attarsumki. Cf. A. R. Millard and H. Tadmor, "Adad-Nirari III in Syria: Another Stele Fragment and the Dates of His Campaigns," *Iraq* 35 (1973) 61.

¹¹²ARAB, 1. par. #813.

¹¹³W. Schramm, *Einleitung in die Assyrischen Königsinschriften*, part 2: 934–722 v. Chr. (Handbuch der Orientalistik; Leiden/Cologne: Brill, 1973) 133.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 136. Cf. D. J. Wiseman, "A Fragmentary Inscription of Tiglath-Pileser III from Nimrud," *Iraq* 18 (1956) 117–118.

¹¹⁵Cf. above n. 60. So also Puech, "Un ivoire" 163–164; S. Schiffer, *Die Aramäer: historisch-geographische Untersuchungen* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1911) 90 n. 6.

no Aramaic or Phoenician witnesses to the *byt*-GN form in which overtones of national unity based on descent from a common ancestor are reflected.

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The employment of the expression *byt* Israel as a self-designation by the Hebrews represents a usage unattested outside the OT. But the form is not restricted to the name Israel; the Israelites also identify themselves as *byt* Isaac and much more frequently as *byt* Jacob. Where individual tribes of Israel are concerned, *byt* often appears before the eponymous tribal name. The double occurrence of *byt* Esau as a designation for Edom in Obad 18 confirms that the *byt*-GN form was used not only as a self-designation but also was applied to the Transjordanian nations, with the name in the genitive position being that of the perceived eponymous ancestor. This observation, combined with the general understanding of a *byt* as being primarily (though not exclusively) a kinship unit, supports the hypothesis that when Israelites identify their nation as *byt* Israel they are employing a collective expression that assumes a nation that is essentially an ethnic unity. Such overtones, however, are probably not as strong as in the cases of *zr'* Israel and *bny* Israel.

Since such use of the *byt*-GN form is not known from the Phoenician and Aramaic texts of the same period and is absent from all Akkadian references to the Northwest Semitic nations, it may be proposed that the expression reflects a unique Hebrew perception of national self-consciousness. To be sure, in these contexts the form *byt*-GN appears to have been in common use, even as a means of identifying a state, but the significance of the expression was fundamentally different. In every one of these instances a territorial state, as opposed to a nation state, is involved,¹¹⁶ and in every case the name derives from that of the recognized founder of a ruling dynasty. The neo-Assyrians even applied this form (albeit erroneously) to the northern kingdom of Israel.

By way of contrast, however, it should be emphasized that, apparently lest realm and dynasty be confused, the Hebrew historians studiously avoided the identification of their nation, *byt* Israel, with the various dynasties. Neither the united kingdom of Israel nor Judah is ever called *byt* Saul or *byt* David. Similarly the northern kingdom is never referred to as *byt* Jeroboam, *byt* Omri or *byt* Jehu.¹¹⁷ The nations represented the houses of their ancestors, not of the

¹¹⁶For a clarification of the distinction see G. Buccellati, *Cities and Nations of Ancient Syria: An Essay on Political Institutions, with Special Reference to the Israelite Kingdoms* (Studi Semitici 26; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967) 13–14.

¹¹⁷Cf. n. 54 above for references. Note also the following: 2 Sam 3:10, which speaks of transferring the kingdom from *byt* Saul and establishing the throne of David over Israel and Judah; 1 Kgs 12:20, the tribe of Judah followed *byt* David; 12:26, "the kingdom will return to *byt* David"; 14:8, the kingdom is torn away from *byt* David (cf. 2 Kgs 17:21); 14:14, a king over Israel will cut off *byt* Jeroboam; Jer 33:17, David would never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel (*ks' byt ysr'l*); Ezek 12:10, reference to the prince of Jerusalem and all *byt* Israel in it; 43:7, Yahweh will dwell among the *bny* Israel forever; neither *byt* Israel nor their kings will defile his name again; Hos 1:4, Yahweh will punish *byt* Jehu and put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel (*mmlkw't byt ysr'l*); 5:1, O priests!//O *byt* Israel!//O *byt* hmlk!

kings-come-lately. Their sense of unity transcended mere political considerations. It was founded upon a conviction of consanguinity and kinship.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸I am indebted to my student Kathryn A. Brogan for her assistance in the preparation of this paper. Any deficiencies in the presentation, however, are my responsibility.