# CHAPTER 5: THE *SĬN* IN ISAAC

One occurrence which has never received an explanatory proposition of a theoretical nature, is the dual spelling of "Isaac" in the Old Testament (cf. Lombaard 2005a:152-159). The spelling of Isaac's name in four Old Testament occurrences, in three Isaac texts, namely Psalm 105:9, Jeremiah 33:26 and Amos 7:9 & 16, is יִשְׂחָק (with a שׂ), rather than the more usual spelling of יִצְחָק (with a צ). Isaac-with-*sĭn* is thus a very rare occurrence. What is of additional interest, is that this spelling occurs only outside of the Pentateuch in the Old Testament, and is not related to a specific time frame. Explanations should therefore be sought in a different direction than linguistic, and one of the proposed theories in this study may provide us with a possible solution.

The most widely followed and therefore most important proposal on this variation in spelling, made by van Selms (1965:157-158), and followed by for example Ackroyd (1987:197) and Schmid (1991:24; cf. Levin 1995:309), is of a linguistic rather than a theoretical nature. The interpretation attached to this phenomenon is that the spelling with שׂ is a later development, evidencing a simplification in speech patterns. The difficulty of pronouncing a *tsadeh* thus in time led, because of a natural laziness of the tongue, to the pronunciation being altered to a *sĭn*. The forms צחק and שׂחק may be called on as parallels for this development (cf. van Selms 1965:157-158).

Exactly the opposite is the view expressed in Hayes (1988:239-240), where it is argued that the spelling with *sĭn* would be the older version, since later spelling

would tend to be more formally correct. However, no further supporting argument is offered.

Both these treatments thus rest on a certain model of the development of language, with entails that over time pronunciation becomes, respectively, either less or more rigorous. Languages are replete with examples of both these tendencies, which means that an argument based on linguistics, at least when it is offered on its own, aids little in our understanding of this *sĭn – tsadeh* variation.

While van Selms (1965:158-159) is probably correct that the יִשְׂחָק –variation may well be ascribed to an indication of an oral tradition at work, captured in literature, this may well be the case for any number of occurrences of the more usual spelling too. Orality on its own cannot provide us with a definite answer to this question either. Alternate avenues must be explored.

In what follows, therefore, the four occurrences of Isaac-with-*sĭn* are analysed, grouped together in this chapter for no other reason than that these texts have this trait in common. Even if no clear solution to the issue of the variant spelling may be concluded to, at least this avenue will have been explored more fully, and the possibility of a theoretical solution in line with the theory of the multiplicity of the patriarchal references in the Old Testament proposed in this study, would have been investigated.

## 5.1 The rare find of Isaac in the Psalms

With a religion so heavily based on history and its reinterpretation (as was most influentially indicated by von Rad, especially in his two related works of 1957 and 1960), it would be expected that the historical traditions (cf. Mathias 1993:29-47) of Israel should find frequent expression in the cultic setting. As Kapelrud (1977:122) stated, the Psalms are "the great melting-pot of traditions in ancient Israel". It would therefore not be surprising if we found the patriarchs, themes from the exodus and wilderness journey and settlement in the land, creation and kingship and Zion often referred to in the Psalms. This would be in keeping with the ways in which the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament constantly take up these themes from Israel's past and reapply them to altered socio-historical and religious circumstances. As Westermann (1984b: 79) puts it: "In Israel hatte die Geschichte Gottes mit seinem Volk eine so bestimmende bedeutung, daβ sie auch die Anfange umfassen muβte ... auch die Väterzeit..."

The Psalms, however, seem not to take up all the traditions of Israel as frequently as expectation might have it (with the exodus and wilderness themes, according to Bos 1977:129, being among the most frequently reflected traditions in the Psalms; cf. Mathias 1993:40-42; Day 1990:125). Notably, the patriarchs seem to feature very infrequently (cf. e.g. Mathias 1993:41), and then mostly in genitive constructions which refer to either God (cf. Mettinger 1987:50-74 for an overview of research into the "God of the fathers" theme) or the nation of Israel, rather than to the patriarchs themselves.

In this part of the dissertation, the references in the Psalms to the patriarchs will be investigated, after which a few remarks in this regard will be made on Psalm 105. The diminutive role of Isaac calls for special attention.

## 5.1.1 References to the patriarchs in the Psalms

In researching here the occurrences of the patriarchs in the Psalms, only direct references to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob-Israel were investigated (cf. e.g. Schmid 1999:79; Lisowsky 1958:1580, 1623-1624, 1627-1630); any possible allusions to the three fathers in the Psalms (as e.g. Kaiser 1978:44 11, 148, cf. 84, and Van der Ploeg 1974:203 suggest of the terms מָשִׁיחַ and נביא in Psalm 105:15; so already Gunkel [1929] 1986:460; related to this, see also e.g. Booij 1994:235 on Psalm 105:14) are not taken into account, since the interest here is on the primary importance attached to the patriarchs. What follows, therefore, amounts to what may be called a "terminological census", in order to determine the significance of the patriarchs in general, and Isaac in particular, in the Psalms.

It is immediately clear that worst off of the patriarchs in the Psalms is Isaac, with only a single occurrence to be found in Psalm 105:9. It was therefore but a slight omission for du Toit (1963:21) not to include Isaac in his list of persons referred to in the Psalms (neither does Isaac reach Frost's 1963-list of "patriarchs and prophets").

Not much better off than Isaac is Abraham, with four occurrences - Psalms 105:6, 9, 42 and 47:10. On closer inspection, though, one finds that the genitive constructions using Abraham's name in Psalms 47:10 and 105:6 refer, respectively, to God and

the people of Israel, thus leaving only two direct references to the person of Abraham in the Psalms.

The case of Jacob-Israel is rather more difficult to investigate, not because of the two spellings accorded Jacob (namely יַעֲקֹב and יַעֲקוֹב , with only the former found in the Psalms), but mostly because Jacob may be referred to as "Israel". Therefore both these terms in the Psalms have to be investigated.

The term "Jacob" is found 34 times in the Psalms. While this may give one hope that at last we have found a patriarch which receives some substantial treatment in the Psalms, here too the news is worse than first impressions might lead one to expect. Of these 34 occurrences, 19 refer in various ways to the people of Israel (in absolute occurrences: Psalms 14:7; 24:6; 53:7; 59:14; 78:5, 21, 71; 79:7; 99:4; 135:4; 147:19; and in genitive constructions: "house of Jacob" - Psalm 114:1; "sons / children of Jacob" - Psalms 77:16; 105:6; "pride of Jacob" - Psalm 47:5; "seed of Jacob" - Psalm 22:24; "triumphs of Jacob" - Psalm 44:5; "dwellings of Jacob" - Psalm 87:2; "fate of Israel" - Psalm 85:2) and 13 refer to God by way of genitive contractions with the name of Jacob (with אֲבִיר - Psalms 132:2, 5; with אֵל - Psalm 146:5; with אֱלוֹהַּ - Psalm 114:7; and with יִשְׁלַח - Psalms 20:2; 46:8, 12; 75:10; 76:7; 81:2, 5; 84:9; 94:7). This leaves us with but two Jacob-references which indicate the person of Jacob, both of which are found in Psalm 105 (verses 10 and 23).

In these two instances (Psalm 105:10, 23) too, however, it would not be unsubstantiated to infer implied reference to the people of Israel as well (cf. e.g.

Booij 1994:235; Kraus 1978:895). 1Chronicles 16:13 does something similar, though more explicitly, with its parallel, Psalm 105:6, substituting "Israel" for "Abraham" (cf. Millard 1994:215 215f), implying a wider frame of reference. From the context of the rest of Psalm 105, the primary intention though seems to indicate the person of Jacob in the first instance.

An investigation into the occurrences of the term "Israel" in the Psalms leads one to the conclusion that, in this regard, "Israel" offers us no hope. Of the 35 absolute occurrences of "Israel" (Psalms 14:7; 25:22; 50:7; 53:7; 68:35; note that I regard the suggested textual emendation of Psalm 73:1 in BHS as likely because of the synonymous-parallelistic structure of the verse (cf. e.g. Berlin 2008:1-30) – there is thus no reference to Israel in this verse; Psalms 76:2; 78:5, 21, 59, 71; 81:5, 9, 12, 14; 105:10, 23; 114:1, 2; 115:9; 118:2; 122:4; 124:1; 125:5; 128:6; 129:1; 130:7, 8; 131:3; 135:4, 12; 136:11, 14, 22; 147:19; 149;2), all but Psalm 114:2 (which seems to be geographical indication) and - again - Psalm 105:10, 23 refer to the people of Israel rather than to the person of Jacob-Israel. As to the genitive constructions with the term "Israel" in the Psalms: 13 instances are related to the people of Israel ("young men of Israel" - Psalm 78:31; "house of Israel" - Psalms 98:3; 115:12; 135:19; "sons / children of Israel" - Psalms 103:7; 148:14; "seed of Israel" - Psalm 22:24; "redemption of Israel" - the two parallel Psalm 14:7 and 53:7, though with slightly different spelling; "from the fountain [or: convocation - cf. BHS footnote] of Israel" - Psalm 68:27; "scatterlings of Israel" - Psalm 147:2; "tribes of Israel" - Psalm 78:55; "praise songs of Israel" - Ps 22:4), with six such occurrences referring to God (with אֵל - Psalm 68:36; with קָדוֹשׁ - Psalms 71:22; 78:41; 89:19; with רֹעֵה - Psalm 80:2; and with שׁוֹמֵר - Psalm 121:4).

The term "Israel" thus does not open up any new possibilities with regards to the patriarchs in the Psalms. At most it affirms the importance of Psalm 105:10 and 23 on this issue, but this is so because of the synonymous-parallelistic nature of the references to Jacob-Israel in these two verses (note that in v. 10 the order of reference is first to Jacob, then to Israel, with v. 23 reversing this order).

We may thus observe from the above that references to the patriarchs are indeed few, though not far between: Abraham is found in Psalm 105:9 & 42; Isaac is to be found in Psalm 105:9 only; Jacob and Israel both occur in Psalm 105:10 & 23, in synonymous parallelisms. We find ourselves thus led to Psalm 105 if we are to investigate further the theme of the patriarchs in the Psalms.

### 5.1.2  The patriarchs in Psalm 105

This seems to be a somewhat neglected Psalm, if one takes into account how few volumes *of Ausgewählte Psalmen* or Selected Psalms contain studies on it. Psalm 105 may perhaps be best described (adapting Treves 1988:82 somewhat) as "a triumphal hymn of thanksgiving (with) historical and didactic contents" (cf. Seybold 1996:414-415; Allen 1983:42; see Mathias 1993:124f for a discussion of the *Gattung* of Psalm 105). Gunn (1956:124) also stresses this didactic intention of Psalm 105 when he states that this Psalm - along with Psalms 78 and 106 - "trace(s) the hand of God in the great events of the nation's past, *for the benefit of the younger generation* who either do not know or easily overlook the lessons of the past" (italics added).

Perhaps it is the didactic intentions (Weiser 1962:673 does not accept such didactic intentions because of his covenantal interpretation) of this Psalm which explain its incorporation of the references to the patriarchs[57], noted above (cf. Haglund 1984:114), as counting among the *magnalia Dei* (Burden 1991:65, cf. pp 74-75). Psalm 105 would thus, as an expression of the "spiritualiteit van het Leerhuis" (Waaijman 1983:139) be similar in intention to the Joseph novella (cf. von Rad 1953:120-127, and locally: Loader 1987:100-107; Wessels 1986), namely in educating in some manner diplomats for the monarchy. Such a connection – oral, not literary (cf. e.g. Booij 1994:231-232) – between the Joseph narrative and Psalm 105 would not be altogether untenable, since the latter allows for it with the relatively large number of verses (i.e. Psalm 105:16-23) which refer to the Joseph narrative. Such an explanation would however not really be satisfactory, because it would leave open the question why neither any other didactic psalms (e.g. Psalm 78), nor the wisdom literature – which is precisely where such references would be expected, had the persons of the patriarchs become oft-employed didactic figures for the monarchy – do the same. The usual dating accorded to Psalm 105 (cf. paragraph below) would also not support such a thesis.

An interesting facet of Psalm 105 is that it is, in a certain sense, a double twin Psalm: on the one hand, it is a *Zwillingspsalm* with Psalm 106, with these two Psalms

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[57] Based on his somewhat earlier dating, namely in the exilic period, Seybold 1996:416 regards this incorporation as later editorial additions. See however footnote 77 below. On a broad level, the whole of the collection of the Psalms may be viewed as having, among other purposes, didactical intentions – cf. Lombaard 2000:506-514.

focusing respectively on Israel's history of salvation and its history of sin (cf. Hossfeld & Zenger 2008:98; e.g. Millard 1994:19); on the other hand Psalm 105:1-15 finds, to a large extent, a parallel in the text of 1Chronicles 16:8-22[58]. With the latter thus as *terminus ad quem* for the dating of Psalm 105 (see however Booij 1994:242[9]), it is generally dated "late" by most researchers (Treves 1988:82, e.g., pinpoints it to the summer of 152 BC; Psalm 105 is however most often dated simply as post-exilic – see Booij 1994:232, 241[7]f and Mathias 1993:121[58&59] for lists of scholars according Psalm 105 this and alternative dates).

A broad thematic structure of Psalm 105 may for our purposes here be discerned as follows (cf. the division of this Psalm into constituent parts by e.g. Gunkel [1929] 1986:458; Kraus 1960:718-719; Van der Ploeg 1974:199; Kraus 1978:890-891; Allen 1983:40, 42-43; Weiser 1962:674-676; Mathias 1993:130-136; Schmid 1999:313-314; Hossfeld & Zenger 2008:98-102)[59]:

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[58] Van Selms (1965:157f), in line with his idea on pronunciation changes over time, described above, notes on the relationship between Psalm 105:9 and 1Chronicles 16:16 that the former "goes back ... to an oral tradition, the singing of the psalms in the cult (so too Weiser 1962:42-43); in this connection it is typical that the learned author of Chronicles who had the scroll of Genesis in his study, corrected the spelling of Ps. 105:9 when quoting it".

[59] As to the place of this psalm in the Book of Psalms: Psalm 105 fits uneasily into any of the large collections of the Psalms, which is why it is variously - and for a variety of reasons - grouped together with e.g. Psalms 103-107, because they are similar psalms of praise (Westermann 1984a:16); with Psalms 106 and 107, because of shared authorship and shared *Sitz im Leben*, similarities in introduction and length and contents, and because of a shared link with Third Isaiah (Treves 1988:81-83); with Psalms 78 and 106, because of their shared didactic intentions (Gunn 1956:67, 124), "historical" character (Day 1990:58) and relatedness to Pentateuchal narratives (Haglund 1984:115, who lists the chronological order as: Psalm 78, 105, 106, Pentateuch); with Psalm 79 (= 78?) and

1. Verses 1-7      Introduction: call to praise

2. Verses 8-15      Yahweh's promises to and protection of the patriarchs

3. Verses 16-23      Joseph's history

4. Verses 24-38      Life in Egypt, the plagues, the exodus

5. Verses 39-41      The wilderness experience

6. Verses 42-45      Conclusion: Yahweh's faithfulness, the gift of the land, exhortation to keep to Yahweh's teachings

Drawing on this brief analysis, it becomes clear that, as far as historical references are concerned, Psalm 105 both starts off and ends off with the promise of land to the patriarchs (Mathias 1993:132, 210, 212; cf. Fuglister 1989:41-42). The existence of the people of Israel is therefore, by implication, shown to be dependent on Yahweh's calling of the patriarchs (Psalm 105:6; Mathias 1993:209), even so - perhaps especially so - now after the exile (refer remarks on dating above). The "grondmotief" (states Booij 1994:230, 234; cf. Kraus 1978:893) of Psalm 105 is found in verses 7-11: that God remains true to his promises of land to the patriarchs (cf. on Abram - Genesis 15; on Isaac - Genesis 26; on Jacob - Genesis 28; see also as a summary Exodus 2:24; cf. Fuglister 1989:47-50, 53-59). Haglund (1984:102) is thus correct in stating that, in this case at least, "the patriarchal traditions are ... associated with the claims on the country..." (see also Wiseman 1980:150, 152).

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106, because of their common contents, i.e. lament which reflects the Deuteronomistic theology of those left behind in Judah after 586 (Steck 1977:207); with Psalm 106 and 107, because of their "common introductions" and their similar hymnic character (Allen 1983:xix-xx), etc. However, such concerns are not important for the purposes of this study.

The patriarchs for this reason seem to be accorded great importance in Psalm 105 (even though only in this Psalm, as shown above; cf. also Schmid 1999:78-79), an observation which is strengthened when one notes the *inclusio* of the reference to the person of Abraham in verses 9 and 42, which circles the references to the other themes. Despite this seeming indication of importance, though, more attention is paid in this Psalm to Joseph's history (verses 16-23), and especially to life in Egypt, the plagues and the exodus (verses 24-38), than to the patriarchs. In this respect Psalm 105 echoes the broader scene of the Hexateuchal composition: "Die eigentliche Israelgeschichte beginnt nicht mit Abraham, sondern mit dem Exodus" (Fuglister 1989:41); the former was only later on added to the latter (Kühlewein 1974:158), namely as a parallel history (Schmid 1999). In Psalm 105 we find this reflected in that, even with a simple "head count" of verses, the patriarchs do not receive pride of place.

Thus we see: with so few references to the persons of the patriarchs in the Psalter, even when such references do occur, other traditions seem to dwarf Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

### 5.1.3  Possible reasons for the paucity of patriarchal references in the Psalms

In this section, a few brief remarks are made, with the intention of stimulating further thought, on the reasons behind the paucity of patriarchal references in the Psalms. Such reasons may be sought in aspects such as place in history, cultic setting and the "levels" of religious practice.

5.1.3.1  Place in history

"Der Gottesdienst in der Vaterzeit unterscheidet sich wesentlich van dem des seβhaften Volkes" (Westermann 1984a:14). With the experience of the monarchy, the division between North and South, the fall of both these kingdoms and the exile added in, one would expect not to be too far off the mark in stating that in post-exilic Israel, Israel's religion was something quite different from that of the patriarchal period.

However, matters are not that simple, since such differences do not seem to necessitate a breaking off in the line of tradition. Specifically, references to Abraham, generally scarce in the prophetic books, become more frequent in post-exilic literature under the influence of Deutero-Isaiah (Is 41:8; 51:2; 63:16) (Van der Ploeg 1974:202; cf. Fuglister 1989:44-46). This is because, in the post-exilic period, the patriarchs and Yahweh's promises to them became a guarantee of sorts regarding the land (cf. Mays 1994:337-339; Goldingay 1980:33-35; Kraus 1960:722). Psalm 105, dated shortly after the exile, would thus fit perfectly into this picture with its incorporation of patriarchal references.

These remarks do not, however, clear up the question as to why no other, older Psalms refer to the persons of the patriarchs. This becomes even more of a question when one considers that the Psalms, according to for instance Haglund (1984:117), generally represent older forms of traditions than those found in the Pentateuch.

These issues, amongst others, leave open the question on the Psalms: where have all the patriarchs gone, long time passing...?

5.1.3.2  Cultic setting

Of course, "the cultus [*sic*] was the native soil from which the psalms sprang" (Weiser 1962:24).  This holds true for Psalm 105 as well, as it was related, even if not originally, then at least later, to a cultic Yahwistic festival (cf. Weber 2003:190; Weiser 1962:673; Allen 1983:40; Booij 1994:232; Van der Ploeg 1974:199; Mathias 1993:115).

If we accept that the traditions to which we find the Psalms bound, show that these traditions had cultic relevance (cf. Weiser 1962:24), perhaps one could postulate that the tradition material attached to the patriarchs did not seem suited, for any number of reasons, to cultic use.  This would then have had to be the case over many centuries' composition and editorial work on the Psalms, until finally we get a glimpse of the persons of the patriarchs in Israel's post-exilic worship, in Psalm 105.

Here too, however, question marks ought to be drawn.  Why would the patriarchal traditions be such a poor fit with the cult?  Why would use be made of patriarchs' names to refer to either God or the people of Israel (referred to above), but references to the persons of the patriarchs would not be made?  These and related questions still beg answering.

### 5.1.3.3 Differences in "levels" of religious practice

The two possible reasons for the paucity of patriarchal references in the Psalms stated above, may perhaps be fruitfully incorporated here as well. Drawing on the thoughts of Albertz (1992:45ff), who postulates different groups within Israelite religion expressing their relationship to God in quite different ways, doing so concurrently and at times in competition, these "levels" of religious practice may provide an explanation as to the references to the patriarchs in the Psalms, as discussed above. The hint which we can draw for ourselves from Albertz in this regard may indeed prove fruitful.

Other, earlier works also seem to point in this direction for the most satisfactory explanation. Haglund (1984:102), for example, states the following: "It is ... possible that there has been an originally cultic poetry where the patriarchs have played a prominent role, but which disappeared at the centralization of the cult during the reign of Joshia and at the re-organization after the Exile. The connexion with the illegitime cult-places (Shechem, Hebron, et al.) may then have made this kind of poetry impossible in the restored Israelite cult." Moreover, the increasingly clear separate origins of the exodus and patriarchal traditions find some form of reflection here (cf. Schmid 1999:79-81), in the poor representation of the patriarchs in the Psalms; quite possibly due to different social layers in society being the carriers of these traditions.

### 5.1.4 The smallest among the small patriarchs in the Psalms

Let me end this part of the discussion by stating, by way of conclusion, that this approach seems to have the most potential for solving the issue of the few references to the persons of the patriarchs in the Psalms. Social stratification thus offers us the most satisfactory explanation in this regard.

At least the following implications have become clear:

- That a competition of sorts between different tradition strands may be postulated – a given in Old Testament scholarship since, most influentially, von Rad, and which included the tradents of the patriarchal traditions, of which Psalm 105 and its twin texts give some indication too;

- That the patriarchs here, in this Psalm, have some connection at least with identities tied to the land; and

- That among the patriarchs, Isaac is also in the Psalms a minor figure, driven to the margins by being, paradoxically, the middle child, with the least claim to prominence.

That having been established, we may now turn to Isaac-with-*sĭn* amongst the Prophets.

## 5.2: The curious case of Isaac in Amos

Reference to Isaac occurs only thrice in the prophets. Leaving the simpler case until later, I shall in what follows pay attention to the puzzling dual references to the patriarch Isaac in the book of Amos. As has already been stated earlier, apart from Psalm 105 and formulaic references to Isaac, along with Abraham and Jacob / Israel, and genealogical references (in 1 Chronicles 1:28 & 34), the figure of Isaac is referred to by name outside the Pentateuch only in Amos 7 and Jeremiah 33. It seems, then, that Isaac was not a dominant figure in the religious and / or national life of ancient Israel, as found above with reference to the Psalms, nor as far as, we shall see here, the Prophets were concerned. The Old Testament, namely, reflects a situation referred to earlier already in which the Abraham and Jacob / Israel traditions had overpowered the probably older Isaac traditions (cf. Wellhausen 1927:317[1]; Noth 1948:112-127)[60]. Given this apparent circumstance, it is therefore rather unexpected that we should encounter Isaac twice in Amos 7. Why should it be that Amos 7:9 & 16 mention Isaac?

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[60] As another example of this, van Selms (1965:161-164), in typically independent style, postulates that the stories in Genesis 31-33 were originally not concerned with Jacob, but with Isaac. The reference to "Fear of Isaac" in relation to Padan-Aram in Gen 31:53, and the reference to Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, in Genesis 25:8, give evidence that a suppressed tradition can still be detected here. The closeness of the long form of Isaac's name and the word "Israel" is for van Selms (1965:164) further evidence of a now hidden strong Isaac tradition. Too little evidence exists to support this interesting latter possibility, though.

### 5.2.1 Isaac references in Amos

Both Isaac references in Amos occur in the famous section of 7:9-17, which details the conflict between Amaziah and Amos.  Though substantial agreement exists on the themes we encounter in this passage – first, that Amaziah versus Amos equates to the state's interests versus Yahweh's interests (cf. e.g. Jeremias 1969:108, 110-111 & Soggin 1987:131); second, that Amos's prophecy is afforded legitimacy here, particularly in 7:14-15; and third, that God's grace for Israel found in the first two visions of Amos 7 has now ended (Wolff 1969:340; Williamson 1990:115-116, also with reference to 2 Kings 17:22-23) –  the details remain an open discussion.

A rather clear, broad editorial history of Amos 7 can be detected in the text; that is to say, that the Amos 7:9-17 section comes from a different hand at a different time than do the encircling vision reports (cf. Jeremias 1998:125[8], 136-137).  This is however not accepted by all exegetes, most particularly by those who prefer to replace historical exegesis with structural, narrative and rhetorical analyses; who consequently attribute most or all of the book to the prophet Amos himself; and, often, who engage in reader response criticism of historical readings to such a point that it hardly becomes possible to say anything of historical value on these texts (e.g. Möller 2000:515-517; Eslinger 1987:55).  Such readings, as I argued in Chapter 2, cannot however answer the kinds of questions historically-oriented exegetes ask, nor the kind of question that interests me here, which go beyond the text but is given us by the text itself, on why Isaac should at all be named in these two verses.

It is, namely, clear that this section of the Amos text is quite different from its surroundings. Internally, the style is changed: the return, after the Amos introduction only, to a third person narrator[61], clearly marks this pericope as something different. Words *on* Amos are given here, rather than, primarily, the words *of* Amos (cf. e.g. Williamson 1990:117; Mays 1969:12). Externally, 7:9-17 offers a transparent break in the argumentative flow of the second vision pair in Amos 7. We must therefore take it seriously that the text of Amos 7 has a developmental history: that 7:9 and 7:10-17 were written into the originally continual flow from 7:8 to 8:1 (cf. e.g. Levin 1995:308; Bergler 2000:466-467; Williamson 1990:101-102).

On a related matter: the role Amos 7:9 fulfils in the textual flow from 7:7-8 (the third vision) to 7:10-17 (the Amos-Amaziah account proper) is under some dispute. This is important for the theme of Isaac in Amos, since 7:9 contains one of the two references.

Three contenders on the role Amos 7:9 contest the arena here. They are the points of view:

- *That 7:9 is inherently part of 7:7-8.* Mays (1969:13), for instance, regards 7:10-17 as from the hand of Amos's "disciples". (or the "Amosschule", as e.g. Wolff 1969:131-132 calls it), who composed it in order to extend 7:9. Amos 7:9 is thus regarded as an older text than 7:10-17, and an inherent part of the previous verses (cf. also van Selms 1965:157; Landy 1987:228-230; Park 2001:4, 47).

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[61] Bergler (2000:467, translated) refers to 7:10-17 as a "pseudo-biographical he-report".

- *That 7:9 is inherently part of 7:10-17.* Williamson (1990:103-104) in particular argues on the basis of catchwords (cf. Jeremias 1969:107)[62] that Amos 7:9 should be regarded as a part of the 7:10-17 pericope. The pericope should thus be defined as running from 7:9 to 7:17[63], and should be characterised as Deuteronomistic (so Williamson 1990:113-121[64]).

- *That 7:9 is a bridge of sorts*, added while or after 7:10-17 was inserted here. Amos 7:9 thus offers an interpretation[65] of 7:7-8, and 7:10-17 gives the supporting reasoning (Jeremias 1995:106-112; cf. Becker 2001:146; Schart 1998: 102, 116-120; Wolff 1969:131, 340-341; Bergler 2000:448).

Considering these three possibilities respectively, I would argue that:

- Amos 7:9 cannot be regarded as an original part of the preceding two verses, for a number of reasons, the strongest of which are (cf. Schart 1998:86, 101-104 ; Levin 1995:309):
  - 7:9 departs from the pattern in the visions thus far, in that now the punishment from Yahweh is announced directly;

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[62] Interestingly, taking a contradictory view, Paul (1991:238) uses catchwords to argue the first position listed here: with 7:9 thus read as part of the preceding verses, Paul argues that Jeroboam (7:9 and 7:10-11) is the catchword which leads to 7:10-17 being edited into the text at this point. Polley (1989:156) considers this link to have been made during the (oral / literary?) "collection stage of the composition" already.

[63] Soggin (1987:130) seems to be in accord with this view, but the formulation is ambiguous in this regard.

[64] Deuteronomistic influence in the prophets is however presently a matter in question – cf. Lohfink 1995:313-382.

[65] Soggin (1976:242; also Auld 1986:27) uses the language that 7:10-17 "interrupts" the visions.

- o Whereas 7:7-8 does not refer to holy places, 7:9 interprets the threat of Yahweh in this way;

- o 7:9 interprets the reference to the city walls (of Samaria) as a reference to the whole dynasty of Yehud, of which Jeroboam[66] is the current embodiment;

- o the wrath of Yahweh against the people of Israel (by which should be understood the elite of Israel, presumably), is in 7:9 narrowed down to cult and king.

- Williamson employs the reason usually given for the placement of 7:10-17 at this precise point – namely that the catchwords provided the editorial cue for such a move – to argue in favour of a greater *redaktionsgeschichtlichen* unity for this pericope.  However, on the one hand, the rhetorical flow of the verses preceding Amos 7:9 are such that 7:9 constitutes an interpretation or application of 7:7-8 (in particular); on the other hand, the narrative development of 7:10-17 indicates a closed component (if not a simple one; see below).  Taken together, these two arguments seem stronger that Williamson's call on catchwords.

-  The most attractive role of 7:9 seems to be that of a bridge between the preceding and subsequent sections.  Jeremias (1969:111-112), for instance, argues that 7:10-17 elucidates the third vision, and for this reason 7:9 interprets 7:8 in various ways, explaining, as it does, why grace has now ended (Wolff 1969:340).  In 7:7-8 and in 8:1-2 it is clear, now, "daß die Geduld

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[66] Levin 1995:309-311 makes an interesting case, going against the more widely accepted view, that this is Jeroboam I.

Gottes am Ende ist" (Becker 2001:142; cf. Jeremias 1969:107), and 7:10-17 gives the reason why[67].

## 5.2.2  And where is Isaac in all of this?

In all the readings using catchwords to prove opposing points of view on the "home" of Amos 7:9 (i.e. Williamson 1990:103-104 versus Paul 1991:238, to keep to the works already referred to), surprisingly, Isaac is not often used as such a catchword. In fact, Isaac is hardly ever referred to, and if such mention is made, it is usually a remark along the lines that Isaac is found only here in Amos, with nothing more made of it (e.g. Wolff 1969:340; Williamson 1990:103).  Yet, as Rottzoll (1996:254) points out, Isaac would seem important: already the single reason of the sharing in Amos 7:9 & 16 of the rare spelling of Isaac's name should draw our attention.

What is more, it is only here in the Old Testament that "Isaac" refers not to the person, but to a nation / group, giving albeit small, nevertheless direct evidence of a group of people identifying themselves with the Isaac (with *sĭn*) figure, paralleling here what is the case with "Jacob" in particular (van Selms 1965:159-160; cf. Landy 1987:224).  For these reasons, Amos 7:9 and 7:16 cannot be regarded as of independent origins (cf. Rottzoll 1996:254).  With Isaac linking them in both orthography and denotation, 7:9 and 7:16 should be read together.

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[67] Amos 7:10-17 gives the grounds for the destruction of the high places announced in 7:9, namely that the words of Yahweh are now not only not proclaimed, but purposely prohibited – cf. e.g. Zenger 1995b:488; Bergler 2000:467.

Amos 7:16 and 7:17, on their part, are argumentatively linked together very strongly: the former offers the reason for the punishment proclaimed in the latter. Amos 7:16 offers the crux of the reason why the third and fourth visions (i.e., the second vision pair) are no longer followed up by grace, as had been the case with visions one and two in Amos 7. Amos 7:17 sketches the result. Mays (1969:140; cf. Hayes 1988:240) lists the things that Jeroboam will now have to face in what Paul (1991:250) calls a "fivefold curse": "The desecration of his wife, the end of his house, the loss of his inheritance in Israel, and his condemnation… His priesthood will be brought to a terrible and final end".

However, Mays errs: the priesthood is not mentioned in 7:17 itself. That is mentioned in Amos 7:9, following on which, the murder of Jeroboam[68]. However, could it be that Mays (albeit unwittingly) points us in a new direction here? Could it not be the case, that 7:9 is, in fact, a direct continuation of 7:17? The logical flow of these two texts thus ordered would certainly bear this possibility out. That is, except for one matter: the references to Isaac in these two verses.

Isaac, to be precise, fits poorly in these two verses (whether one accepts my proposed re-ordering of these verses or not) in two ways. First, stylistically, the references seem superfluous, out of place, uncomfortable[69]; and second, the Isaac

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[68] וְקַמְתִּי עַל־בֵּית יָרָבְעָם בֶּחָרֶב is thus read here more literally than the usually understood "dynasty", namely as his dwelling. Jeroboam's *palace* will thus be destroyed. Although the inclusion of בֶּחָרֶב might in this interpretation seem strange at first glance, it should be understood as having been used for poetic reasons, to link with יֶחֱרָבוּ earlier in the verse.

[69] This parallelistic formulation leads Wellhausen (1927:316) to describe these references to Isaac as a collective name for the whole of Israel together with Edom. Mays (1969:133) simply states that in

tradition is accepted as being a thoroughly southern tradition[70]. These two considerations, along with the possibility that Isaac spelt יִשְׂחָק could indicate a late oral tradition entering written record here, lead to the conclusion that the Isaac references here are later additions. Isaac is not an original part of the 7:9-17 pericope.

### 5.2.3  Amos 7:9-17: an editorial history

These considerations lead me to reconstruct the editorial history of Amos 7:9-17 in the following way:

- Amos prophesied in the court of Jeroboam.

- The traditions preserved and collected by the Amos disciples[71] were combined and written down, with the text here that would run from 7:8 to 8:1 directly.

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Amos 7:9 & 16 "Isaac is used as a name for the northern kingdom"; so too Wolff (1969:131). They give no indication as to why this should be the case, particularly since Isaac is a southern tradition.

[70] According to the Isaac traditions, this figure had been associated first with Beer Lahai Roi (Gen 24:62 & 25:11), and later with Gerar (Genesis 26:6) and Beersheba (Genesis 26:23). These are all locations in "the extreme south of Canaan" (van Selms 1965:160). According to Hayes (1988:240), this would imply that "house of Isaac" could be rebels critical of the house of David, upon whom God's wrath is now also proclaimed from Davidic circles. This theory calls for further investigation, since it points in roughly the same direction of a vague possibility that, underlying the Amos 7:9-17 text may be a tradition of southern priests unhappy with the centralising tendencies of the Jerusalemite establishment.

[71] In the understanding of the Amos tradents, Amos is the plumb line of 7:7-8 (Schart 1998:115). On the term אֲנָךְ, see e.g. Bergler 2000:457-460; Heyns 1997:28-29; Ouellette 1973: 321-331.

- For the reason to preserve another, as yet unenscribed Amos tradition, the 7:9-17 text was produced[72], however, without any references to Isaac as yet, and with 7:9 not at the beginning of the text, but at the end. It (i.e., Amos 7:9-17) was inserted between the current 7:8 and 8:1[73], because it offered a more explicit rendering of the reason why Yahweh's grace had now come to an end.

- After this tradition had reached the far South, thus after 722[74], the need was felt to reinterpret or actualise anew this text, more precisely, its theology, in the new southern context. In the two instances where Yahweh's words against Israel are reported directly, that is Amos 7:16 and 7:9 (with 7:9 attached to 7:17), parallel formulations referring to Isaac were included. The re-actualised message was clear: those who sought their identity in the patriarch Isaac and worshipped at the holy sites attributed to him, stood to suffer the same fate as the North[75], were they too to silence critical prophetic voices.

- Whereas the transition from 7:8 to 7:10 is not difficult or awkward, a later hand experienced it as such, and moved 7:9 from its initial place, as the conclusion

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[72] Wolff (1969:131) states that 7:10-17 comes from the hand of an older Amos school that would have had to be eyewitnesses of his activities, and were now preserving their master's voice. Amos 7:9 comes from a later but related hand, he believes.

[73] On the one hand, the insertion here seems rather awkward, since it breaks up the second vision pair. On the other hand, though, inserting it anywhere else would have been even more awkward.

[74] With Park 2001:50-53, I prefer a dating of the final Amos-redaction to between 722 and 587.

[75] Bergler (2000:467), for instance, points out that 7:10-17 warns the South that the same fate as that of the North (722) may befall them.

to the Amos-Amaziah narrative, to its present position, as the introduction[76]. This served the purposes of clarifying the meaning of visions three and four well, since, understood as an interpretation of 7:7-8 and as a preparation for 7:10-17, Amos 7:9 already directed the attention of hearers or readers in the right direction.

## 5.2.4  The Isaacites rescue prophecy

Thus considered, the case of the strange reference to Isaac is no longer strange. Between the twin major exile events, North and South, of 722 and 586, and probably earlier in this period rather than later, the Amos message was given new voice. For a small group of people who found their common identity in patriarch Isaac, with *sĭn*, the idea was preserved that prophetic activity is vital for their wellbeing. Without treasuring prophecy among them, they will incur Yahweh's wrath. Thus, Amos's views on prophecy apropos Bethel regain currency in Beersheba. The Isaacites take a lesson from the northern experience around 722, giving it continued meaning within prophetic and societal context.

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[76] This means that one cannot argue, as does e.g. Hayes (1988:231), that the 7:10-17 unit was inserted here because of the Jeroboam-reference in 7:11 linking naturally with that in 7:9. In this reconstruction, 7:9 was secondarily extracted from the unit and employed as an introduction (where it now serves all the purposes usually ascribed to it in its role as link between 7:7-8 and 7:10-17). The usual question on 7:9, whether it is "Abschluß der dritten Vision oder Brückentext zum folgenden Fremdbericht" (Rottzoll 1996:252-254), should thus be answered: both, and a little more besides.

In this way, the Beersheba Isaacites become the preservers of a tradition of prophetic independence, along with forming the social context within which the Amos words were maintained for posterity.

Whereas the question as to Isaac's appearance within the Amos book demanded a rather technical analysis, matters are much simpler with respect to Isaac's remaining manifestation among the Prophets, namely in Jeremiah.  It is to this occurrence we turn next.

### 5.3  Isaac's Jeremiad – 33:26

Although no detailed analysis is required here, it should be noted that the Isaac-with-*sǐn* reference (noted by very few commentators on Jeremiah, with e.g. Mackay 2004:284[126] among the exceptions) finds itself here among a series of rhetorically refined collections of affirming sayings, attributed in the text to the prophet Jeremiah, but certainly dating from a later period.  In addition, as is the case with the surrounding chapters, Jeremiah 33 too carries a heading implying that what follows is the result of a single revelation by Yahweh; the sayings placed within Jeremiah 33, however, as with the other similar chapters, are clearly not always directly related in the sense that these were words come by in a single setting.  The relation between these sub-units is thematic.  The frequent sub-introductions to pericopae indicate their relative independence most clearly, and are indications that each of the smaller sections ought to be regarded as units in themselves, with an own initial setting in history.  Furthermore, textually, Jeremiah 33:26 constitutes the closing of a prose

expansion of the immediately preceding restoration poems found in Jeremiah 30:1 – 31:22 (Carrol 1989:65).

For Jeremiah 33:26, the sub-introduction can be found four verses earlier, in verse 23 (constituting the whole verse: וַיְהִי דְּבַר־יְהֹוָה אֶל־יִרְמְיָהוּ לֵאמֹר – a classic prophetic introductory formula).  As in the preceding sub-sections, the rhetorics are refined: first, the negative, accusatory doom saying against the people of Yahweh is recounted.   This is then countered by giving an example of Yahweh's steadfast power, in verse 26 namely from creation, the assurances around which is then transposed onto the continued Davidic dynasty (cf. Carrol 2006:638; Brueggemann 2007:135; Clements 1988:175-201).  The message is clear: the kingdom will last, and it will be the descendants of David who will rule over the three traditional patriarchal "houses", which implies all of Israel (McKane 1996:865).  Not only is the assuredness of this matter underlined by this rhetorical strategy; the fact that the matter is stressed several times in this chapter is meant to clear away any doubts about the continued existence of Israel under, specifically, Davidic lineage.

It is this promissory character of these sayings which form the common theme, on the basis of which these sayings were grouped together here.  The purpose of these sayings is assurance; the giving of hope (Holladay 1989:231Brueggemann 2007:35-36).  The historical context is clearly the very late exilic / early post-exilic period: the return from captivity referred to in the closing words of this verse give further support to such a Persian dating (Carrol 2006:638), as does the fact that the whole section of Jeremiah 33:14-26 is absent from the Septuagint version of this text (McKane 1996:861, cf. clxii-clxiii).

The emphasis in Jeremiah 33 and in this section of it is on the continuation of the Davidic lineage. An interesting feature of verse 26 is, however, not only the reference to the patriarchs, but also the stylistically rather awkward duplication of the reference to Jacob. Could it be that, here at the opening of verse 26, the name of Jacob was inserted again to give him and / or his adherents greater prominence, namely over against the other two patriarchs? Certainly, the occurrence of the singular noun – "my servant", rather than what would be expected after the reference to both Jacob and David, namely "my servant*s*" – would support such a position.

Within this pericope, thus, Isaac is included, in his usual position as middle patriarch, namely as part of the message of hope the Jeremiah "Trostschrift" conveys to its exilic audience (Backhaus & Meyer 2006:475-476). Clearly, though, in the jockeying for position, Jacob comes up in the prime position, as demonstrated by the overt connection between Jacob and David. Here the Jacobites can be seen between the lines to assert their power – a strategy which would prove highly effective in post-exilic Judea, when the group of tribes would come to be known collectively as Jacob or Israel, as synonymous names, whereas that would never be the case even for "Abraham" nor, most certainly, for "Isaac".

What Mackay (2004:284) writes as an encouragement of faith, namely that the references here to the patriarchs "reminds the people of their true status in God's sight", is for Isaac, above all, a negative state to be in, though. *His* status is here merely emphasised as being minor. In Jeremiah 33:26 too we find Isaac in subjugated state.

## 5.4  Taken together: the occurrences of *sĭn* in Isaac

The four instances of reference to Isaac-with-*sĭn* reviewed above do not provide us with enough evidence to draw firm conclusions.  Certain things must be noted, though:

- That all of these references are extra-Pentateuchal, which means they have escaped the heavier editorial processes on the "canon within the canon" that are (or more accurately: that increasingly became during such editorial processes) the Moses books;

- That no clarity can be gained from the respective dates of the Isaac-with-*sĭn* texts about a certain period of time in which this spelling may have occurred (the Amos-references being decidedly pre-exilic, the Jeremiah-occurrence late exilic / early post-exilic, and the Psalm 105-reference decidedly post-exilic, as respectively concluded to above)[77];

- That, however, all these references precede the strong editorial work on the Pentateuch during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, which most probably

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[77] Dr. David Firth, in a personal communication dated 14 June 2005, points out that these four occurrences may well all have initially northern origins (the Deuteronomistic covenant language, which occurs in both Jeremiah 3:26 and Psalm 105, "is generally associated with the northern traditions from which Deuteronomy may have originated", he writes).  This seems possible, in the sense of the pre-history of the occurrences as we find them here.  However, from the analyses undertaken above, the enscripturation of these verses are all probably southern activities (with the possibility of an exilic setting for the Jeremiah-text) which, given the dating accorded these activities above, may indeed have incorporated broadly Deuteronomistic influences.

would have smoothed away any difficulties caused by variance in the spelling of the Isaac name, had that been present within the Pentateuch, namely by deferring to the dominant form with *tsadeh*;

- That in none of the texts concerned are the patriarchs the dominant theme;

- That, however, where all three the patriarchs do feature, one predominates strongly: Abraham in Psalm 105; Jacob in Jeremiah 33. Only in the earlier text, in Amos, where the other two patriarchs have not yet impinged on Isaac's territory, does Isaac retain a place of prominence.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the Isaac-with-*sǐn* texts regarding the theory of the competition between the patriarchs is not negative, namely: nothing in these occurrences decisively precludes the validity of this theory. In fact, although no strong case can be made, because of the paucity of evidence, certain slight indications of or hints at the patriarchal competition could be shown.

What is more important for the purposes of one of the theories of this study, though, namely that the Isaac references refer to not only a single entity, is this – in all three these texts "Isaac" serves as reference to something different:

- In the case of Psalm 105, the reference is to a constituent, albeit not dominant, part of Israel's heritage, with specific reference to the connection between the patriarchs and the land. Here the reference is thus ideological, coloured by the post-exilic context of return to Juda, drawing on the posited ancient land promises to the patriarchs. Not much indication is given of conflict between the patriarchal groups, despite Abraham's dominance. Here, unity is of prime kerugmatic importance (the unstated context of which may be

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conflict with the people who had remained behind in Juda after 586 and had since taken possession of the land emptied by war and exile). Ideological Isaac is thus drawn into the game here of those who recount, reflexively, the history of God's path with Israel in their favour.

- In Amos 7, a small group in a specific region is quite clearly indicated by the reference to Isaac. Post-722, the message of Amos on particularly the importance of the continued existence of critical prophets was brought to a far-southern group (with which extant northern ties are indicated by Amos 5:5 and 8:12 – cf. van Selms 1965:161), who identified strongly both themselves and their area with an Isaac. The connection with Israel in both Amos-references to Isaac shows however no insular attitude, but possibly a position of security for these Isaacites within the broader social context, at the very least, a sense of identification with the broader group, secure enough to be open to the wider importance of these specific Amos-words. These Isaacites were thus in a sense the protectors of the prophetic tradition. The fact that no further reference to this group or their appropriated task is found in the Old Testament, indicates that the influence of this regionalised group remained limited. The fact however that prophecy went on to become a major dynamic within the life of Juda, before, during and after the exile, shows that at least some of the stimulus for this movement had to have come from this far-southern group.

- In Jeremiah 33, the usually expected reference, namely to Isaac as an identifying central figure for a substantial group within ancient Israel, is found. Together, the patriarchs here serve as rallying figures in not a Jeremiad of lamentations, but for the Jeremiah message of hope. To be sure, Jacob is

given clear prominence. However, their combined role here is to serve as rhetorical building blocks in an argument for the continuation of the Davidic dynasty over the whole of Israel.

Although the Isaac figures in the first and last of these three representations are in some ways related, they are not identical. Different is most senses, though, is the middle reference: an altogether different referentiality for "Isaac" emerges in Amos 7 – and Isaac found in no other of the Isaac texts in the Old Testament.

The implications of these conclusions will be drawn in the closing chapter of this study, when the history of Isaac in the Old Testament is retold.

# CHAPTER 6: INCIDENTAL AND FORMULAIC ISAAC REFERENCES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In this chapter, but the briefest notice is taken of the remainder of the Isaac references as we find them scattered throughout the Old Testament, though with a pronounced concentration in the Pentateuch. These references have been grouped together according to the thematic context in which they are found, which is given in each of the headings below, along with the pertinent verse indications.

## 6.1 The God of Abraham and / or Isaac in Jacob / Israel references – Genesis 28:13, 32:9, 46:1-3, 48:15-16; 1Kings 18:36; 1Chronicles 29:18; 2Chronicles 30:6

In the epiphanies Jacob and Israel respectively experience in Genesis 28:13 and 46:1-3 (cf. Schmid 1999:62-63; Ruppert 2002:35), it is made clear that the God of Jacob / Israel is indeed the same as that of his two preceding forefathers (cf. de Pury 1998:5-6). Whereas that lineage is given voice to in both these accounts from the mouth of God, in Genesis 32:9 (Scharbert 1986:219-220) the same matter is taken in the mouth of Jacob. The case is similar with the blessing of Genesis 48:15-16 (Scharbert 1986:288), where the identical personage is encountered, though now under the name of Israel. These references served, clearly, to reaffirm the ideology of the family ties, by tying Jacob / Israel into the foregoing genealogy. The explicitly religious context of each of these references indicates too that this lineage has overt connections with the living faith tradition of Juda.

This unity under Yahweh is given further legitimacy in the prophetic invocation by Elijah in 1Kings 18:36 (cf. e.g. Leithart 2006:136), the royal plea to God by David in 1Chronicles 29:18 (cf. e.g. McKenzie 2004:216), and the royal decree by Hezekiah in 2Chronicles 30:6 (cf. e.g. McKenzie 2004:344-345). Situations such as these, all of which employ the Israel-name for the third patriarch, are projected back into a romanticised past, and as such are intended to show to post-exilic Juda the idealised stability of the patriarchal union under God throughout the (hypothesised) history of Israel-Juda. None of the post-exilic strife between the patriarchal tradent groups is reflected; the nature of the material is such that it cannot; the result is that the subservient position of Isaac is reflected as having been stabilised for centuries.

## 6.2 "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" – Exodus 3:6, 3:15 & 16, 4:5, 6:2-3, 32:13

The above social project of identification is intensified in these verses, where at one of the epiphanical highpoints of the faith of Israel, namely during Yahweh's self-revelation to Moses, explicit reference to Yahweh's identity as the God of the three patriarchs is made, stressed by repetition to the point of stylistic awkwardness – Exodus 3:6, 15 & 16 (cf. e.g. Houtman 1993:349-353, 367-371; cf. Schmid 1999:7-8 on the implications for the relationship between Genesis and Exodus). The identification here of the patriarchs' ancestral deities with Moses' Yahweh not only aims to unify the three different religious strands under a "neutral" (that is: a non-patriarchal) divinity, but also serves to strengthen the now implicitly accepted idealised familial relationship between Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The exact same situation is found in the divine words in Exodus 4:5 and 6:2-3 (cf. respectively e.g. Houtman 1993:394 & 500), on which Moses can be made to draw rhetorically in Exodus 32:13 (cf. e.g. Houtman 2000:650-652). (Strongly akin to this is the parallel reference in Jeremiah 33:26; however, now, with a preference expressed for Jacob, as indicated previously.)

**6.3  Land of Abraham and Isaac... and Jacob – Genesis 35:12 & 50:24; Exodus 6:8 & 33:1; Numbers 32:10-11; Deuteronomy 1:8, 6:10, 9:5, 9:27, 30:20 & 34:4; Joshua 24:2-4**

Still more intensifying these familial relationships, are references which not only tie the patriarchs to one another under God, but also add the dimension of the now shared land. In Genesis 35:12 (cf. e.g. Scharbert 1986:232), God is found linking Jacob to the Abrahamite and Isaacite territory, thus still establishing the patriarchal unification process. However, that union is accepted and has thus already been effected in a series of other texts: Genesis 50:20 (the last monologue of Joseph; cf. e.g. Scharbert 1986:301), Exodus 6:8 & 33:1 (cf. e.g. Houtman 1993:505 & Houtman 2000:687), Deuteronomy 1:8, 6:10 & 34:4[78] (cf. e.g. Nelson 2000:18, 92-93, 395-396) and Numbers 32:10-11 (direct divine communications to Moses; cf. e.g. Jagersma 1988:151-152), Joshua 24:2-4 (indirect divine communication via Joshua;

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[78] The question, reviewed in Schmid 1999:75-77, on whether references to the fathers (אבות) in Deuteronomy were indeed initially related to the Abraham-Isaac-Jacob trio, remains unsure (cf. de Pury 1998:9). In the socio-historical phase of Juda analysed here, such an identification would already have been accepted.

cf. e.g. Görg 1991:105-106), and Deuteronomy 9:5, 9:27 & 30:20 (words of Moses, espousing deuteronomistic theology; cf. e.g. Nielsen 1995:110-111, 115-116, 169-271; see again Schmid 1999:7-8 on the implications for the relationship between Genesis and Exodus). By not only connecting the patriarchs to one another, and by not only connecting the three patriarchs to God, but by also adding in the very concrete dimension of geography, the implication for a united people in Juda would speak clearly to the contemporary reader or hearer.

## 6.4   God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – Leviticus 26:42, Deuteronomy 29:12, 2Kings 13:23, 1Chronicles 16:15-18, Psalm 105:9-10, Jeremiah 33:26

Less material and more directly connected with the patriarchs' relationship to God, are texts such as Leviticus 26:42 (a clearly post-exilic text, drenched in deuteronomistic theology; cf. e.g. Balentine 2002:201-203), Deuteronomy 29:12 (a Mosaic assurance; cf. e.g. Nelson 2002:340-341), 2Kings 13:23 (cf. e.g. Leithart 2006:232-236), 1Chronicles 16:15-18 (cf. e.g. McKenzie 2004:147-148) and the references in Psalm 105 and Jeremiah 33 discussed in the previous chapter. The aspect of covenant stands central in all these texts, thus tying God, patriarchs and land together within a single theological construct – a highly effective ideological technique through which to effect unity.

**6.5  Burial and genealogical notices – Genesis 49:31 (& 25:7-11), 1Chronicles 1: 27-28 & 34**

The reference to the burial of the patriarchs and their wives in the family grave (Genesis 49:31; see also 25:7-11; cf. e.g. Scharbert 1986:197, 181-182) serve to strengthen the idea of a single, natural blood lineage across three generations, the more so because death is such a natural part of life, and because the concept of a shared burial place for members of most particularly prominent families is such a natural part of Ancient Near Eastern cultural life.  The idea of a shared family grave thus cements what is essentially fantasy as reality.  By the time the Chronicler's introductory genealogy was written down, the familial bonds were certainly above doubt – cf. 1Chronicles 1: 27-28 & 34 – and the identification of Abram with Abraham and of Jacob with Israel had been accomplished.  In both these instances – the burial and the genealogical references – what the editorial processes were intended to lead to, had indeed become.  Distinct histories had been unified.  Though the traces of the earlier "separate development" with regards to the patriarchal (and Mosaic) religions were still there to be seen, in the Old Testament texts as much as probably in the live oral traditions, in death and genealogy it is no longer history that matters, but kerugma.  Here we are presented with a *fait accompli* – a united family, across three generations, forming subsequent identity – the implication is – for all eternity (cf. Westermann 1981:274).

## 6.6 A case of special interest: the Fear of Isaac – Genesis 31:42 & 53 (+ 18)

The "Fear of Isaac", the rare divine appellation usually understood to refer to a kind of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* experience (classically related to Rudolf Otto; cf. e.g. Otto 1917) that characterised patriarch Isaac's encounter with the divine (later associated with Yahweh), can from the perspectives taken in this study now become not primarily a sense of awe in the presence of God, but – in post-exilic inner-Judean identity politics – a genuine fear, borne for the Isaacties from the experience of being at the mercy of God-and-Abraham.  It is instructive to note that, apart from the two verses of Genesis 31:42 & 53 being the only occurrences of the פַּחַד יִצְחָק terminology, in both cases this designation is set within the immediate context of reference to Abraham and God.  The "God of Abraham", as a phrase combining Isaac's two intimidators – one divine, one human – has at least the possibility of overtones here, namely that it cowers Isaac, showing him within a relationship with the divine, via the arch-patriarch, that is characterised primarily be terror.  Not just respectful adoration-with-trepidation before the mystery of the divine is then alluded to by the "fear of Isaac" (the usual idea taken from Alt's *Gott der Väter* hypothesis), but, later, genuine dread.  Thus understood, the defeated Isaac is in the hands of the victorious God-*cum*-Abraham; the Isaacites remain at the mercy of the Abrahamites.

Interesting too is that this language occurs in the mouth of Jacob, certainly one of the victors in the post-exilic competition for social primacy, namely after identification / unification with the figure Israel.  A unique "fear factor" is thus incorporated here into Jacob's speech.  At the very least, he too does not draw into question a by now

established pecking order. Could it be, though, that taken from the current perspective, Genesis 31:18 may indicate that, in the event of conflict ensuing between Jacob (the Jacobites) and Laban (representing here the Abrahamites), the former would seek an alliance with Isaac (the Isaacites)?

Though there is every probability that the terminology of the "fear of Isaac" has some kind of minor antecedent tradition, prior to being incorporated here into the Genesis 31 account, the connotation now, under the influence of Genesis 22* as interpreted above, carries at least hues of actual, rather than numinous, fear.

## 6.7 Conclusion

Six loose groupings of relatively minor Isaac references have been indicated in this brief chapter. What has become clear from this is that, although these Isaac references are more or less formulaic and incidental, in the sense that they are not related directly to larger narratives of the Isaac figure, they still convey some value to the theories being proposed in this study:

- First, that the intensity of these formulaic and incidental references differ. Whereas some may refer to patriarchal figures only, others draw in directly reference to God, the land, and covenantal relationships, presenting by such "thick descriptions" the proposed vision of a unitary family as all the more compelling to the intended reader or hearer.

- Second, that the scattering of these references throughout a range of Old Testament texts subtly furthers the notion that the editors had wanted to portray, namely that there was in actual fact a family. From these references

particularly, it would hardly be possible to find indications of a pre-history to this smoothly-presented concept.

The obvious exception to the latter is the unusual "Fear of Isaac" expression, which has in the research history on the Old Testament proven to be an important divine name. Whereas this expression could on its own perhaps have rendered us some inkling that a different, antecedent faith expression may lie behind the text, the rare Abram – Abraham and Jacob – Israel variances in these texts would aid further curiosity in this direction. Yet, without the rest of the Pentateuchal Isaac references, some kind of viable historical reconstruction would remain impossible. Not enough material is available is these scattered references alone to provide for a meaningful alternative, critical history to be proposed, in which both the multiplexity of the patriarchal figures and the competition between their adherents in later Judaic society could be postulated. For that, the larger narratives would be required; the more so when such a diminutive figure as Isaac is pursued, as is the case in this study. Certainly, no such a critical retelling of Isaac's history could have been attempted in the light of the Genesis 22* interpretation offered above, in Chapter 3, as is attempted here, based solely on these incidental and formulaic Isaac references in the Old Testament.

However, accepting then that the scattered minor Isaac references indicated in this chapter help us but a little, namely in indicating to its post-exilic readers / hearers a seemingly long-term stability in the relative importance of the patriarchs in the relation to one another, it is more in the light of the previous chapters that such a critical retelling of Isaac's history in the Old Testament may now be attempted. By

taking together all that has gone above in a creative, historical narrative, we may now attempt to outline the possible storyline of Isaac in the Old Testament.

# CHAPTER 7: THE STORY OF ISAAC IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, CRITICALLY RETOLD

*Philosophical friendship would be the passion of understanding*

*the difficulties of others in terms of one's own,*

*and one's own in relation with others.*

– Rajchman 1991:27

## 7.1  Up to this time...

To come to the present point in this study, many aspects have had to be considered. In Chapter 2, acknowledgement was given to the philosophical, methodological and historical impulses which fundamentally informed the rest of the study.  After that, a detailed analysis of the Genesis 22* text was undertaken, making the point practically that had been argued theoretically in the previous chapter, that historical interpretation offer us more fruitful avenues than does a-historical exegesis.  The implications of the new interpretation of Genesis 22* concluded to were then applied in brief to other Isaac accounts in the Pentateuch.  Because this had never been done in such an extensive way, much attention was paid to the three Isaac texts in which this patriarch's name is spelt with a *sĭn*.  Lastly, the rest of the succinct Isaac references spread throughout the Old Testament were briefly touched upon.

Frequently in the exegetical accounts, aspects touched upon in Chapter 2 were incorporated in the subsequent chapters. Moreover, the whole of the exegetical section of this study was undertaken from within three theoretical perspectives:

- first, a further development of Alt's *Gott der Väter* hypothesis, namely in combination with, most recently, Albertz's perspectives on inner-Israelite identity politics, in order than cognisance may be taken of the conflict this would have entailed amongst the tradents of the various patriarchal accounts in, most particularly, post-exilic Juda;

- second, a new vision of the multiplexity of the patriarchal figures, which draws on an anecdotal view of the Old Testament accounts, as a middle ground between (and not as an exclusionary alternative to) focussing only on the smallest possible or on the largest possible textual units, respectively; and

- third, a new historical interpretation of Genesis 22*, and the different light this would cast on other Isaac texts when viewed from this fresh perspective.

Not all three of these theoretical approaches have proven equally fruitful. The first, on the inter-patriarchal identity conflict, proved itself to be a valuable analytical tool throughout. The theory of the multiplexity of the patriarchal figures has been proven to add interesting interpretative possibilities too. It had, however, to be understood in a soft sense, namely that at certain times, at least, different aspects or sides of patriarch Isaac were indicated by the texts concerned, rather than that each and every reference had been to initially unrelated figures. That a number of antecedents – either historical indications or literary creations – found reference, though, is by no means beyond the scope of possibility, and indeed seemed likely in many of the cases, most particularly so with the more extensive Isaac accounts.

Further work on the other two patriarchs, and as a next step, on other major Old Testament figures would be required, in order to ascertain more clearly the borders of the applicability of this theory. On Isaac, though, it has indeed proven insightful.

The third theory, namely the new historical interpretation of Genesis 22*, has proven to offer exegetically the most productive insights of the three (to some extent also because it incorporates important elements of the other two theoretical standpoints just reviewed). This new historical interpretation of Genesis 22* namely offers something entirely different, in three respects:

- The interpretation itself is fresh, and stands a number of tests on the Genesis 22* text that other interpretations do not pass, particularly in explaining more of the different aspects of the editorial history of the text than any of the other explanations available, as had been indicated;

- The interpretation also makes a substantial contribution over against aspersions that are from time to time cast on the Bible as religious source book. With this interpretation, communicated popularly (which will be done in research communications to flow from this study), religious communities could be substantially served, namely the better to handle at times highly unfair, not to say uninformed, criticisms levelled against the Bible and, hence, religion. It in this concern of mine which, in my interpretation on Genesis 22*, stands most directly as a continuation of what I had called the apologetic trend which goes along with Pentateuch readings in South Africa, some points of which were indicated in Chapter 2.

- Lastly, within the debate in recent years on the late dating of almost the entirety of the Old Testament texts, the approach followed here provides a

different route. Picking up impulses from the history of Old Testament patriarch studies, these are applied in a different way, related here to the influence of Genesis 22* on the understanding of other Isaac texts. Clearly, these other texts all had had a separate, and in some cases probably a centuries-old previous history of being told, read and understood. Simplistically to date such texts late do them no justice. However, it is entirely legitimate to investigate what the understanding of an older text could be within a later age. When a text or theme is recast in a later age by means of a new interpretative frame, the new meaning is a legitimate object of study. This however does not mean the text should now be dated young. It simply means that the meaning of the text in a later phase of history is explored – a meaning which had been super-imposed over extant denotations. Of this, in the treatment of Genesis 22* as an anecdotal Isaac account, and in then suggesting its hermeneutical ramifications in recasting the understanding of other such Isaac accounts and references in the Old Testament, this study has given an example.

Such scholarship must acknowledge its philosophical indebtedness. Once the philosophical move has been made to accept that science cannot and ought not to sell its soul to the ideals of modernist objectivity, a different way of reading texts academically becomes possible. The relationship between scholar and subject matter, here played out as the relationship between exegete and text, becomes up-close and personal. Apart from the inherent theological dynamic as this relates to the biblical texts, namely that the reader not only reads the text but is at once also read by the text, in a hermeneutical spiral of interpreting and of being interpreted, in

a give-*and*-take of meaning, this has enlightening methodological implications too. These include that one acknowledges one's personal make-up, one's socio-intellectual situatedness, in interpreting the object of one's study.  The Rajchman-quote as the opening words of this chapter illustrates this perfectly, as do the words from Foucault, quoted at the very beginning of this study, which characterise my experience of studying the Isaac texts in the writing of this dissertation.

In conclusion, now, remains but one aspect: based on all that had gone above, to retell the story of Isaac in the Old Testament.

## 7.2  Once upon a time...

Once upon a time there was a man.  We do not know exactly when this time was – it may have been around 1200 BCE; some guess it may even have been a millennium earlier, but that is improbable.  In reality, it may well have been around the 9$^{th}$ century BCE; even later.  We do however have a general idea of his whereabouts when we encounter him, namely in the southern parts of Palestine, with quite possibly an oasis of sorts, called Beersheba, as one of the most important geographical points of reference for him.

His name was Isaac, which in European and European-influenced languages seems simple enough, but in Hebrew a little variation in the spelling of his name is found. Although this could simply be a linguistic quirk, there may well be more to it, especially if one considers that the body of stories about and references to this Isaac figure do not always add up, as a history should, or a collection of short stories

would. These editorial rough edges enable a different conclusion: chances are that underneath this one name, Isaac, lays hidden a series of figures, some historic, some fictive, that in time were understood really to be referring to one and the same figure. Isaac thus becomes a composition: a composite figure, who at the very same time now himself tells the story of the people who identify with him. It is this story that we may, albeit tentatively, well aware of the pitfalls of historical reconstruction, trace further.

We do know that he – this "multiplex" Isaac of our narrative – became quite rich, as a successful farmer. Genesis 26:12-33*, a text which rings true with what seems like much authentic memory of Isaac, gives us some indications in this regard. That did not make his life as easy as we would expect, though. Conflict with his neighbours ensued, as competition for scarce resources followed on the growth of his wealth. In fact, conflict would very much become associated with this figure Isaac...

As Isaac's wealth and power increased, he became something of an icon to his family, his slaves and other hangers-on. His stature attained that of a patriarch to what we may call his extended family, or his clan. Like all people in his world, Isaac was probably highly religious – not in a pietistic kind of way, but in an earthy and existentialist way: every aspect of life was understood implicitly to be related to the divine. Chances are good that a number of gods were worshipped within the clan of Isaac. Perhaps, perhaps, though, the main divinity, associated most strongly with Isaac and his clan, was called the "Fear of Isaac". That would mean, then, that the prosperity that Isaac and his people enjoyed would have been attributed most directly to them being blessed by this supra-human Being. For this, they paid Him

much respect, which is what his name – "Fear" – refers to most directly.  In such circumstances, that is...

As always with a strong leader, other stories had begun to develop around Isaac.  We are no longer sure exactly how these stories came into being.  We also cannot know such stories which have in time quietly died out.  One account that has been retained, though, tells of Isaac's young days, when he moved into the area.  He was still so poor and without power that, when the locals took a liking to his wife, Rebekah, Isaac feared that an enamoured Philistine would simply murder him, as an isolated sojourner who stands in the way of a more powerful Philistine's romantic ideals.  So they lied.  Isaac and Rebekah pretended that they were siblings.  Of course, such secrets have a way of coming out, and it was with much royal drama that Isaac was reprimanded.

Granted, the above is a rather strange tale, particularly about a man who in time had become rich and influential.  However, that may well add to the authenticity of the bare outlines of the account – one does not go about making up bad stories about a big man!  Now, if there *is* something to the story, though, that is another matter altogether...

It seems, however, that Isaac and his group never succeeded in becoming a hugely expansive clan.  If they had, we would have heard much more about Isaac, his wealth, and his derring-do.  We can gather, though, that some time during the late eighth century, the Isaac clan became a rescuer of an important part of the culture of that greater region: prophecy.  A prophet named Amos had some years earlier gone

to the northern part of the country, to Israel, and had there proclaimed a divine message of compassion for the underclass. In a strongly hierarchic society such as a kingdom, however, a social consciousness is not always appreciated, and Amos along with his message was ignored. By a strange confluence of circumstances, though, prophet Amos's words of doom came true, and Assyria destroyed most of the North. Obviously, this was taken as a direct vindication of the prophetic message of Amos by his disciples, that is: by those who had remembered and treasured his words, so that when some educated refugees from up North found themselves, in their flight from the Assyrian aggressors, in the far South, their rendition of the Amos words came to be accepted in some way among the Isaacite group. When resistance against the power of the prophetic word was encountered among some Isaacites, these refugees recounted how the royal prophet Amaziah had given Amos the exact same kind of opposition. The deduction: silencing true prophets elicits divine wrath. By clever word play, this message was made applicable to the Isaacites: silence the true prophets here, and 722 could happen all over again...

Perhaps, thus, the Isaac clan became in this way a sort of rescuer for the tradition of true prophecy. This tradition was in time to become a major part of the religio-political life of the people in the broader southern territories, that is: in the country called Juda. So perhaps Isaac, spelt here for the first time we know of in a slightly unusual way, even became a kind of designation for a group larger than just the clan. "Isaac" may have become an icon of stature, a rallying point for those who sought to identify themselves over against others.

In a quite natural way, similar such groupings had been developing too, around figures with names such as Abram, Abraham, Jacob and Israel. Some grew close to one another, perhaps through marriage, for shared interests, against common enemies, and so forth. Equally naturally, therefore, alliances were formed and competition, even conflict ensued. That may well be why, when we find two other references to this Isaac with the unusual spelling, he already plays an inferior role to the other iconic figures. In the century and a half that had passed between the time when we found the connection between Amos and Isaac and the time another prophetic school, that of Jeremiah, refers to Isaac, Jacob had entered into the picture quite forcefully. When we find another such Isaac reference, more or less another century later, within a post-exilic Psalm, Abraham had become the strongest contender.

The post-exilic period in Juda sees a few centuries of intensified competition for social leadership among its constituent groups. What tricks those who aspired to prominence got up to in their social engagement with one another, we will never know. We do know, however, by the way that their conniving is reflected in their writings, that they were rather sly. Isaac seems never to have been particularly good at mastering this kind of game, since he always comes up short. Stories that refer to him are namely edited but slightly, by inserting another patriarch's name here and there, and suddenly poor Isaac has been relegated to a supporting role only in his own story. In at least some of the incidental and formulaic references to the patriarchs scattered throughout the Old Testament, the trend towards the marginalisation and / or disempowerment of Isaac may be surmised too.

Such subtleties were not the only strategy of Isaac's competitors.  At times some of his stories were blatantly taken over and retold with a new central character – another patriarch.  Where identification with land was at stake, the going got even tougher: real estate wrangles can bring out the worst in people.  Hence, the story of Isaac's young days, when he thought he had to lie about his wife just to stay alive, and which had come to be understood as Isaac's claim to the southernmost territories, was twice usurped.  In time, thus, the land which had been associated with Isaac was, in a sense, nationalised.  The Abramites / Abrahamites came to dominate the religious identity within Juda; the Jacobites / Israelites, their national identity.  Isaac had become ensnared on all sides of his family by Abrahamites.  This is shown sharply in Genesis 17 – a text embedded within strong religious connotations.  Yet here, with the introduction of circumcision, Isaac is to a large extent cut from the picture.  Even, or perhaps: precisely at a theological high point, the figure of Isaac is being ex-communicated.

The *coup de grace* was yet to come, however.  This would be the final nail in the coffin of, if not the figure of Isaac, then certainly of his tradents, the Isaacites, rendering them as if forever the subordinates of the Abrahamites.  In the Aqedah account, by clever formulation and editorial manipulation, the end product leaves the fourth century reader / hearer of this story in no doubt: Abraham is the prime patriarch, is so with divine sanction, and is the one who exercises control over the very life of Isaac.

This appalling tale then casts its pall across all of the other Isaac accounts.  The shadow of death will forever now fall backwards, to cover almost every aspect of the

memories about Isaac's existence in Juda.  The very fact that the Aqedah story is placed in the early beginnings of Israelite history, as understood at this time, and moreover casts Isaac as a youth, cannot but lead those who now encounter this tale to deduce implicitly that Isaac is forever in the debt, even at the mercy, of Abraham-and-God.  All of the other Isaac references are now redefined, with the most extreme being possibly the "Fear of Isaac" divine appellation, which can from this negative perspective now also be understood anew, as no longer reflecting a numinous experience, but a genuinely fear-filled orientation toward the divine.  Subjugated to God-and-Abraham, the Isaacites now know no fearlessness.

Taken from this vantage point, and reviewing all of the above, the story of Isaac in the Old Testament is thus now an account of him being written progressively out of both the texts and, therefore, history, and not of developing him into a position of greater status, namely as a patriarch (so Boase 2001:334).  For Isaac, thus, the Pentateuch in particular is for the greatest part not "a story of beginnings", as Gooder (2000:2) would have it, but, rather:

the end.